CHAPTER III

PHILOSOPHY OF

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John Steinbeck’s philosophy is a comprehensive one that takes into consideration his biological view of life, his non-teleological thinking as well as his teleological view. A realist and a writer writing with social reform in his heart Steinbeck’s fiction reveals and suggests a deeper mystery along with his realism and ‘is thinking’.

Non-teleological or ‘is’ thinking focuses on and accepts present reality and does not ask why this reality is the way this reality is or how it might be changed or where it is going. In fact, “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.” (Steinbeck “Log from the Sea of Cortez” 862)

Non-teleological thinking sees life whole, not through narrow spectacles of specialized interest. The whole forms part of the picture only and the infinite whole is unknowable except by being in it, by living into it.

Steinbeck postulates a view that sees humanity as a whole, as it is, and in relation to human environment. Despite its philosophical insufficiency, the theory had a profound effect on his artistry, particularly in the animal and vegetable imagery that roots his characters to the earth. The close linking of
humanity to the environment, and metaphorically to marine biology also set up
Steinbeck’s theory of the group man, his biological view of life: a theory closely
allied with non-teleological thinking.

Some believed that Steinbeck ultimately reduces man to animalism and
that he:

 Presents man as a captive . . . of instincts and appetites only,
 blindly desiring and striving, not reasoning, judging, choosing but
 automatically responding to impulses and attractions. (Kennedy
 127)

A theory that Steinbeck formulated in 1940 in his *Sea of Cortez*, his non-
teleological thinking is an attempt to accept and face life as it is without
pondering over its mysteries and metaphysical concepts. The realism of
Steinbeck is at the core of his theory that negates all kinds of abstraction in the
face of realistic situations that require immediate and rationalistic decisions and
actions, and not abstract philosophy.

A compassionate man, Steinbeck lived amongst migrant workers and got
to know their problems and miseries first hand. Their distress resulted in a
helpless wrath in the heart of the writer. Once in a church while listening to the
sermon of the preacher on the spiritual hunger of the Prodigal Son, Steinbeck
burst out saying, “Yes, you all look satisfied here, while outside the world begs
for a crust of bread or a chance to earn it. Feed the body and the soul will take
care of itself!” (Bennet)
Steinbeck’s philosophy was the philosophy of “pragmatism”, which literally means, “thinking about solving problems in a practical and sensible way rather than by having fixed ideas and theories.” (Hornby 990)

Dogmatic approach to situations cannot help to solve the problem. Fixed theories, ideas and concepts cannot be held viable in every situation. When man is faced with hunger and poverty, Steinbeck believes that, “You can’t satisfy hunger...” (Bennet) with mere sermons and preaching. Practical situations require practical solutions.

Pragmatism as a school of thought has a long history behind it. The theory is considered to have originated in the late nineteenth century. Originating in the late 1800s in the United States, pragmatism figured prominently in the works and thoughts of philosophers like Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey and George Herbert among others.

The term first used in print by James was attributed to Peirce during the early 1870s. As a philosophy pragmatism takes inspiration from Francis Bacon who emphasized knowledge as power, David Hume for his naturalistic account of knowledge and action, Thomas Reid for his direct realism, Immanuel Kant for his idealism, Georg Hegel for his introduction of temporality into philosophy and J.S. Mill for his nominalism and empiricism.

Influenced by Darwinian thinking in its early stages, pragmatism comprehended the relevance of evaluation of theories of knowledge. It however challenged the assumption that knowledge and action are two separate spheres. According to it, there exists an absolute or transcendental truth above and
beyond the sort of inquiry organisms use to cope with life. In fact the concept provides for an ecological account of knowledge inquiry construed as a means by which organisms can get a grip on their environment. ‘Real’ and ‘True’ are the labels that have a function in such inquiry and cannot be understood outside of that content. The philosophy of pragmatism is not realist in a traditional sense of realism but is realist in that it acknowledges an external world which must be dealt with.

The view, beliefs must represent reality to be true is widely disagreed in pragmatism. Beliefs are dispositions which qualify as true or false depending on how helpful they prove in inquiry and in action. It is only in the struggle of intelligent organisms with the surrounding environment, theories acquire meaning, and only with a theory’s success in this struggle it becomes true. However in pragmatism, nothing practical or useful is held, nor anything which helps to survive merely in the short term, as necessarily true. According to the pragmatic belief, truth is mutable and is also relative to a conceptual scheme.

Pragmatists believe on the mutability of truth or the fact that beliefs can pass from being true to being untrue and back. For James, beliefs are not true until they have been made true by verification. According to him, propositions become true over the long term through providing their utility in a person’s specific situation.

