

# NATURALISTIC AND PRAGMATIC PHILOSOPHIES REFLECTED IN THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS CHRIST

Article

## ABSTRACT

*Philosophy is the original discipline of thought. It is really a quest for understanding human existence. The relationship between man and society, nature and humanity is also well understood through philosophy.*

*The world has witnessed a great philosopher in Jesus Christ. The philosophy of Jesus Christ is an embodiment of all truths and values. All His teachings had a philosophical outlook. Whatever philosophy He preached was put into practice. The philosophical teachings of Jesus are a blend of idealism, naturalism, pragmatism, realism and humanism. The present study aims at exploring the naturalistic and pragmatic philosophies in the teachings of Jesus Christ.*

## JESUS AS A NATURALIST PHILOSOPHER

As a naturalist teacher, Jesus Christ formulated all His teachings on natural grounds. They are closely associated with nature. The venues of His teachings in most cases are informal natural settings. The 'Sermon on the Mount' as in Matthew 5-7 was taught on the mountain side. Usually nowadays all teachings are done in formal settings with sufficient infrastructure and audio visual aids. In formal settings, the teacher has a good target group in a closed environment. But in the case of Jesus, it was open air, a natural setting. All the people are intellectually arrested at His teaching, irrespective of age. Even the great truths of eternal life like 'Kingdom of Heaven' is well explained from nature using the Parables of the sower, parable of the weeds, parable of the net (Matthew 13:1-52). Easy and familiar objects of nature are used in the teaching.

To teach about the 'Kingdom of God', He illustrated with 'The Parable of the mustard seed (Mark 4:30-32).

Jesus said "what shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest seed you plant in the ground. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds of the air can perch in its shade."

The greatest abstract truth on the 'kingdom of God' is fully explained with a help of a small natural seed.

When questioned about the sign from heaven by the Pharisees and Sadducees He said (Matthew 16:2-4). "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red', and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Here Jesus explained about the judgement days with the familiar knowledge of 'weather change'. When questioned about paying the temple tax by the tax collectors, Jesus said to his disciple Simon Peter (Matthew 17:25-27): "What do you think, Simon?" he asked, "From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes - from their own sons or from others?" "From others," Peter answered. "Then the sons are exempt," Jesus said to him. "But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours". Here also, Jesus gave this illustration to teach about the laws in the society through nature. The disciples

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of Jesus were mostly fisher folk. So Jesus used the familiar environment of 'fish and sea' to teach about laws governing society. To teach about fullness of faith, again a natural environment is used (Matthew 21:18-22) "Early in the morning, as he was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, May you never bear fruit again!" Immediately the tree withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. "How did the fig tree wither so quickly? they asked. Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, "Go throw yourself into the sea; and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." Here Jesus demonstrated faith through nature to explain great spiritual truths.

Jesus' chosen disciples are fisher folk. Jesus taught people at the seashore, on the edges of lakes, sitting on the boat, all closely identified with nature. The principle of 'heurism' is applied in His teaching. He made people discover truths themselves. This we see in Mark 10:17-23. Here Jesus teaches about 'eternal life' to a rich man through the principle of 'heurism'. Here the man confronted Jesus with a question "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No one is good except God alone. You know the commandments! Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother." "Teacher," he declared, "all these I have kept since I was a boy". Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack", He said, "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth. Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!"

Here Jesus taught very explicitly and the man was able to discover the truth himself.

As a naturalist, He used 'nature' as the venue of His teaching. The natural interest, ability and emotion of the people was given due importance. His teaching is never confined within the four walls. Perfect freedom is given to the people in learning situation. They could raise doubts

and questions in between the learning process. The familiar objects in nature are used as aids in learning.

As a naturalistic teacher Jesus advocated democracy in teaching. He used the 'observation' method in teaching through nature. This we see in Matthew 6:25-30. Here Jesus was teaching using the objects of nature. Jesus said "Do not worry about life, what you will eat or drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than the clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.

Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into fire, will he not much more clothe you, o you of little faith?" Here Jesus used the very familiar nature and unfolded the realities of life. But unlike the other naturalistic teachers, Jesus also concentrated much on the spiritual being of man. He never taught anything separated from nature. All the parables used in His teachings are from the natural environment.

### JESUS AS A PRAGMATIC PHILOSOPHER

Jesus had a highly pragmatic outlook in His teachings. As a pragmatic teacher Jesus taught people on the practical aspect of life. Jesus believed in action or activity for the development of the individual. For the immediate solution of life's problems, practical tips are taught. This type of teaching we see in all the four gospels. When an expert in the law questioned Jesus about true neighbour, Jesus taught through a parable as we see in Luke 10:30-37. Jesus said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the

man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. Look after him, he said, and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have. Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." This is a practical teaching on personal and social values. Values like responsibility; accountability and compassion are taught through this parable.

As a pragmatic teacher, the teaching through parables of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), the lost sheep (Matthew 18:12-14), the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-8) and the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) are all centered on the world of experience which an individual faces in his life time. The practical teachings on sin, faith and duty are all very much related to daily life. In Luke 17:1-6, Jesus said "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied around his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to sin. So watch yourselves. If your brother sins rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent', forgive him". The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" He replied, "if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea, and it will obey you". Jesus teaches His people to be free of sins and inculcate the quality of forgiveness in practical life.

In teaching the moral value of righteousness for practical life, the Parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector is explained (Luke 18:9-13). Jesus said "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself. 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men-robbers, evildoers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get'. But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not

even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." This type of teaching resulted in self examination for the learners.

As a pragmatic philosopher and teacher, He stressed on the practical aspects of daily life. He never imposed any teaching on the learners, but He placed the learner in the position of an experimenter in the pursuit of knowledge and truth. The preaching, teaching and healing ministry of Jesus is centered on the daily life of the common man. Whatever He preached was put into His practical life.

## CONCLUSION

The teachings of Jesus are a composite blend of all philosophies. He is an intellectual adventurer par excellence. As a naturalist, He used nature and environment as a powerful tool for teaching. As a pragmatist, He gave importance to the practical life of man. Thus the philosophy of Jesus is an eclectic one which teaches the philosophical framework for understanding the problems of earthly life and the vision for eternal life.

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