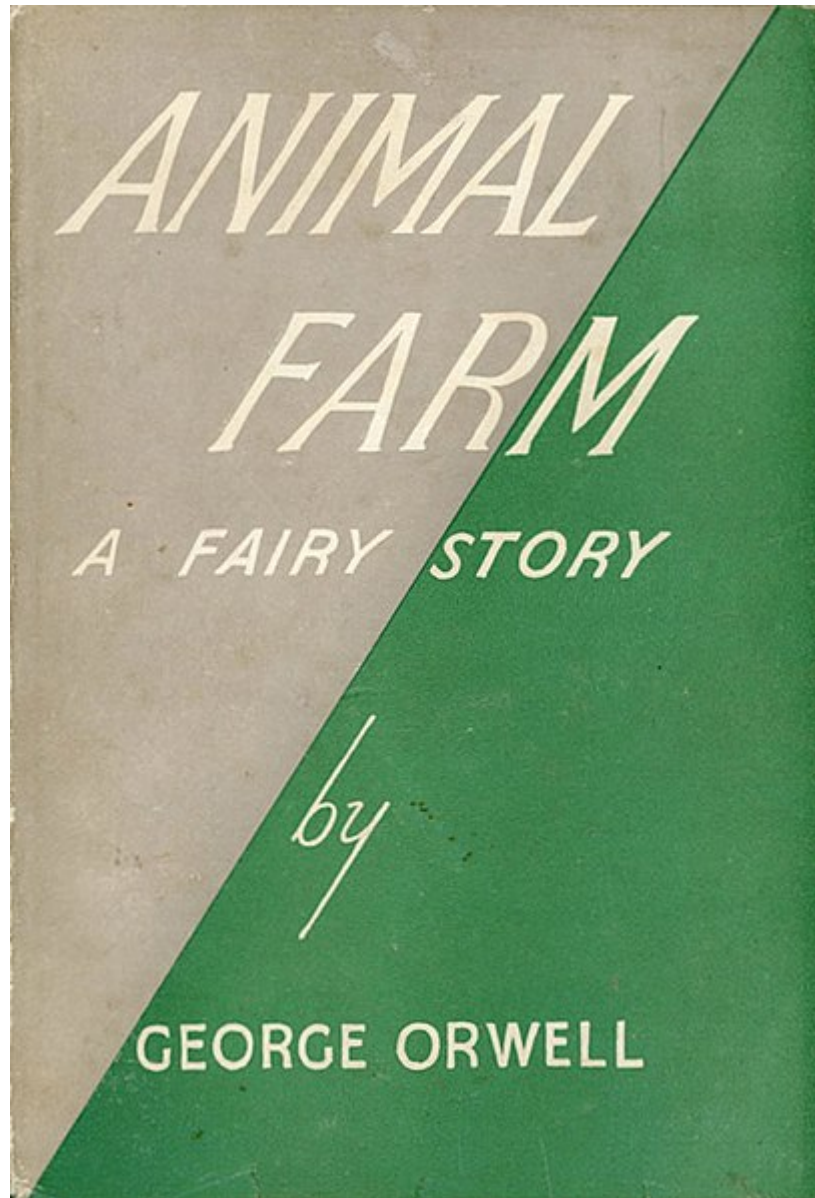


Sermon

'Animal Farm'

6 September 2020, Mt 18.10-20



George Orwell's novel, *Animal Farm*, is a story demonstrating the power of persuasion and perception. The main example of this is the pigs establishing authoritarian rule over the rest of the farm by promising utopia through propaganda and lies. Furthermore, language is also used by pigs and other animals through the book to gain trust through a sense of community, using words to refer to each other like 'comrade' and 'friend.'

The book opens with Old Major, a fatherly mentor to the animals he lives alongside, gathering everyone to the shed. He presents a speech to all the animals about the 'golden future time' that he won't live to see. Old Major knows that most of the animals in the farm are not very bright, and picture him as old and wise so they will believe what he states without question. This is made worse by informing the animals that the elderly are taken to the nearest pond to drown with bricks tied to their neck. The negative connotations and nightmarish scenarios given to the animals make them susceptible to influence through fear and worry. Moreover, they need to be saved, to secure a brighter future.

Using the language of 'Beasts of England, Ireland, every land and clime' Old Major redefines each lowly farm animal in political terms. Adding on to this, Old Major describes the neglectful farm owner Mr Jones (along with the other humans) as 'Tyrants' who 'whip' them while the animals struggle from their bounding 'harness'. He persuades the farm animals to fight back and cause an uprising against the brutal 'Tyrants' and take control of the farm to claim the coveted 'fruitful fields of England'. Old Major had put his ideology in the right using his powerful and seemingly whole perception of reality gripping the farm. However, the truth has been distorted to fill his moral barometer. Although the 'oppression' they face is not uncommon, and Mr Jones is in no way a tyrant (however corrupt), the farm animals

don't know any different.

Following the battle of the cowshed, Napoleon introduces a new set of laws the animals must abide by. These are the 7 commandments of animalism. The language used in the set of laws are simple and direct, easy for the animals to understand. It provides no reason as to why, but it doesn't need to because it doesn't matter to them. What matters is their prosperous future. Furthermore, the pigs present themselves as Gods before the animals, they write the laws and tell them what is right. The first two commandments give NO exceptions. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy, whatever goes upon 4 legs or has wings is a friend. No one else gets a say in this, is the way these commandments are stated. It is what it is. All power belongs to the pigs. But the animals are drawn to the last commandment the most. ALL ANIMALS ARE EQUAL. Not all of them know necessarily what it means, but they know it is what Old Major promised. Therefore, the animals provide their support to Napoleon and Squealer who enforce these laws.

In conclusion, the pigs use positively connotated words as a way to produce propaganda to lure the rest of the farm to their ideology. They use language to make it sound as promising as possible, to gain the fellowship of the animals and the leadership they desire.

Said Wolfhart Pannenberg, one of the leading theologians of the 20th century, Christians cannot employ Marxist categories as a scientific, sociological tool in the task of understanding the dynamic of oppression in contemporary society.

In an article in 1981, 'God's Presence in History,' Pannenberg, reflecting on the rise of Marxism within Western society, wrote:

'In my earlier years I had little doubt about not only the moral superiority but also the historical future of the values of the liberal democratic tradition. A little more than 15 years ago, I became considerably less optimistic. The course of the students' revolution in Europe, especially the unexpected susceptibility to Marxism on the part of many educated youth, made me more keenly aware of the unpredictability of irrational factors still shaping the course of history. In another way the political decline of the West in recent decades suggests similar conclusions.

However, the more insecure the future of a liberal, secular society appears to be, the more confident I feel about the future of religion -- not a future in relation to emancipation and economic and/or political liberation. Much of the enthusiasm in such movements seems to me an unintentional contribution to accelerating the spread of oppressive regimes. But religion in the strict sense of the word can feel more secure today than it has for a long time. It will outlive every ideological regime. And the only serious challenge to Christianity will not be secular society, which is badly in need of religious support in our days, but rival religions.'

What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.'