So, what the pragmatists actually mean by the phrase ‘making truth’ is their idea that we make things true by verifying them. In fact there can be no truths without a conceptual scheme to express those truths. Truth is a
transformation of our experience but it does not mean that we can construct or imagine it as we please out of nothing. In other words something is true so far as it works or exists.

As per the theory of pragmatism, the concept has close affinities with the theory of Existentialism. Freedom, decision and responsibility are the themes that form the core of an existential belief. According to existentialism, it is the exercise of freedom and the ability to shape the future that distinguishes man from all the other beings on earth. It is through free and responsible decisions that man becomes authentically himself. In the view of John Macmurray, the ‘self as agent’ provides the central thought of existentialism.

In essence both pragmatism and existentialism are similar in their beliefs. Both are in protest against intellectualism, they stress the relation of belief to action and acknowledge the risk of faith as an attitude about which we are compelled to decide by the demands of concrete existence before we can arrive at theoretical grounds for decision. Finally both the forms of beliefs look for confirmation or falsification of faith in terms of its fulfillment or diminution of our humanity.

Despite the similarities inherent in both the concepts there are certain differences that distinguish them as separate ideologies. Pragmatism lacks the sense of inwardness, an important criteria in the concept of existentialism. Further the pragmatist is usually an optimist concerned with success and mostly ignorant of the tragic and frustrating side of life inherent in existential belief and writings.
In the works of Steinbeck there exists a strong presence of the pragmatic belief. His characters are men and women possessing an indomitable strength of spirit that struggles and strives against all the odds presented before them by life's difficulties and problems. They fight and endure all difficulties in their struggle to survive and emerge winners as survivors. Fully aware of the tragic side of life and the frustrating and difficult situations of life, Steinbeck is more of an optimist.

The philosophy of pragmatism inherent in Steinbeck's art is based on his belief that cause-effect relationships are too simplified to be true in experience and that, "The truest reason for anything's being so is that it is" (Steinbeck “Log from the Sea of Cortez” 873), and the various genuine reasons for anything “could include anything.” (Steinbeck “Log from the Sea of Cortez” 874). Accordingly Steinbeck's characters and events have an order and a rationale as they appear in the objective world.

Steinbeck considers teleological thinking as misleading and impractical. He is of the opinion that ‘teleological thinking’ is frequently associated with evaluation of causes and effects and the purposiveness of events. In other words this kind of thinking considers changes and cures as what ‘should be’. Moreover it presumes the bettering of conditions. On the contrary he favoured non-teleological thinking and defended it. He said that only by accepting things as they are we can understand them well and take sensible action in response. He explained further the concept with allusion to Darwinism:
Non-teleological ideas derive through 'is' thinking is 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 outgrowths and expressions rather than as results (Steinbeck "Log from the Sea of Cortez" 861-862)

In other words Steinbeck's non-teleological view or his theory of pragmatism is actually his theory of objectivity. Whatever be the problem that he deals with in his fiction, he attempts to approach it with objectivity without bringing his prejudices to bear upon it. His focus of attention is mainly the observed reality and not the cause that has caused it. According to his philosophy he considers events as, 'out-growths and expressions rather than as results.' His non-teleological thinking does not ask 'why' but 'how' and 'what'. It is in fact a sturdy perception of life that not only helps in dealing with but also brings a deeper and clearer understanding and acceptance of life and its various phenomena.

Steinbeck's novel Tortilla Flat is the story of Danny and his friends, who are the poor Paisanos of Monterey. Their life is lived on an existential level. They ate, drank, fought, stole and loved. Full of health and vitality they lived a life of contentment without any high or remarkable ambitions. They are not concerned with philosophy or any higher truth, living life as it is, improvising on whatever resources they have.
Danny and his friends quietly satisfy their appetites and yet maintain all that is good in them. A gallon of wine secured by one is shared by all, Danny rents one of his houses to Pilon though he never asks for the rent and the latter never offers it. Pilon in turn rents out a portion of this house to Pablo knowing full well that Pablo will never pay any rent. This rich feeling of satisfaction is beautifully expressed by Pilon, when sitting on the steps of the house one morning he tells Pablo:

A mass is a mass. Where you get two bits is of no interest to the man who sells you a glass of wine. And where a mass comes from is of no interest to God. He just likes them, the same as you like wine. Father Murphy used to go fishing all the time, and for months the Holy Sacrament tasted like mackerel, but that did not make it less holy. These things are for priests to explain. They are nothing for us to worry about. (TF 394)

This supreme satisfaction with what is, the total acceptance of that which exists, is the hall-mark of the attitude of Danny and his friends towards life. And that is a reflection of the non-teleological thinking of the novelist.

