

# Science and Methodological Naturalism

---

*Dr. Sven Östring*



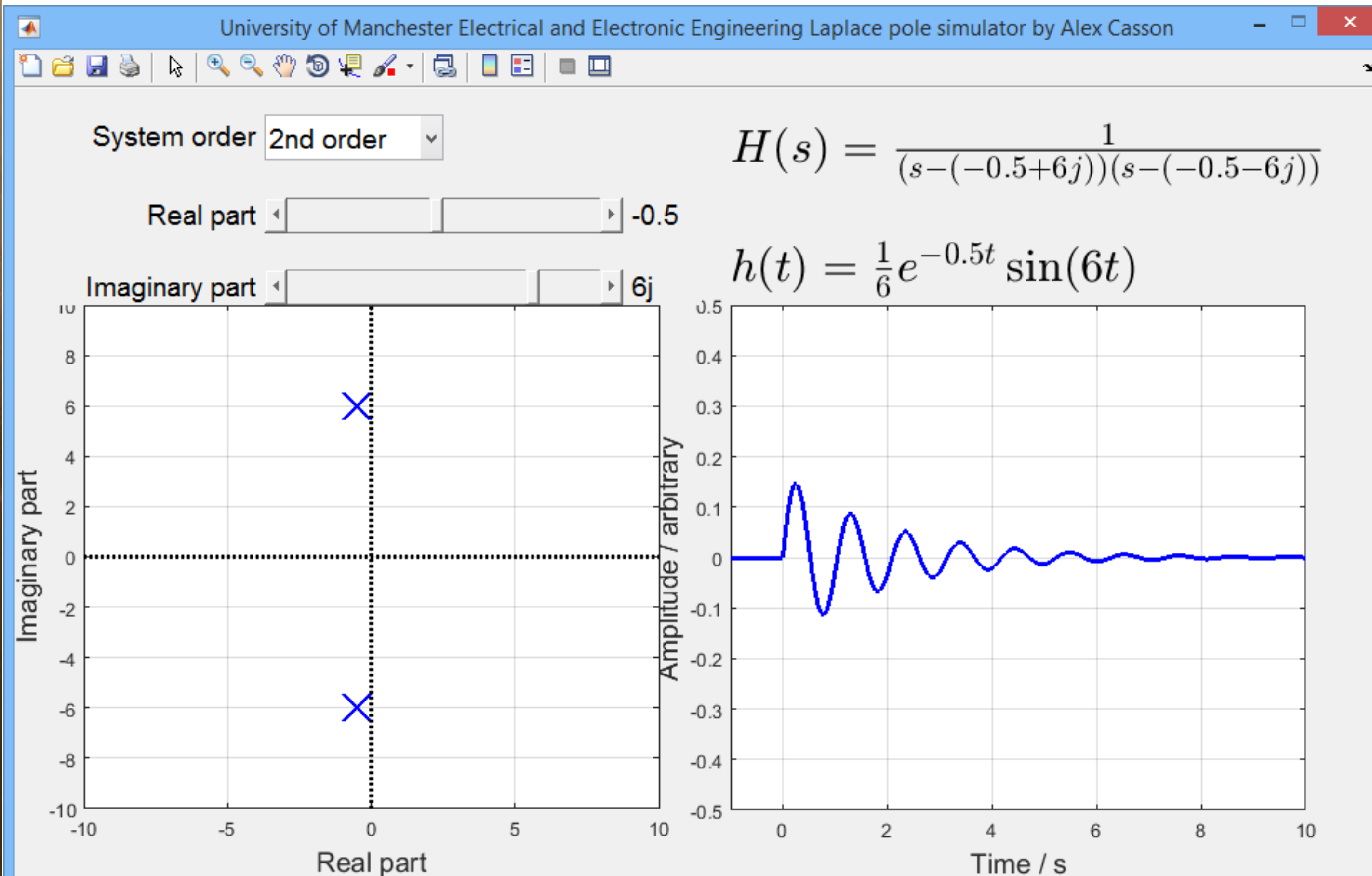






# Laplace Transform

$$F(s) = \int_0^{\infty} f(t)e^{-st}dt$$







U. IX 7

TRAITÉ  
DE  
MÉCANIQUE CÉLESTE,

PAR P. S. LAPLACE,

Membre du Sénat conservateur, de l'Institut national, et du Bureau des  
Longitudes de France; des Sociétés royales de Londres et de Gottingue;  
des Académies des Sciences de Russie, de Danemarck, d'Italie, etc.

