

## The Supernatural Is What the Paranormal May Be: Real

“Please leave,” said Mircea Eliade (editor-in-chief of the 17-volume “Encyclopedia of Religion”). With a question, he had just begun a lecture to a group of liberal clergy at the University of Chicago. His question: “Do you think that the sacred tree in the center of the clearing is not holy? If so, please raise your hand.” To the hand-raisers – about a third of us – he said, “Please leave.” The room became dead quiet; nobody left. Minds not open to the supernatural seemed to him subhuman: openness to experiencing the transcendent, the beyond, is a constitutive characteristic of human consciousness.

The great phenomenologist was talking about the supernatural, not the paranormal. The current “On Faith” question asks about the two: “Polls routinely show that 75% of Americans hold some form of belief in the paranormal such as astrology, telepathy and ghosts. All religions contain beliefs in the supernatural. Is there a link? What’s the difference?”

1.....The difference appears in the delightful, uproarious film, “The Gods Must Be Crazy.” Out of the open cockpit of a small biplane, somebody throws an empty coke bottle, which lands in a small village of near-naked primitives, overwhelming them with fear of the unknown and befuddling them with cognitive dissonance. We viewers know that the event was natural, almost normal. But to the primitives, the event was *para*-normal, *pre*-natural, beyond both expectation and explanation.

What to do? The leader rose and supernaturalized the event. The gods had gone crazy and had dropped on them an evil that would destroy them if they did not destroy it by throwing it over the edge of the world. The remainder of the movie is the leader’s physical-spiritual journey through the jungle, and viewers can share his relief and joy as the coke bottle flies out of his hand and over the cliff.

The sense the movie makes to the Enlightenment viewer is *literal* – not paranormal, preternatural, certainly not supernatural. But scholars like Eliade would have us read it also *allegorically*, making sense in the context of full human experiencing. The first guy to throw the coke bottle was, in a way, crazy; and the second guy was, in a way, not crazy.

2.....“You have 48 hours to write and hand in an essay defining the supernatural.” In 1941, those were the first words of the University of Chicago doctoral-seminar professor teaching a course titled “The Natural and the Supernatural.” I’ve been revising my essay these 67 years: what can’t be done must be done. “Transcendence” is Latin for “climbing across/down/up,” and we are climbers with ladders too short. But as we reach out beyond the end of our ladders of longing, the Mystery reaches and blesses us.

3.....It’s an old joke that if you pray you’re pious, and if God speaks back you’re crazy. But we supernaturalists say you’re crazy if when God speaks you don’t listen. Of course, God’s language *transcends* ours, and we translate his speech into the best sense we can make of it with the best sounds we know. We can’t expect our God-stories to match. The fact that they don’t is an argument not for atheism but for awed humility face to face with the divine transcendence and for generosity toward one another: “O the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord?” (Bible: Romans 11:33-34)

4.....As parapsychology uses “*paranormal*” as an umbrella term for the trans-scientific, the rationally unexplained, religion uses “*supernatural*” as an umbrella term for the rationally unexplainable, for the more real than real, for what Browning called “beyond our reach, or what’s a heaven for?” But we would not reach if we had not been reached: the natural dimension is available to, indeed pervaded with, the supernatural dimension. The sky can reach us far beyond our ability to reach the sky.

5.....As philosophies compete to win our *minds*, God-stories compete to win our *hearts*. Nobody gets a pass to the truth, everybody must choose and should respect others choices within the bounds of human dignity. I choose the most astonishing God-story, the Bible’s: God so loved us that in and as Jesus he became one of us, to do for us what we could never do for ourselves – free us (as an ancient baptismal formula puts it) “from sin, death, and the devil” - free us to be fully human and responsible in love of God, neighbor, self, and the good earth.



## Comments

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Pagan I understand that view point it is wrong, but I understand it. Because I will not accept that something someone else considers to be Holy as Holy does not render me incapable of understanding that to them it is holy.

Also understand as a Christian I do not Consider the cross to be holy, only Him, who gave up his life that mine own might be spared, do I consider to be Holy.

POSTED BY: GARYD | JULY 21, 2008 11:01 PM

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BS and more BS

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | JULY 21, 2008 9:55 PM

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The usual way of getting god into a person's head is through the age old practice of childhood indoctrination.