In *Dubious Battle*, Steinbeck presents the struggle between the landowners and the striking fruit pickers. Atrocities are committed by both the sides but their actions are neither condemned nor condoned but presented with complete objectivity. It was Steinbeck's belief in the biological view of life that provided him with the necessary detachment needed to represent the modern social struggle as, "a tragic-comedy of animal instincts." (Kazin 395)
If the landowner crush and oppress the workers terrorizing them till their existence is reduced to that of animals, then the workers also use violence and a lack of compassion for one another. For the workers the cause is more important than the individual, so when one is discovered to be a spy, Mac uses him as a billboard. In another incident Mac and Jim use the body of Joy to rouse the anger of the strikers, which is similarly repeated by Mac using the body of Jim when he is killed. Maxwell Geismar comments, "Lie fights lie, radical power struggles against capitalist power, blood is used by the land owners to intimidate, and blood is used by the strikers to stimulate." (Geismar 262)

Following the theory of non-teleological thinking Steinbeck does not withhold sympathy for either Mac or Jim because they have not created the conditions that have caused the conflict. The situation as created by the growers by cutting the wages of the fruit pickers results in discontent and violence. Doc Burton, considered as Steinbeck's mouth-piece invariably presents the novelist's non-teleological view with his detachment and objectivity.

*Of Mice and Men* is a novel which has the relationship of George and Lennie as its focal point. But George's attachment to Lennie far from being sentimental is actually a relationship that depends on each of the individual's need for the other. Lennie needs the companionship of George as much as George needs his. Lennie's devotion and his need to relate to George is reciprocated by George's need, which is satisfied by the power that he exercises over Lennie.
Man’s freedom and survival in society is based on the acceptance of reality and the ability to move forward with the acceptance. Both Lennie and George have their drawbacks. Lennie is physically strong and big but mentally not equipped for real life. George on the other hand is small but mentally strong and capable. They both accept and complement the other’s shortcomings. But with the objectivity and detachment of Steinbeck’s non-teleological view George also kills Lennie when its no longer possible to protect him from violence of the mob. If its not Curley who kills him, the people might, “lock him up an’ strap him down and put him in cage.” (OMM 870) George accepts the reality of the situation and acts. Lennie’s death is inevitable for he represents unguided strength. George’s act is the act of a saviour as well as that of the destroyer. He destroys Lennie and in the process also destroys himself, his illusions and dreams. His acceptance of reality leads him towards a more matured understanding of life.

Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath is the story of the difficulties and hardships of the migrant’s life. Though sympathetic towards the migrants and his anger at the brutalities inflicted by the land owners, Steinbeck did not adopt a partial attitude. Instead he comprehended the situation and deals with the story objectively. The understanding and acceptance of reality that comes with non-teleological thinking is evident from the very beginning of the narrative. In a detached and objective manner he discusses the situation of the land owners who are themselves caught in the vortex of something greater:
Some of the owner men were kind because they hated what they had to do, and some of them were angry because they had to be cruel, some of them were cold because they had long ago found that one could not be an owner unless one were cold. And all of them were caught in something larger than themselves. (GOW 30)

The land owners and vigilantes are the natural manifestations of the system. They have failed in their endeavour to succeed. They are unable to accept the reality and, "have lost the vitality and initiative and adaptability of good biological specimens." (Tedlock)

The Joad family also represents the author’s non-teleological thinking. Casy for instance provides an example of the influence of such thinking when Grampa dies. The Joads will break the law if they bury Grampa themselves but Casy advises them not to worry about that, "Law changes...but "got to's" go on. You got the right to do what you got to do." (GOW 128). Casy adopts a pragmatic approach to events and decides on a course of action without searching for moral justification. Similarly, when he says a few words over Grampa’s grave, he dismisses concern about whether Grampa was a good or bad man:

"This here ol' man jus' lived a life an' jus' died out of it. I don' know whether he was good or bad, but that don' matter much. He was alive, an' that's what matters. An' now he's dead, an' that don' matter. Heard a fella tell a poem one time, an' he says: "All that lives is holy." (GOW 132)
Steinbeck's most important work *East of Eden* is the story of three generations of Trask family. The novel is a celebration of the human soul in the face of ugliness and evil surrounding us in life. Though more philosophical in tone, the novel still retains Steinbeck's concept of pragmatism or non-teleological thinking. The acceptance of evil in life and within us is the first step towards endurance and victory over it. Love, friendship, family help in this journey of evil that begins with Cyrus and later Cathy, and which ends with Adam's forgiveness of his son Caleb and his last words to him 'Timshel', meaning 'thou mayest'. The choice is with the individual to choose the path in life.