TOME TROISIÈME.

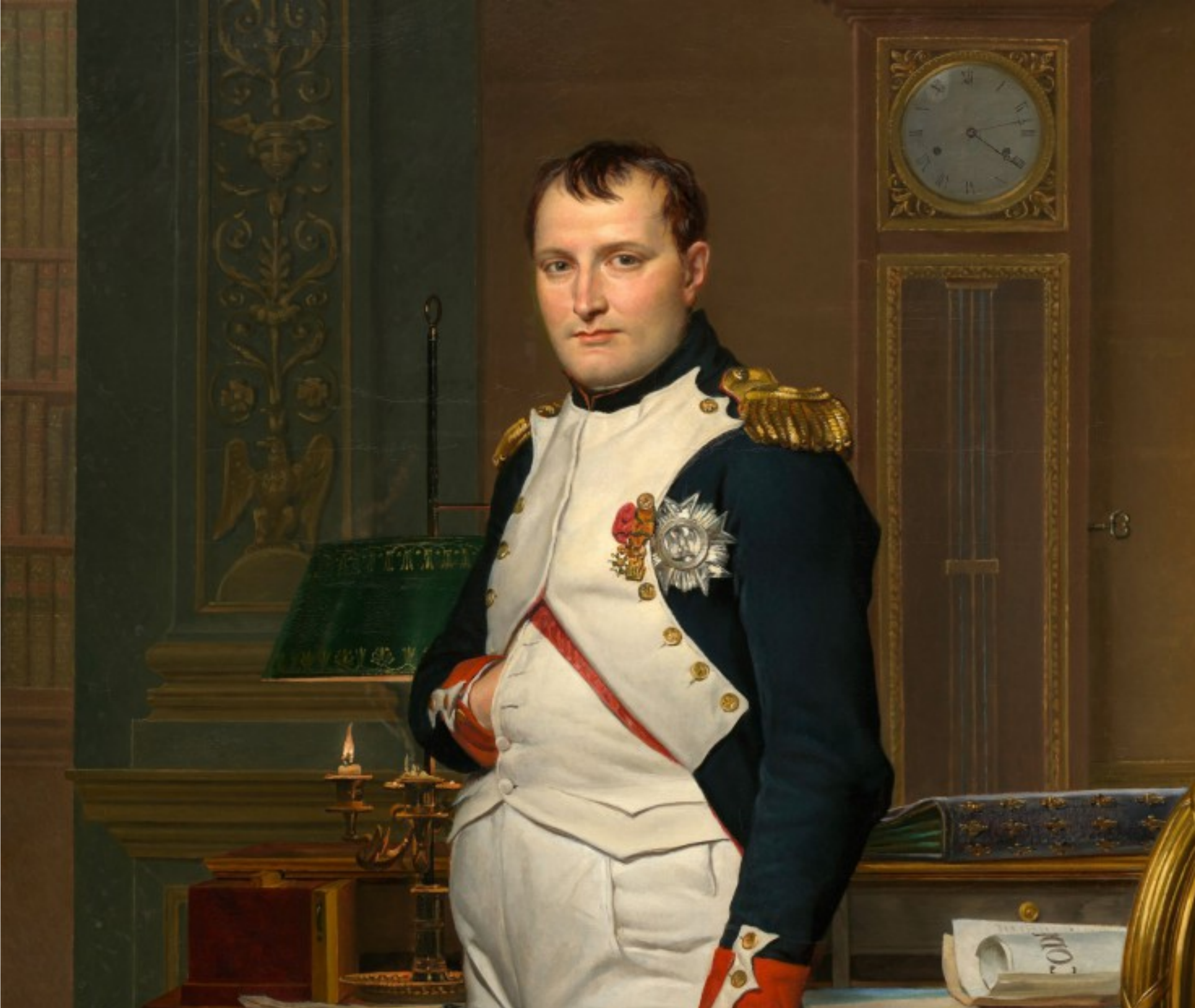
DE L'IMPRIMERIE DE CRAPELET.