Catholics indoctrinate their children into the Catholic faith, Evangelicals indoctrinate their children into the Evangelical faith, Mormons indoctrinate their children into the Mormon faith, Shia Muslims indoctrinate their children into the Shia Muslim faith, Sunni Muslims indoctrinate their children into the Sunni Muslim faith, Hindus indoctrinate their children into one of the many Gods of the Hindu faith, Sikhs indoctrinate their children into the Sikh faith, Jews indoctrinate their children into the Jewish faith. I don't know what Pagans do. I assume indoctrination would be involved. It is the one sure fire way of getting god into people's heads, (any god, any head) get it in their heads when they are too young to realize how absurd it all is. Then they'll believe forever, and believe nonsense makes sense.

O cruel world, how can we end this madness?

POSTED BY: E. PONSONBY-SMALLPIECE | JULY 21, 2008 6:52 PM

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Terra.

Brilliant Terra, you certainly check-mated Andrew with your icy logic.

You have convinced me and anyone else who read your comments that gods exist, otherwise how can we imagine them in the first place unless they actually exist??????????

And now I believe in Santa, the Tooth fairy, and the Flying Spaghetti Monster too,for the same reason.

Thank you Terra for enlarging my world.

You are obviously a scientist.

POSTED BY: YOYO | JULY 21, 2008 5:42 PM

[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

Andrew says,

"In the opinion of many there is no supernatural or paranormal world outside of the imagination."

Right on!

Terra says,

"You say its all in the imagination...ok...where did the idea come from before it was in the imagination? We all have that eureka moment...where did it come from? If you do not know it first, how can we know it ever?"

Too bad! Imagination doesn't make things real! If it did, all I would have to do is imagine that it doesn't, and it wouldn't!

No, IMHO, imagination is the arising into consciousness of information-processing that's going on at a subconscious level. Depending on the quality of the processor, the thoughts that arise may tend toward either truth or nonsense. When you look at the mass of ideas that human imagination has produced, and how contradictory they are to each other and to experience, it's clear that there's a whole lot of nonsense going on.

One of the things I like about Paganism, at least as far as I know about it, is its focus on the cultivation of imagination as the source of creativity. But as for the truth of what ultimately arises we still need the good old Enlightenment paradigm of evidence-based scientific investigation. For every scientist with a vivid imagination there are a thousand goofballs with equally vivid imaginations who are wrong. It took a long time to get Darwin, who in his day competed with the imaginative Lamark, who was wrong, as well as the mass of religious creationist humanity, who were wrong.

Yes, God is in the mind, or at least in your mind. How did it get there? Maybe indoctrination coupled with incredulity. Maybe extrapolation of the apparant omnipotence of parents over children, coupled with poor logic skills. Maybe an evolutionarily-reinforced tendency to believe ones elders, thus avoiding life-threatening situations.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | JULY 21, 2008 4:25 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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I regard monotheism as the greatest disaster ever to befall the human race. I see no good in Judaism, Christianity or Islam - good people, yes, but any religion based on a single, well ... frenzied and virulent god, is not as useful to the human race as, say, Confucianism, which is not a religion, but an ethical and educational system.

Gore Vidal in "At Home". 1988.

POSTED BY: PLAY IT AGAIN SAM | JULY 21, 2008 4:05 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Andrew,

You say its all in the imagination...ok...where did the idea come from before it was in the imagination?

We all have that eureka moment...where did it come from? If you do not know it first, how can we know it ever?

All things start as inagination. Try inventing anything without the use of the imagination?

Design anything and you have to imagine it first.

Yes, God is in the mind...how did S/he get there?

terra

POSTED BY: TERRA GAZELLE | JULY 21, 2008 3:15 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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The question is not about whether or not there is either eternal life or one or more gods/Gods but what is the connection between the two, if any?

The answer is at [hoax-buster.org](http://hoax-buster.org) page 1 and very simple. God is a weapon used by crooks to extort money from people with threats they will be killed. Killed means they will NOT go on to the next world be that world spirit or physical. Since there is no death then hell is required. Hell is a prison where those deprived of more life in the next world live. God is used by the terrorists who threaten with hell as the means of arresting, trying, convicting and carrying out the hell sentence which happens between this world and the next world, (no sinners in heaven not even long enough to be prosecuted and thrown out).