The novel is represented through a narrator who is Steinbeck's detached and objective observer, narrating the story, recognizing the evil but neither condemning it nor being threatened by it. Yet instead of following the non-teleological and pragmatist approach he asks 'Why?' instead of 'How?' or 'What?'

When I said Cathy was a monster it seemed to me that it was so.

Now I have bent close with a glass over the small print of her and reread the footnotes, and I wonder if it was true. The trouble is that since we cannot know what she wanted, we will never know whether or not she got it...it is easy to say she was bad, but there is little meaning unless we know why. (EOE 158)

So taking leave of his pragmatic approach Steinbeck is concerned with the cause of the evil as well. His approach to life, his philosophy with the
maturity of his art becomes more religious and moralistic. Concerned with good and evil that he is, Steinbeck however places the choice of choosing the path on man, which reveals the subdued yet pertaining spirit of pragmatism. Referring to the various interpretations of ‘Timshel’, Lee says:

The American standard translation orders men to triumph over sin, and you can call sin ignorance. The King James’s translation makes a promise in ‘Thou shalt’, meaning that men will surely triumph over sin. But the Hebrew word, the word Timshel- Thou mayest- that gives a choice. It might be the most important word in the world. That says the way is open. That throws it right back on a man. For if ‘Thou mayest’ it is also true that ‘Thou mayest not!’...why, that makes a man great, that gives him stature with the gods, for in his weakness and his filth and his murder of his brother, he has still the great choice. He can choose his course and fight it through and win. (EOE 263-264)

The stature of man surely is very high according to Steinbeck. His image of man uplifts, and makes us aware of the inherent potentialities in man. More than his religious leanings it was his faith in man that spoke through the character of Lee when he said:

And I feel that a man is a very important thing- may be more important than a star. This is not theology. I have no bent towards gods. But I have a new love for that glittering instrument, the human soul. It is a lovely and unique thing in the universe. It is
always attacked and never destroyed – because ‘Thou mayest’

(EOE 264)

As a writer, Steinbeck’s writings thereby represented his various beliefs and thinking. He was a writer who was deeply moved by the pain and plight of the people; the underdogs of society. Their hunger, struggle, dreams and frustrations found an apt representation through his various writings. Spanning a period of four decades, Steinbeck’s literary career reveals one unifying and common factor and that is, his compassion for man.

From his youth Steinbeck was aware of the hardships of the homeless workers who dreamed of a steady job and a home. His own experience as a worker presented to him with an opportunity to share their fears and dreams, thereby engendering an abiding compassion for them. His compassion for them was truly, “... the sharing of a sorrow, a pity and sympathy, a desire to help feeling another’s pain or plight as if it were one’s own, seeing those in chains as bound with them.” (Fuller 31)

In his fellow feeling and compassion for the migrant workers and oppressed of society, Steinbeck though influenced by Marxism was essentially indebted to Emerson and Whitman. He was deeply moved by the unhappy lot of these workers and had a deep sense of affectionate identification with them. His compassion or fellow feeling is identified by Dr. Martin Luther King as ‘Love’, which is an:

... understanding, redeeming goodwill for all men. It is an overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated.
groundless and creative . . . It is the love of God operating in the
human heart. (King Jr. 84)

Steinbeck’s compassion or love for humanity reveals his religious
inclination. Religious in an unorthodox manner, he believes in the inherent
principle of ‘love’ preached by all religions. His wide reading and an abiding
interest in The Bible created by his great-aunt created a genuine interest in him
about religious literature and thought. His reading of literature concerning
Hinduism, Buddhism and the Christian Apostles, left a deep impression with
their emphasis on love and compassion. He believes in the principle of love as
practiced by Christ. He does not approve of the hypocritical practices of the
priestly class. His approval of the formal religion exists in only so far as in its
ability to take a man out of loneliness.

