

Many people who are leaving religious affiliations, of their families of origin or altogether, often describe themselves as "spiritual, but not religious." Humanists would do well to empathize with and assist those who are leaving religions and searching for connections, community, and senses of purpose and meaning that they might well find among us if we are gracious enough to be inviting and welcoming. As more people are unaffiliated with religion, more Humanists are addressing a range of "spiritual" concerns in "naturalistic" ways: deepest motivations that define and direct our lives; the human search for and creation of meaning in our lives; the quality of our interior experience vs prioritizing more quantitative, acquisitive, status-oriented, and external assessments of human beings and the worth of their lives; and narrative and mythic structures that connect and contextualize human beings among one another and in the world and cosmos.

"naturalistic spirituality" (NS) & the philosophy of Humanism

"naturalistic" implies naturalism vs supernaturalism: Humanists uphold natural & social sciences, see humans as parts of nature, consider evidence & internal consistency to evaluate all claims.

"naturalistic spirituality" - Many Humanists describe themselves as having this type of spirituality.

NS is concerned with inspiration, passion, and meaning in life; focuses on social justice & improvement of this world & this life (vs an "after-life" in a "world to come"); focus on nature, love, family, community, healing, growth, beauty...

"spirituality" from a naturalistic perspective can refer to *"an emotional quality animating life" or "a quality relating to elevated morality, character, feeling, & intellect."*

The English words "inspire," "inspiration," "spirit," "spirituality," & such all come from the Latin "spīritus" meaning "breath" which comes from the Latin "spīrāre" meaning "to breathe."

Both natural & supernatural meanings are found in the historical usages of these terms.

(See *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 1973, p 1246, and *The Oxford Universal Dictionary on Historical Principles*, 3rd edition, 1955, p 1973)

For philosophical naturalists, "spirit" can therefore be understood as a poetic reference to *"the animating force in living beings" or to "the character of persons, periods, and places."*

Thus, *spirituality is a quality of the bodily experiences of living beings in "this world" - not something beyond our bodies, our lives, or the many dimensions of nature & the cosmos. Science helps us perceive & conceive of other dimensions of existence (eg: dark matter & energy) as natural aspects of the cosmos, not outside it in some proposed supernatural "other world."*

"Spirit" can function as a natural if poetic reference to *energy* in relationship to matter, to *motion* in relation to the stationary, & to *emotion* in contrast to things unfeeling or immovable.

Speaking of the "spirit" of love, democracy, peace, or freedom helps us relate to ideals "intangible" to material touch, yet emotionally *"touching" & "moving."* These ideals often = elevated virtues (eg compassion, magnanimity, integrity, authenticity).

The focus here is on *quality* vs quantity.

"Spirituality" relates to *subjective*, individual experience in contrast to religious claims to absolute truth and in contrast to commandments inducing obedience & conformity.

"Spiritual" feelings, thoughts, and behaviors relate to the *expansive* rather than to the static or contracting, to the *emergent* rather than to that which contains or is contained, to *innovation, exploration, & risk* rather than to conservatism, parochialism, & safety.

"spirituality" vs "piety" - George Santayana - "piety" as reverence, convention, communion, dedication, submissiveness, fearful guarding or watching out for

(see *The Life of Reason*, 1905-06, vol 3, chapters 10-11 on piety and spirituality, pp 178-213)

"spirituality" vs "organized" religion -

"spirituality" re soaring heights of the spirit

vs "soulfulness" re depths of strength & resilience to cope with life's challenges & pain (Hillman 1975)

(see David Elkins, President, Humanistic Psychology Division of the American Psychological Association

Beyond Religion: A Personal Program for Building a Spiritual Life outside the Walls of Traditional Religion, pp 18-19)

"humanism" - "religious" vs "secular" & beyond...

humanism - focus on the human experience, abilities, betterment - vs focus on god/s, demon/s, etc. ;
(from Latin "humanus" = "earthling," a being made of "humus," Latin for "earth" or "soil");

"Humanism" rooted in philosophies of ancient India, China, + Hellenistic Greek & Roman cultures;

1st named as such in Renaissance Italy; popularized by Unitarian-Universalist & Quaker movements.
two commonly recognized types: "religious" &/or (vs) "secular" humanism.

- "Religious humanists" participate in some religious cultural traditions;
and may or may not have theological beliefs.
- "Secular humanists" = non-theological, focus only on human life in this world,
and may or may not participate in religious cultural traditions.
- Growing number of humanists identify with both "religious" *and* "secular" elements of Humanism,
since they participate in religious cultural traditions but in non-theological ways;
eg, many Jews & Buddhists are "religious humanists" and also non-theological or atheistic.
Most contemporary Humanists are atheists &/or agnostics; some = deists or progressive theists.

spirituality resources for Humanists

"An All-Natural Faith," *The Humanist* (magazine). John Shook. January-February 2014, pp 19-21.

<http://thehumanist.com/january-february-2014/an-all-natural-faith/>

"Invite Those 'Not Religious, But Spiritual' to Explore Humanism" in *Humanist Network News*. Binyamin Biber

<http://americanhumanist.org/HNN/details/2012-11-spiritual-but-not-religious-a-humanist-perspective> (original post in Oct. 2012)

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The Humanist Contemplative: Essays on Spiritual Naturalism. DT Strain. <http://humanistcontemplative.blogspot.com/>

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Meditation for the Rest of Us. Dr. James Baltzell. 2006. (Secular scientific approach to meditation; book & CD)

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The Evolving Self: A Psychology for the Third Millennium. Csikszentmihalyi. 1993.

The Farther Reaches of Human Nature. Maslow. 1971.

Toward a Psychology of Being. Abraham Maslow (Founder, Humanistic Psychology). 1962 1st, 1968 2nd.

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David Elkins (President, Humanistic Psychology Div, American Psychological Assoc). 1998.

"Toward a Humanistic-Phenomenological Spirituality: Definition, Description and Measurement,"

Journal of Humanistic Psychology 28(4), 5-18. David Elkins, et al. 1988.

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