

What is Spiritual Naturalism?

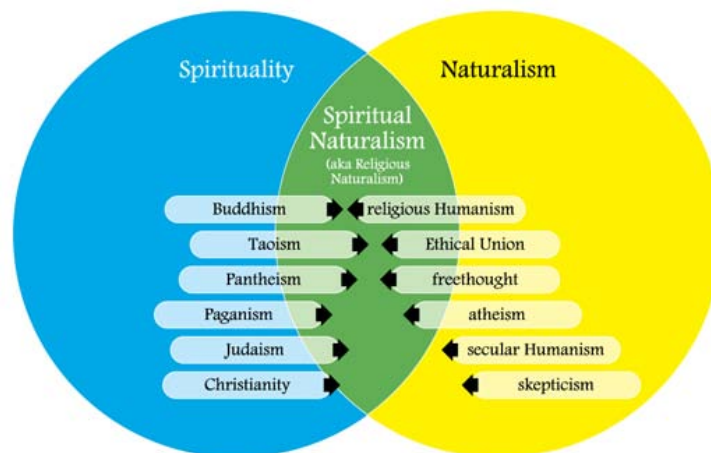
Spiritual Naturalism (also called religious naturalism) is a worldview, value system, and personal life practice. A religion to some, philosophy to others, Spiritual Naturalism sees the universe as one natural and sacred whole – as is the *rationality* and the science through which nature is revealed. It advocates principles and practices that have *compassion* as their foundation, and it finds wisdom and inspiration in innumerable rich traditions and ethical philosophies from around the world.

The focus of Spiritual Naturalism is *happiness*, contentment, or flourishing in life, and a relief from suffering. It is a spirituality whereby we work to become wiser and to live better over time through continued learning, contemplative practices, and character development. It is by walking such a path that we become more capable of helping to make the world a better place, and in so doing, come closer to the flourishing ‘good life’. To explain in more detail, it is helpful to take each word separately:

Naturalism is a view of the world that includes those things which we can observe or directly conclude from observations. Naturalists’ conception of reality consists of the natural world as outlined by the latest scientific understanding. As for claims for which we have no evidence, we do not hold any beliefs in these and do not make any other claims about them. It is quite possible, even likely, that many things exist which we cannot detect, but we believe in a humble approach to knowledge. With humility, we can recognize that human beings are imperfect in their ability to know all things. Therefore, we are careful to limit our claims about reality to what we can experience and measure, as well as reproduce and show to others. On all else, we are content to admit “we don’t know”.

Spirituality is the other word in Spiritual Naturalism. For many, the word ‘spirituality’ has an association with the supernatural. However, we mean the term in its more general and original sense. The Latin root word *spiritus* meant ‘wind’ or ‘breath’, or the essence of something. As we might speak of the ‘spirit of the law’ or ‘school spirit’, the spiritual is that which is concerned with the *essence* of life – or the *essential* things in life. Thus, a person with no sense of spirituality would be a person that lives on the surface, always dealing only with the shallow or the mundane; perhaps even a materialistic person. But to have spirituality is to be concerned with the larger, deeper, and essential matters of life and to apply ourselves consciously toward them in a committed practice or ‘walk’. This includes, as Socrates put it, the ‘examined life’, and this is what we mean by *spirituality*.

Because it is a general term that overlaps with many viewpoints, it is possible for a person to be a Spiritual Naturalist and several other things simultaneously. Spiritual Naturalism cuts across traditional or familiar categories. Many Humanists, Unitarians, Freethinkers, Jews, Pagans, Buddhists, skeptics, atheists, agnostics, and others may also be Spiritual Naturalists, though not all of them.



Many communities now have subsets growing toward a common naturalistic spirituality.