

What's the Difference Between Spiritual and Supernatural?



One of my blog readers asked me to provide some perspective on the difference between “spiritual” and “supernatural”, noting that everybody these days wants to be spiritual, without believing in the “supernatural”. Yet, isn’t “spirit”, by definition, other than natural?

First, let’s clarify the word “spiritual”, because there is a whole lot of confusion out there. Everybody uses the same word, but often with vastly different assumptions about its meaning. Ken Wilber helpfully distinguished four meanings:

1. The highest level of any line of intelligence. Howard Gardiner, the Harvard researcher, has identified eight, measurable lines of intelligence, including cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, intrapersonal, musical, etc. When someone performs at the highest level on any of these lines, people associate it with “spiritual”. Even when a lowly person like myself weighs in at a dinner conversation with some philosophical observation that the other guests are not familiar with, they might say “that’s quite spiritual”.

2. Its own line of intelligence: Although Gardner doesn’t deal with it, because it’s difficult to measure, there is a spiritual line of intelligence. It addresses the question “Of all that I am concerned about, what is of ultimate concern, and what is the nature of ultimate reality?” *In Stages of*

Faith, James Fowlers deals with this spiritual line of intelligence. As the title implies, this line of intelligence may evolve.

3. **A peak experience:** I'm walking in the forest and I drop into an awareness of my unity with All That Is, or am gobsmacked by the beauty and grace of it all. I've had a "spiritual" experience. Technically, this is a "state" experience of Spirit.

4. **An attitude:** Such as love, joy, compassion.

When somebody tells me that they are "spiritual but not religious" (sbnr) usually they're talking about 1, 3, and 4, but haven't necessarily spent a whole lot of time cultivating the spiritual line of intelligence itself (#2.) To evolve along this line of intelligence requires disciplined, committed, practice within a spiritual path and community (which is pretty much what religion has always been about and when it isn't it turns into what the sbnr's reject). This requires a separate blog.

The question my friend asked me about really concerns #2, which is the only one that systematically addresses the ultimate nature of reality. And when you get into that subject you realize right away that ultimate reality manifests in the realm of form through different stages of consciousness and different worldviews.

Premodern:

a. Tribal: many gods vie for loyalty, power and control.

b. Mythic/Traditional: Tribal gods come under the rule of one big God who rules over all other gods and nature, and intervenes episodically to straighten things out, punish, bless, save, etc.

Modern: No God/gods—(or at best a deistic God who gets a world

started and then leaves it alone to run itself.)

Postmodern: Compassionate God, whose only rule is Love:

Post-postmodern: God as divine milieu, the Heart/Mind of Reality that is eternally birthing new worlds.

The idea of the “supernatural” is really, really important at a Mythic/Traditional level of consciousness and worldview, but not at later stages. To rule over nature, God obviously must be greater than nature, and be able to display this power at will. So Jesus is portrayed in the New Testament as calming the seas, walking on water, floating up to heaven, and performing all kinds of miracles. To believe this literally is critical for Mythic Christians. When we feel out of control, at the mercy of nature or our own destructive natures, we want a supernatural Power to save us.

My observation is that as one moves through these worldviews, the nature of “God” changes accordingly. God becomes:



- less interventionist
- more Mysterious
- less supernatural
- more the infinite depth, freedom and fullness of the One Reality
- less ontologically distinct from and critical of all

that is natural

- more affirming of nature (including human) as a blessed manifestation of Spirit.

As each worldview is transcended and included in the next, responsibility for life is transferred away from a supernatural God and internalized by the human species. Mythic Christians see this as hubris, displaying a lack of faith in God's power. Postmodern and post-postmodernists see this increased capacity and willingness to assume responsibility for current conditions and the shaping the future as a sign of deepening faith. God is manifesting in the world through our capacity to assume increasing degrees of responsibility. God is moving in us, through us, and as us. We are being divinized, becoming Christ for the world.

When people express a preference for "spiritual" over "supernatural" they are intuitively signalling that the Mythic God doesn't work for them anymore—to the extent that God is perceived to be a supernatural Being who intervenes episodically and unilaterally to effect things that humans can't or won't. It should be noted that there are many brilliant theists who affirm that God is wholly Other, and of a different essence (ontologically distinct) than the rest of reality. But if these theists are functioning from a modern or postmodern worldview, they intuitively know that they must figure out how God acts in the world without interfering with natural processes or in the human domain with free will. That kind of God is simply a non-starter from modernism forward.

Supernaturalism is functionally, effectively, rejected by these postmodern theists.

I believe that Reality is One, and the Oneness manifests in diverse forms, human and other than human. God is a single House with an infinite number of floors and rooms. (In my Father's house there are not just many rooms, but also many floors!) You can't get outside the House. Supernatural, from the perspective of these later worldviews, becomes simply

weirdly unnatural. See Michael Dowd's [excellent riff](#) on this.

Spirit isn't other than natural, but Infinite, Absolute Nature on the move in the realm of form. The natural world (observed by science) is not other than Spirit, but rather the outside of the inside of Spirit's—Spirit's "body". It's not that we are not in need of grace. Rather grace itself is paradoxically natural. That is, because Spirit is yearning to experience its infinite depths, its infinite freedom, its infinite fullness, in, through, and as us, the yearning we feel to evolve is itself a gracious and immediate experience of Spirit. We can rest in that blessed unrest.

When we experience God as Beloved Other, (2nd person face of God or Beloved Other), we are experiencing the infinite potential for personhood, which we already know partially in how we are showing up and how others are showing up for us—as persons who love, think, empathize, yearn, etc. (Now we see in a glass darkly, then we shall see face to face). Our Beloved Other is where we are headed, personally and collectively. Or, if you are Christian, follow the second "person" of the Trinity, Jesus, the Christ, into full personhood. We are paradoxically both an expression of this Holy Oneness, and yet also actually a distinct other within this One Heart and One Mind. To resolve this paradox is to lose the truth of the Mystery.

Perhaps we could say that God is supernatural, as in super-natural. Take the beauty, diversity, mystery and intelligences of natural world (including human) and magnify or intensify these infinitely, and you arrive at Spirit's Absolute Nature.

Take the interiority of Reality, the highest form of which we know is human personhood—love, compassion, complex reasoning, empathy—and expand, deepen, and intensify this infinitely as the Milieu out of which it is, we are, all arising. For all intents and purposes you get to a quality of Reality (God) that feels Wholly Other than us, and yet (and this is crucial) it is not actually separate from us. We are not separate from

that. We are That having a human experience, and yearning to become more of Itself/Himself/Herself, through us. Which is one explanation for our ceaseless yearning. Spirit is having an experience through us and wants more depth, more joy, more love, more transparency, more beauty and goodness.

Seeing as there are so various families buying online and likewise exploring the internet market place, it has grow increasingly famous to purchase medications online. So the next question is where can you get information that is reliable. You can find useful info fleetly and conveniently by going online. The most common sexual problems in men are erectile dysfunction and ejaculation disorders. A lot of doctors think about "[levitra cost](#)". Did learned something about "[buy levitra online usa](#)"? Other matter we are going to is "[buy generic levitra online](#)". In effect, a medic reviews found that up to three quarters of people on such remedy experiment side effects. Luckily, most cases of sexual dysfunction are treatable, so it is momentous to share your concerns with your partner and physician. Today, there are many options for men who suffer from erectile dysfunction. Get emergency help if you have any of these signs of a side effect to this medication. Talk to your soundness care provider to see if it's sure to make the switch.