A PARIS,

Chez J. B. M. DUPRAT, Libraire pour les Mathématiques,  
quai des Augustins.

AN XI — 1802.





M. Laplace, they tell me you have written this large book on the system of the universe, and have never even mentioned its Creator!



*Je n'avais pas besoin de cette hypothèse-là.*

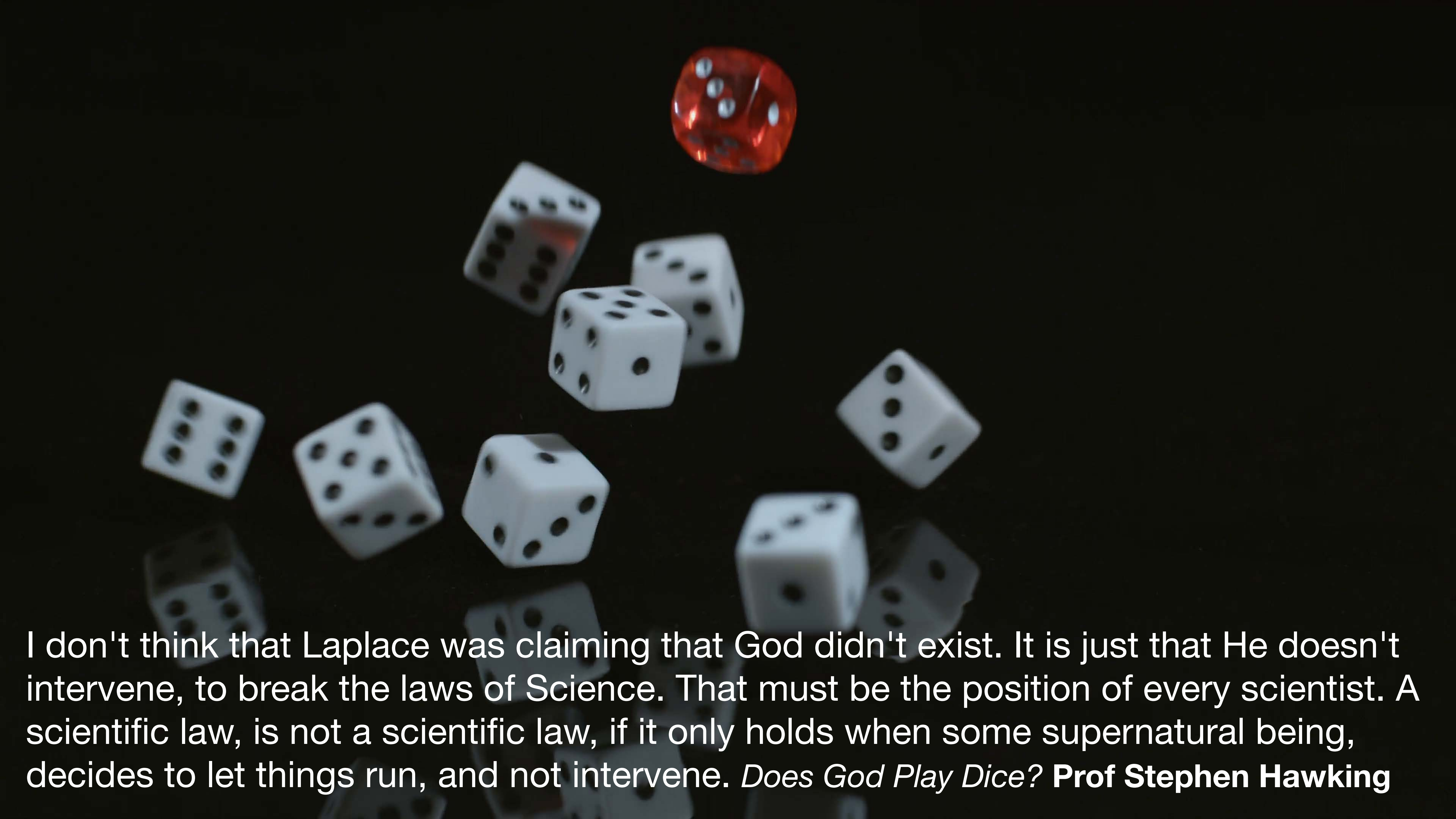




I had no need of that hypothesis.