Steinbeck held strongly that non-teleological thinking actually
emancipates man from the trap he imposes upon himself by his biased mental
thinking. Non-teleological thinking rather helps man to recognize the illusion for
what it is and make us understand the whole complex situation, thereby paving
way for intelligent action. According to him:

Non-teleological methods more than any other seem 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 . . . with the non-
teleological treatment there is only the love and understanding of
instant acceptance. (Steinbeck "Log from the Sea of Cortez" 871-872)

After ‘instant acceptance’, the next step Steinbeck advocated was for all embracingness which comes from envisioning the whole picture. It is as if he has taken one step beyond naturalism. He assumed that man is ennobled by his very awareness of his part in this whole great design (world). His attitude can be called religious especially, when his biological investigation has its reverence for the mystery of existence. In fact, he progresses from biology to spirit when he inter-links the existence of animals and human beings. Steinbeck philosophically stated that it is only apparently that the species are separated as commas in a sentence. In fact, all the units nestle into the whole and are inseparable from one another. He had fused biology with spirit saying:

And it is a strange thing most of the feeling we call religious, most of the mystical outcrying which is one of the most prized and used and derived reactions of our species is really the understanding and the attempt to say that man is related to the whole thing, related inextricably to all reality, known and unknowable. This is a simple thing to say, but the profound feeling of it made a Jesus, a St. Augustine, a St. Francis, a St. Roger Bacon, a Charles Darwin, and an Einstein. Each of them in his own tempo and with his own voice discovered and reaffirmed with astonishment the knowledge that all things are one thing and that one thing is all things . . .

(Steinbeck "Log from the Sea of Cortez" 929)
Steinbeck’s idea of fusion between man’s physical and spiritual existence has been commented upon by Woodburn O. Ross as, “The first significant novelist to begin to build a mystical religion upon a naturalistic base.” (Woodburn 438)

In his writings Steinbeck is not only concerned with man’s struggle and biological needs, but also with the fall of man. His works reflect a yearning to find solutions for social and economic problems which are religious rather than material. He wants men to recognize the unity of mankind, and in order to embody his ideas of the good life and the good society he has searched broadly for a philosophical framework.

Steinbeck’s view of man as a religious being deals with the soul of man and suggests a most romantic, perhaps, sentimental approach to life. If his awareness of man as an animal seems incongruous with his awareness of man’s spirituality, both notions nevertheless have one important thing in common as Steinbeck employs them in his fiction and both work metaphorically to depict his total vision of man’s duality.

As biologist, he observes the ‘animal’ with scientific objectivity, hoping to discover in its behaviour an order and a meaning within an ecological framework. As philosopher, still concerned with order and meaning, but knowing that objective reality is only part of the truth, he views the group as men, who like himself are spiritual beings seeking their place within a mysteriously ordered cosmos.
The biological view of man that Steinbeck propounded symbolized the principle of unity inherent in life and nature. Man, nature and God are the embodiment of the ‘Over-soul’ that animates all universe. Steinbeck’s biological view of life also recognizes this unifying principle in life: in men, animals and nature.

The concept of non-dualism, of oneness of man and universe reveals the influence of Oriental philosophy on Steinbeck. The teachings of Upanishads find an expression through the belief in the Over-soul. The non-attachment or detachment recommended by Hindu philosophy as in the Gita finds an apt reflection in Steinbeck’s non-teleological point of view. It is only through non-attachment that a non-teleological point of view is possible and an understanding acceptance of humanity can be achieved. In his works can also be found the presence of selfless action; for true non-attachment is renunciation of personal profit and gain. It does not mean for giving up physically, the things of the world but for not being slaves to desires and possessions.

Steinbeck’s novels reflect his religious inclination sourced not only from Oriental religious philosophies but also extensively from The Bible and its related religious myths and legends like the legend of King Arthur. Based on stories and medieval romances, the legend chronicles Arthur’s life and the adventures of his Knights who were the upholders of religious, social and moral values, and their search for the mystical Holy Grail of Christ. Each of his works take their inspiration from Steinbeck’s varied sources of religious philosophy.
The Paisanos in his novel Tortilla Flat are non-attached in the sense that they are not in love with possessions and do not try to own anything for its sake. If they take without permission food or drink belonging to others, it is only to satisfy their hunger and their thirst. They have no intention of preserving it for future use. S. T. Kallapur comments:

The paisanos are charitable and generous. They commit petty thefts of fowl for themselves but do not mind stealing from sacks of pink beans for Senora Teresina to feed her brood of eight. And when they commit thefts they are likely to pick on those who can afford the loss. They lend their clothes to the Pirate so that he can go to church to present a golden candle to St. Francis. Being simple, they talk not of Original Sin, God’s grace and Judgement Day, but being wise, they keep their souls untrammeled by the tawdy things of the world. (Kallapur 31)

In fact the novel is a tale of man’s soul being slowly caught up in the meshes of a material civilization and finally defeated. Material possessions weigh down on the spirit of Danny so much so that he gets himself a gallon of wine to drink. Here he is not celebrating his inheritance but trying to face a calamity. “Pilon noticed that the worry of property was setting on Danny’s face. No more in life would that face be free of care.” (TF 382)

Danny never worries about his possessions. He rents one of his houses to Pilon but never cares if the rent is paid or not. When the house catches fire, he is least bothered and says to Jesus Maria, “if the fire department can’t do anything
about it, what does Pilon expect me to do?” (TF 410) The burning of the house is in a sense a symbolistic ritual of purification. “If it were still there, I would be covetous of the rent, he thought, ‘My friends have been cool toward me because they owed me money. Now we can be free and happy again.’” (TF 411)

Non-attachment is the way of life they follow, they are not perfect but they are simple and altruistic in attitude. They help one another and transcend the conflict of good and evil, having experienced both.