There is no logical connection what so ever between God and life. The only connection is between God and death -the removal of our immortal beings from society. To authenticate the claim that God deprives people of life the terrorists claim God created everything.

There is no logical connection between God creating everything and God depriving folks of life. In fact, that makes no sense at all. It's like God creates creatures to torture them. God never says to us directly to do or not do. It's ministers that threaten us with hell for doing and not doing what they and NOT God dictate.

In it's most elementary definition religion is J-Hawking along the road from this world to the next. The logical conclusion is that the ministry does NOT believe there is a God that punishes crooks else they wouldn't J-Hawk. J-Hawking the eternal life trail is conceivably the deadliest of deadly sins. It makes the minister like unto God -a violation of the first commandment which is the only logical commandment.

I'll go back to where I began here. I'll need to shoot that demon on the nebol bridge and throw Willis a line down there in hell and try to drag him out. He had better hope there is no God that cares.

What the survey shows is that atheists believe there is a God but don't believe ministers represent God or know what God wants. The Bible says it's the word of Devil. The Bible is all ministers have to say they know what God wants.

And you wonder why things are so fouled up. Does the ministry picking those to run our government have anything to do with it? Keep the faith in ministers. Ministers are moral, respectable and know what they want. God wills what they want.

POSTED BY: [BGONE](#) | JULY 20, 2008 4:29 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"The fact that they don't is an argument not for atheism but for awed humility face to face with the divine transcendence "

Or that they are a load of drivel.

POSTED BY: [HAIRYSTEVE20](#) | JULY 20, 2008 2:30 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Interesting, Bgone, only, this 'death' thing, well. It seems a little silly, if convenient, to believe you can believe in your head that there exists a state of non-being about which your nonexistence can later or even presently gloat.

Strictly speaking, if my past lives are my imagination, my imagination has a lot in common with certain pretty detailed record-keeping. It's of course theoretically possible that information came some other way and that's someone else's memories, but, that's constructing whole other scenarios a little more improbable than experience is anyway.

\*Brains\* are obviously mortal, but it takes a certain form of hubris to figure that's all there is to a living universe, I would say.

Sometimes people ask of 'religion' to tell them their brain won't die, or of atheism to tell them they won't have to live without their present personality.

As for whether or not that's at all meaningful to living a better life, that's up to you to work out.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JULY 19, 2008 8:09 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Religion is really easy to understand. It's based upon the principle that there is life after death. That means there is no death but rather a transition from this world to the next. Religion says that those who don't do and not-do what they say will not make it to the next world.

1. Dead is dead - no more life.
2. There is no death - more life means never ending life
  - 2.1 More life is in a spirit world
  - 2.2 More life is in a world like this one

What does God have to do with it?

POSTED BY: BGONE | JULY 19, 2008 5:14 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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""Transcendence" is Latin for "climbing across/down/up," and we are climbers with ladders too short. "

That's what you get for believing in the ladder salesmen when free-climbing is in order. :)

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JULY 19, 2008 4:06 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"You see though your mentor Asked the wrong question. He asked if the tree was Holy which from a Christian perspective is the same as asking if the tree is God incarnate. To any Christian the answer is obviously no."

I think what Profesor Eliade was getting at, with the 'Please Leave' was that if \*that's\* all you're going to hear when discussing someone else's holy things, there's no point even being there.

Frankly, the World-Tree \*is\* holy, to a great number of indigenous and later cultures: the Christian Cross in some ways just chops it down and turns it into a man-carried holy \*artifact,\* a dead thing, even.

I mean, speaking of Coke-bottles and cargo cults, as cruel a form of punishment as crucifixion was, it had its own meaning to the culture it came from: people who set themselves above the world by treason and the like were suspended between Earth and Sky. (which of itself seems a corruption, but hey) It's still a holy thing to Christians.

Who have a certain history of cutting down sacred groves and world-trees, actually. In Eliade's area of expertise, anthropological studies of shamanism, it's very important not to insist on seeing the World-Tree as a 'false God' or 'artifact.' It's the center of the worlds, wherever it is, and basic to the worldview he was discussing.

Certain definitions of 'holy' may in fact preclude understanding. Cause those are about \*you,\* not the people he was teaching about.

