

## Normal vs. Natural

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Who wants to be abnormal? No, we all want to be normal, right? We don't want people to think there's anything wrong with us. We don't want to stand out as different or unusual, just in case someone notices and questions us why. When we compare ourselves with others and notice that we're doing things differently from the way others are doing, we readjust our behaviour to fit in, don't we? Or do we swim against the current when everyone else swims with it?

I'm the kind of person who's quite happy to swim against the current. I don't care if I'm the only one doing something differently when everyone else is doing it a certain way. In that sense, I don't want to be normal, because I'm not comfortable with normal. Just because it's normal doesn't mean it's right. Just because everyone thinks a certain way, or does things a certain way, doesn't mean that's the best way, or even a good way. Normal can sometimes be simply wrong. Normal can be damaging. Normal can be regressive. Normal can be inhibitive.

I'd rather pursue what is natural. I don't think it's natural to periodically fill one's lungs with damaging smoke particles. In some cultures it might be normal, but it's not natural, and indeed smoking isn't good for one's health. It would be healthier not to smoke. I don't think it's natural for teenagers to be isolated from hierarchical relationships; it's normal for teenagers to be disconnected from their parents, teachers and other forms of authority, such as the police, but I don't think it's natural. It would be healthier for teenagers to be intimately bonded with their parents or teachers. It sounds so crazy, so unusual, to suggest but that's because it's not normal. And yet it's one example where I believe what is natural is being pushed aside by what is normal.

The crazy thing is that many unnatural things are becoming normalised. There's an effort to normalise all kinds of behaviours and habits. Even if these ways are not normal, in the sense that only a minority do things these ways, they are highlighted with increasing frequency in order to give the impression that they ought to be normal. And since humans learn by imitation, guess what, the behaviour becomes more prevalent as what used to be quite abnormal slowly becomes more and more normal in terms of the population as a whole. Unnatural, but normal.



Of course I'm generalising. It's normal and natural for people to walk on two feet. Walking in any other way, when you have a healthy body, would not be as optimal. But there's the caveat: it's natural if you have a healthy body. Health matters in the context of what is natural. Some people are naturally born unhealthy, and this presents obstacles in terms of development. Reaching one's full human potential is inhibited when health is not optimal. Ideally, we should all be able to reach our full human potential naturally. The problem is very few of us do. None of us do, if our spiritual potential – the potential of our hearts to become like God's heart – is considered.

So what we need is an unnatural grace. We need an unnatural way to help our broken, unhealthy selves escape from the prison of normality and be liberated to realise our natural potential. I want to campaign to revise normality, to redefine what is normal, and champion what ought to be natural. Through religion, I find many exercises and disciplines that retrain my unhealthy self to recover the fitness I need – psychologically, emotionally, intellectually, volitionally, spiritually, even physically – to pursue my God-given potential. And socially, we need fitness in our relationships that allows society to function.

So I question everything that is presented to me as normal, and seek what I feel ought to be natural.

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