Steinbeck himself explained that the novel followed a definite pattern based on the Malory version of the Arthurian legends that comment upon the moral, aesthetic and historical significance of the incidents which make up the narrative. In the Preface to the novel he says, “For Danny’s house was not unlike the Round Table, and Danny’s friends were not unlike the knights of it.” (TF 373)

Following a plan of formation, flowering and destruction of King Arthur’s troop, Steinbeck parallels it with the gathering of Danny’s friends in his house, their doing remarkable deeds in the neighbourhood and the dissolution of their bond following Danny’s death.

Like the Knights of old, Danny, Pilon and Joe Portagee were warriors having enlisted in the American army in the First World War and like every Knight Danny was a horseman. They liked fights, loved jests and hostile encounters and fought over women.

Similarities can be drawn from the legend and the novel in several incidents occurring in the novel the inheritance of Danny [Arthur] of a house
trouble with Pilon, Pablo [Kings, and Barons] when they refused to pay rent; and their eventual reconciliation [defeat] when the house burned down; the search for the mystic treasure [Grail] by the friends of Danny [the Knights] on St. Andrew’s Eve for his [Arthur’s] welfare or the search for Danny by the Paisanos in the woods and coming back to find their possessions stolen. The irony of leaving behind an unprotected home front is brought to the fore by the novelist through the novel for it is Danny himself who steals. In the same way in the mythical story it is one of the Knights, Launcelot who seduces the Queen, Guenevere. Finally at the end of the novel Danny leaves the house to fight the Enemy, never to return again, which resembles Arthur’s final fight and disappearance over a lake at Avalon.

Being opposed to orthodox and dogmatic form of religion, the organized church is treated with little courtesy in Tortilla Flat. Steinbeck a compassionate man who believed in the power of love reiterates its importance when he says that it was, “... enough for Pilon to do good and be rewarded by the glow of human brotherhood accomplished.” (TF 419). Yet several references in the novel do point out to the Catholic background of the story, like references to masses, rituals and sacred objects; the occurrence of miracles and visions, as when the Pirate’s dogs see a vision of Saint Francis or so the Pirate believed.

Like the tragedy of Arthur, the novelist through the story of Danny comments on the present social situation of the civilized world where there is no room for the Arthurian hero.
The Arthurian legend also finds a remarkable echo in Steinbeck's novel *In Dubious Battle*, in the psychological similarity between Jim Nolan, the protagonist and one of the principle Knights of the Round Table, Perceval or Parsifal. Apart from the Arthurian legend, Milton's version of Satan's rebellion in *Paradise Lost* has also inspired the novel. Like Satan, Jim also had the same purpose on reaching his destination: to persuade subordinate men to disobey their superiors. The struggle once begun is as hopeless for the strikers as the rebel angels. Several images in the novel are also inspired by the epic like the images of fire and contrasting darkness. The dreams that pervade Jim's sleep in the freight car in which he and Mac had gone to Torgas echo the images of Satan leaving Hell's mouth when 'stunning sounds and voices' from the dark hollows confuse him; “His sleep was a shouting, echoing black cave, and it extended into eternity” (IDB 561).

Perceval in *Morte d' Arthur* has a father slain by treachery, a morose mother and a sister who dies and mysteriously disappears. Jim Nolan's father is also killed, a sick mother and a sister who disappears.

Steinbeck further distinguishes Jim from others by giving Him a special allegorical significance. Personal purity is the characteristic cultivated by the Knights of the Round Table. Jim is also represented as a character possessing chivalric ideals of adventurousness, selflessness and chastity. He is free from social vices: he neither drinks, smokes nor goes with girls. He is as attached to the Party as the Knights to the Round Table, working towards a 'cause'. But like
Danny in *Tortilla Flat*, Jim is also destroyed. The established culture fails to utilize the talents of its potential Knight.