POSTED BY: PAGANPLACE | JULY 19, 2008 1:58 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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I regard monotheism as the greatest disaster ever to befall the human race. I see no good in Judaism, Christianity or Islam - good people, yes, but any religion based on a single, well ... frenzied and virulent god, is not as useful to the human race as, say, Confucianism, which is not a religion, but an ethical and educational system.

Gore Vidal in "At Home". 1988.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | JULY 19, 2008 12:50 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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For the Christian their is only one heaven.

POSTED BY: GARYD | JULY 18, 2008 7:38 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Andrew;

I liked your comment on the supernatural; "you can see it better with your eyes closed".

Of course, it's in the mind  
where even the most preposterous imaginings comfortably reside.

POSTED BY: CLEAVER | JULY 18, 2008 3:14 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Mr Willis

It sounds like your education was all about indoctrination into different kinds of spooky thinking. Poor guy, how can you ever hope to get back in touch with reality?

I am just as sure that gods and fairies and angels and such things have no existence outside our imaginations - as you are that there is a skygod, and all kinds of flying thingies out there somewhere in a parallel universe.

Religion is so childish. It has to go the way of alchemy and astrology eventually, or the world is really in trouble.

POSTED BY: SIMON CALLED JIM | JULY 18, 2008 3:03 PM  
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Anonymous: - your wish is granted.

POSTED BY: THE GOOD FAIRY | JULY 17, 2008 6:35 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Magic (Paranormal) and Religion are reviewed at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic\\_\(paranormal\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magic_(paranormal))

POSTED BY: CONCERNED THE CHRISTIAN NOW LIBERATED | JULY 17, 2008 12:13 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Hmmm, the poll did not address belief in "pretty/ugly, wingie, talking thingies. Tis strange since one would assume they would be considered in the realm of the paranormal (definition- Beyond the range of normal experience or scientific explanation).

Some background on these "beyond the range of normal experience" thingies:

Joe Smith had his Moroni.

Jehovah Witnesses have their Jesus /Michael the archangel, the first angelic being created by God;

Mohammed had his Gabriel (this "tinkerbelle" got around).

Jesus and his family had Michael, Gabriel, and Satan, the latter being a modern day demon of the demented.

The Abraham-Moses myths had their Angel of Death and other "no-namers" to do their dirty work or other assorted duties.

Contemporary biblical and religious scholars have relegated these "pretty/ugly wingie thingies" to the myth pile. We should do the same to include deleting all references to them in our religious operating manuals. Doing this will eliminate the prophet/profit/prophecy status of these founders and put them where they belong as simple humans just like the rest of us.

Some added references to "tinker bells".

"Latter-day Saints also believe that Michael the Archangel was Adam (the first man) when he was mortal, and Gabriel lived on the earth as Noah."

Apparently hallucinations did not stop with Joe Smith.

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07049c.htm>

"This belief in guardian angels can be traced throughout all antiquity; pagans, like Menander and Plutarch (cf. Euseb., "Praep. Evang.", xii), and Neo-Platonists, like Plotinus, held it. It was also the belief of the Babylonians and Assyrians, as their monuments testify, for a figure of a guardian angel now in the British Museum once decorated an Assyrian palace, and might well serve for a modern representation; while Nabopolassar, father of Nebuchadnezzar the Great, says: "He (Marduk) sent a tutelary deity (cherub) of grace to go at my side; in everything that I did, he made my work to succeed."

Catholic monks and Dark Age theologians also did their share of hallucinating:

"TUBUAS-A member of the group of angels who were removed from the ranks of officially recognized celestial hierarchy in 745 by a council in Rome under Pope Zachary. He was joined by Uriel, Adimus, Sabaoth, Simiel, and Raguel."

And tinkerbells go way, way back:

"In Zoroastrianism there are different angel like creatures. For example each person has a guardian angel caled Fravashi. They patronize human being and other creatures and also manifest god's energy. Also, the Amesha Spentas have often been regarded as angels, but they don't convey messages, but are rather emanations of Ahura Mazda ("Wise Lord", God); they appear in an abstract fashion in the religious thought of Zarathustra and then later (during the Achaemenid period of Zoroastrianism) became personalized, associated with an aspect of the divine creation (fire, plants, water...)."

