

MISSING GOD IN NATURALISM

=====
Matthew 10:27-39

Jesus Teaches the Fear of God

"Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

Confess Christ Before Men

"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven."

Christ Brings Division

"Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.' He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

=====

This message isn't an expositional message on that passage of Scripture in Matthew 10:27-39. I had to write an essay on naturalism for my Literature class and as it was with us looking at the transcendental movement and how it prevailed upon the minds of many in the mid-1800s, the naturalism movement took place just after that.

Naturalism is one of many philosophical ways of describing the world and in how all things function within the operations of the world. While transcendentalism was proposed by writers in the mid-part of the 19th century, what came afterwards were the writings of poets and authors that has been called naturalism.

Transcendentalism gave mankind the benefit of the doubt, by ascribing a good nature at the core of most people, but naturalism began to strip the human condition down to the core and essentially leave man existing as not much more than a common ordinary beast.

What was being recognized by the writers in the age of naturalism is what proponents of the Christian faith and adherents of the Bible would describe, in the words of the Apostle Paul, as "the sin

nature", that all of mankind is born with a natural propensity to sin. In the belief system though of the naturalist, all of "creation", or in their viewpoint perhaps a better way of saying it would be "all that just somehow exists", is dependent upon the natural course of how things just naturally happens. That entropic process then can be anxiously anticipated, by the holder of such belief, to soon bring doom, despair and agony (that's a *Hee-Haw* reference, by the way).

In lieu of believing that man was created by God with a free-will, naturalism proposes that there is nothing outside of what can be perceived by what exists in nature, be it man or beast. Its companion point then, in describing how the world functions, is the idea that the world operates as "a blind machine" that "results in a bleak, realistic depiction of lower-class life".¹ Therefore, it is said that, with naturalism, if one cannot prove something scientifically, then it likely doesn't exist. That would be good news indeed for those who have been afraid of "the boogyman".

If one is an old movie fan, an example that comes to mind is, *On the Waterfront* with Marlon Brando. In that movie, the characters operate in what could be described as an almost fatalistic setting, where there is no way out of what is naturally determined for them. While there is a Catholic priest in that movie who helps affect the final outcome, he only operates as a moral agent, and the movie certainly depicts the condition of the lower-class in bleak realism.

Marlon Brando hadn't even been born yet though when naturalism took hold of the readers' minds and thoughts, when the big-name writers began perpetrating those ideas in books and poems. Yet, according to Britannica, "Naturalism's greatest vogue occurred during the 1930s and '40s, chiefly in the United States among philosophers such as F.J.E. Woodbridge, Morris R. Cohen, John Dewey, Ernest Nagel, and Sidney Hook."²

The writers of the late 19th century included Stephen Crane, who was propelled to literary infamy, er, I mean literary notoriety, with his book, *Red Badge of Courage*, and another notable author was Jack London. Perhaps it is worth noting that both of them lived hard and died young. Is it possible that their world-view may have had something to do with their early demise? If you're in the mood for reading all about the negative side of life, like suffering, pain and death, either of those two writers should be able to supply all your needs. If you decide to read Jack London's *White Fang*, be prepared to have a strong urge to afterwards go to the local animal shelter and save all of the dogs that are there.

1 Laurie E. Rozakis, Ph.D., Complete Idiot's Guide to American Literature, (Indianapolis: Alpha Books, 1999), 194.

2 "naturalism philosophy", Britannica, accessed Mar. 29, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/naturalism-philosophy>

If the reading of the bleaker side of things in life isn't depressing enough for you, then, consider also that with naturalism, there is no purpose behind anything that exists or functions. As gotquestions.org describes naturalism with regards to purpose, "The philosophy of naturalism leads to several incomplete ways of thinking about the world. One of the most important concerns is the philosophy of telos, or purpose. The Christian worldview holds that the purpose of a thing must be given to it by a higher authority. Since naturalism teaches there is no higher authority (no deity), it deduces that mankind, creation, and individuals have no purpose in life."³

As with the other -isms, such as romanticism, Darwinism and transcendentalism, naturalism attempts to explain the nature of mankind, the world, and the universe in human terms versus looking to the Word of God and acknowledging the one true God and creator of all things. When that becomes acknowledged, one has no option then, other than to consider how we are accountable to God, and that He alone transcends space and time to ultimately decide on the final outcome of all things. Also included in that revelation is that there is but one way to be reconciled to God and have forgiveness of sins, as Jesus proclaimed, "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life." (John 6:47) .

In the words of Terry Malloy (Marlon Brando), "I could have been a contender". If that disappointed you, look a few more decades further and you'll think you're watching the same movie in Rocky. Rocky's coach (Burgess Meredith) calls Rocky a bum, but he, Rocky (Sylvester Stallone), fights his way past the naysayers and the natural elements to eventually win the championship title. You'll have to watch the sequel movie though to see that happen. The philosophies of man continue to evolve in seeking a way to be their own god and to struggle, if necessary, to make a name for one's self. Yet in the end, in the words of Jesus, one can "gain the whole world and lose his own soul."

To be entertained by the macabre, look to the writers in the naturalism era. If you get enough realism in life without needing to seek it out in written form, then the words of Jesus may give you the solace that you need (and you won't have to vicariously cry out for Stella or Adrian). Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

³ "What is Naturalism?", Gotquestions, accessed Mar. 29 2023, <https://www.gotquestions.org/naturalism.html>

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Britannica, "naturalism philosophy." Accessed March 29, 2023.
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/naturalism-philosophy>.

Gotquestions, "What is Naturalism?" Accessed March 29, 2023.
<https://www.gotquestions.org/naturalism.html>.

*Rozakis, Laurie E. Ph.D. *Complete Idiot's Guide to American Literature*. Indianapolis: Alpha Books, 1999.