Doc Burton in the novel is perhaps the first purely good character. His altruism contrasts starkly with the selfishness of the conflicting groups. Burton says, “I have some skill in helping men, and when I see men who need help, I just do it.” (IDB 680)

Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* is perhaps the last novel to be influenced by the Arthurian legend. Though it lacks a definite mythical pattern yet the central image of the novel is the earthly paradise. It is a vision of Eden, a land of peace, harmony, prosperity, which includes both individual independence and fellowship.

The Knightly loyalty, pursuit of vision, creation of bonds, and its destruction reflect the presence of a strong parallel in the story of Arthur. George is the obvious link to the Arthurian legend with his loyalty towards Lennie. Like Jim Nolan of *In Dubious Battle*, George is a last Galahad, dismounted, armed only with a fading dream, a long way from Camelot; his dream of a farm of his own, and his chaste and pure character that is free of vice.

George’s association with Lennie is that of leader and follower, held together by a religion, complete with myth and ritual. They represent the religious and moral principle of brotherhood which delivers them from loneliness into the blessings of fellowship. The religion practiced herein is the religion of cooperation but one which is overshadowed by the evils deprecated to
keep men away from paradise. The individual desire for carefree enjoyment of pleasures is the serpent in the garden of the world.

Unorthodox and not dogmatic in his religious philosophy; religion, religious mythology, images and philosophies have always been a strong source of inspiration for Steinbeck in his various works. This influence has further strengthened with the maturity of Steinbeck as a writer and we find his growing pre-occupation with philosophical questions of good and evil in his later novels.

Steinbeck’s most famous novel The Grapes of Wrath has not only allusions to the Bible but is also entitled as such. The title refers to Julia Ward Howe’s ‘Battle-Hymn of the Republic’, ‘He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.’ which itself is inspired by the biblical allusion to the great wine press of the wrath of God.

Various critics have accurately pointed out the basic reference of the novel to that of the mythical exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt, the land of bondage to Canaan, the promised land of milk and honey. Peter Lisca discusses the above point based on the three divisions of the novel – the first ten chapters referring to drought; then the next eight chapters the journey and the final twelve chapters to the sojourn in California. The drought and erosion are the plagues of Egypt: the banks and land companies are Pharaoh and the Egyptian oppressors; California is Canaan; and Californians like the Canaanites are hostile to the immigrants. Lisca also draws attention towards the inherent symbolism of the grapes that can either be interpreted as abundance or the wrath and vengeance.
The name Joads also has a biblical ring to it and is a definite take of the name of Judah. The Joads like the Hebrews lived in Oklahoma [Egypt] peacefully before the rise of the new King, the Pharaoh that is the banks and land companies which likened to the biblical sea monster, Leviathan. The oppression results in destruction of lives and livelihood like the plagues in Egypt that destroyed all crops.

The journey from Oklahoma [Egypt] to California [Canaan], the land of promise is filled with difficulties and many die on the way like the Israelites: Grampa and Granma Joad for instance.

The migrants are distraught and discontent. As a group of people they make their own laws and rules of conduct, the breaking of which results in banishment from camps. Steinbeck’s repeated use of ‘It is unlawful’ echoes the ‘Thou shalt not’ of the laws followed by the Hebrews.

The eventual disappointment of the dream of the Promised Land can be seen from the reports of men coming back from California as by the scouts sent ahead into Canaan by Moses. On reaching California Tom thus says to Casy, “. . . this ain’t no ian’ of milk an’ honey like the preachers say. They’s a mean thing here.” (GOW 230)

Despite the difficulties and the hostility of Canaans the Israelites persisted and took over the Promised Land. The book of Joshua ends with victory but The Grapes of Wrath ends on a low note because of the inability of the Okies to give up selfish desires for money and possessions.
The most striking parallel drawn between the novel and the Exodus relates to the incident near the end when Tom killed the vigilante who had struck Casy down, and left the region when it appeared that he would be found out. In the biblical story also a similar incident takes place though at the beginning before the Exodus when Moses kills an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew labourer. Later when he discovers that his deed was known, he flees to the land of Midian.

The character of Casy in the novel draws heavily from Jesus Christ. His words echo the preachings of Christ when he says, "'what's this call, this spirit? It's love. I love people so much I'm fit to bust, sometimes.'" (GOW 23)

Casy's doctrine went beyond Christ. He rejected Christianity which he once preached much like Jesus who starting as a disciple of John the Baptist had abandoned and transformed his teachings.