"The beginnings of the biblical belief in angels must be sought in very early folklore. The gods of the Hittites and Canaanites had their supernatural messengers, and parallels to the Old Testament stories of angels are found in Near Eastern literature. "

"The 'Magic Papyri' contain many spells to secure just such help and protection of angels. From magic traditions arose the concept of the guardian angel. "

For added information see the review at:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angel>

POSTED BY: CONCERNED THE CHRISTIAN NOW LIBERATED | JULY 17, 2008 12:02 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Sorry you can't escape the prosperity theologians and likely not Falwell either by going to hell. They put too many lies in the mouth of God. The Bible itself says for such it would be better if they had not been born at all.

Let me see if I can clear up some of your problems Dr. Ellis.

The Supernatural is obviously everything that is beyond or outside of what we consider to be natural. That is the best anyone can do in defining it simply because it is beyond our ability to accurately describe it. It won't fit on a microscope slide, it won't replicate itself for our convenience, we can't reproduce it in a laboratory. The best we can do is say that some of it appears to be bad and some of it appears to be Good or Holy Though Holy in the Bible seems to be to good as good is to bad.

You see though your mentor Asked the wrong question. He asked if the tree was Holy which from a Christian perspective is the same as asking if the tree is God incarnate. To any Christian the answer is obviously no. However had he asked if the tree was supernatural the correct response would have been "I don't know". Why? simply because until the tree does something or is revealed to be something other than what it appears to be we cannot say accurately yes or no.

POSTED BY: GARYD | JULY 16, 2008 9:24 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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BGone;

I think I'd prefer to stay dead than awake in some creepy place called Heaven, with everybody singing hymns and praying all the time and people like Jerry Falwell on TV up there too I bet, and Jesus signing autographs, and folk queuing up to see God. And no beer, no dope, no dames, no baseball, no television. Only religious books and magazines.

That's what I would call hell. I'd rather be dead. And I'm sure I will be.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | JULY 16, 2008 7:13 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Mr Elliott

All those words without once mentioning the imagination.

In the opinion of many there is no supernatural or paranormal world outside of the imagination. I bet you can see it better with your eyes closed. Where else could it possibly be if not there? Because that's where God is too, isn't it. In the mind and only in the mind.

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POSTED BY: ANDREW | JULY 16, 2008 6:59 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Gee. And yet ... I don't believe you, pal.

POSTED BY: JONNY | JULY 16, 2008 5:25 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Willis, we're so old that soon we will find out what happens to dead people. I'm not worried. How about you? What if that demon guarding the bridge we must cross to get from here to the next life is there?

I don't know about you but for me it's bury me with my shotgun, (objects in the near vicinity of the dead body are also duplicated on the nebol bridge. Jesus said so). If them devils can't be shot why do they have shields.

If I go first that bridge will be cleared for your crossing. I don't know if I can throw you a line and get you back up out of hell and onto the bridge or not. So take real good care of yourself. You definitely want me to take the point.

POSTED BY: BGONE | JULY 16, 2008 2:01 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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"The supernatural is real."

Unfortunately, only if the authorities say it is real.

POSTED BY: L.KURT ENGELHART | JULY 16, 2008 1:27 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Here's my God story:

An invisible patriarch (as tradition at the time of his invention would have it) who lives way, way, up in the sky and created the entire universe has enough interest, capacity, and free time on His hands to watch every move of everyone who ever lived in order to decide whether or not they should be tortured -- for eternity -- after they are dead, mind you.

But He loves you (thanks, George.)

Those who escape that fate are spirited away to a land of milk and honey where all they need do all day is concern themselves with how to better supplicate themselves before His omnipotent presence, as if being so supplicant somehow was a reward.

Now I ask, what boundless arrogance would be required of a human being to suppose that the omnipotent creator of the universe cares about their day-to-day actions? And what loving God would torture anyone for eternity, even His worst-behaved child?

Such myths are worthy of a toddler, but not a rational adult.

On the other hand, if that myth keeps some folks from going out and shooting up the neighborhood, I say, have yourself a heapin' helpin' of it. But thankfully most of us don't need to operate under the threat of eternal duress in order to do the right thing.

POSTED BY: TRIPPIN | JULY 16, 2008 1:03 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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One problem, of course, is to identify something that can not even in principle be rationally explained.

Good luck with that. Theists have been failing to do that for a couple of centuries now.

POSTED BY: ASH | JULY 16, 2008 11:50 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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