Casy had in fact rejected John Joad's Christianity. Though not literally similar to John the Baptist, John Joad did live a lonely, comfortless life, guilt-ridden and obsessed with sin. Rejecting his teachings Casy concluded:

Maybe it ain't a sin. Maybe it's just the way folk is . . . There ain't no sin and there ain't no virtue. There's just stuff people do. It's all part of the same thing. And some of the things folks do is nice, and some ain't nice, but that's as far as any man got a right to say.

(GOW 23)

Like Moses who found the Lord on Mount Horeb, Casy also retired to the wilderness to find spiritual truth. The conclusion that Casy reached led him to
the realization of the presence of the Over-Soul, the Advaita, “... maybe it’s the Holy Spirit – the human spirit – the whole shebang. Maybe all men got one big soul ever’body’s a part of.” (GOW 24). His doctrine took the shape of a social gospel in a California jail and became the organizing force of farm workers into unions.

Casy sacrificed himself for others like Jesus when he surrendered himself as the man guilty of striking a deputy at Hoovers. In his death Casy reflects the Christian virtue of forgiveness as preached by Christ when crucified he said, “You fellas don’ know what you’re doin” (GOW 354)

After his death Tom Joad becomes the new Moses. Two of Jesus’ disciples were named Thomas, and Tom Joad is the person who would carry on his teachings like a disciple.

A deeper association exists between the gospel story and the novel as critics like Fontenrose have pointed out. Thirteen persons started West and similarly the Joad family consistd of twelve members and Casy. Not only were two Joads named Thomas but another was John. Casy’s name was James who was the brother and disciple of Jesus. One of the twelve Joads, Connie Rivers was not really a Joad and he is the Judas who deserts the Joads selfishly at a critical moment.

The allusion and reference to the myth is accompanied throughout the novel by symbolic images of groups, vineyards, vintage, snakes, etc. It is the abundance which turns into bitterness transforming into wrath at the voluntary destruction of harvest and eventually lives.
In his novel *East of Eden*, Steinbeck examines the question of good and evil, and the philosophical problem of free will. Peter Lisca remarks:

> As the title suggests (And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden), the vehicle for this theme is a reworking of the Cain and Abel story, told through three generations of the Trask family. Steinbeck sees this story in Genesis as a true account of man’s condition . . .”

(Lisca 261)

In the novel Steinbeck examines the question of good and evil and the philosophical problem of free will. The novel also represents a shift from Steinbeck’s non-teleological idea ‘it might be so’ to ‘I believe’. In fact the novel is a maturing of the artist’s art as well as his faith.

The dominant story of the novel involves three generations of the Trask family. Characterization of the novel invests certain characters with dominant evil traits and others with goodness of heart. Cyrus, Cathy, Charles and Caleb are the evil characters. Adam, Aron and Abra, are the good characters along with the Hamilton family and Lee.

Drawing his inspiration from the Cain and Abel story of crime and fratricide, Steinbeck presents the betrayal theme between brothers. Adam and Charles are brothers who are totally unlike. Cathy is the girl whom Adam marries and dreams of creating a beautiful life with but is ignorant of her true hideous nature. She seduces Charles and conceives his child. Giving birth to
twins, she wounds Adam and runs away. The story of good and evil is continued in the changed guise of her twins, Caleb and Aron.

The arrival of Abra in the lives of the twins creates havoc. Cal vengeful after Abra’s rejection of his suite in preference for his brother takes Aron to see their mother, Cathy who had taken to running a brothel. Shocked by the truth of their mother, Aron enlists in the army and dies. Cal in remorse goes to see his dying father and is forgiven with the help of Lee. Adam forgives his son with the last words ‘Timshel’, ‘thou mayest’ and Lee thus tells Cal. “Whatever you do, it will be you who do it –” (EOE 389)

The optimism and faith of the novelist in the human spirit finds an expression through Lee who speaks of the endurance of the human spirit, “to strive, to seek and not to yield” (Tennyson – ‘Ulysses’)

Drawing a parallel to Old Testament, the novel testifies to Steinbeck’s religious inclination in the later years.

And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the Lord said unto Cain, ‘why art thou wroth? And why is his countenance fallen? If thou dost well, shall thou not be accepted? And if thou dost not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shalt be his desire, and thou shall rule over him. (EOE 233)

Steinbeck’s philosophy of pragmatism and religion are the overlapping features of his works that run parallel to his social concerns, sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly. However the one important feature of all his works is his concern, reverence and complete faith in the human spirit, and in its
potentialities to endure and overcome all obstacles in life. His compassion for
man is the most relevant and major feature of his writings: man as individual, as
a group, in a family or in a community. Human relationships form the core of his
compassion and concern for man in all his novels. His humanistic philosophy is
the basis of his narratives that speak of his love and compassion for all
humanity.
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