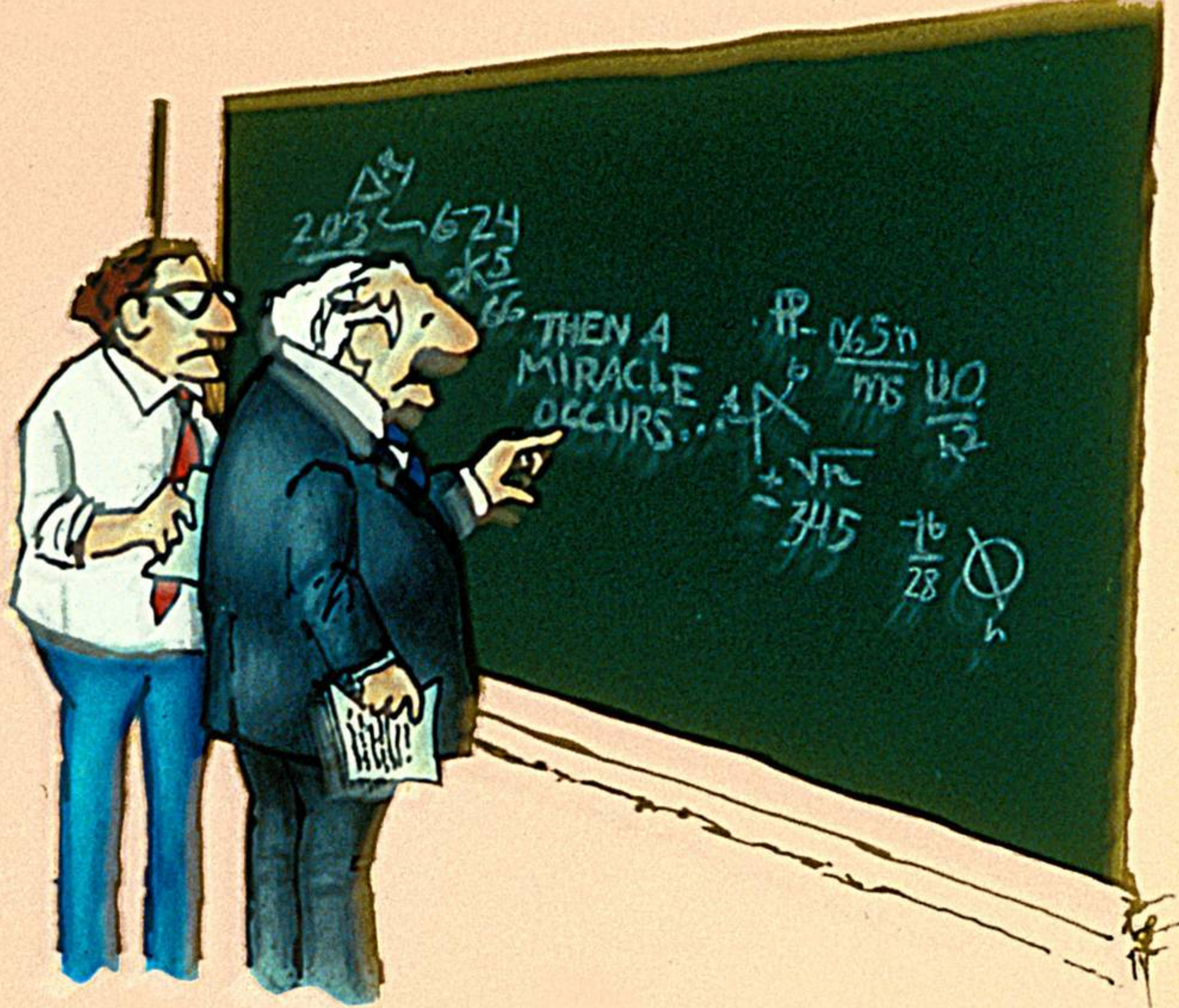






I don't think that Laplace was claiming that God didn't exist. It is just that He doesn't intervene, to break the laws of Science. That must be the position of every scientist. A scientific law, is not a scientific law, if it only holds when some supernatural being, decides to let things run, and not intervene. *Does God Play Dice?* **Prof Stephen Hawking**







# Defining Methodological Naturalism

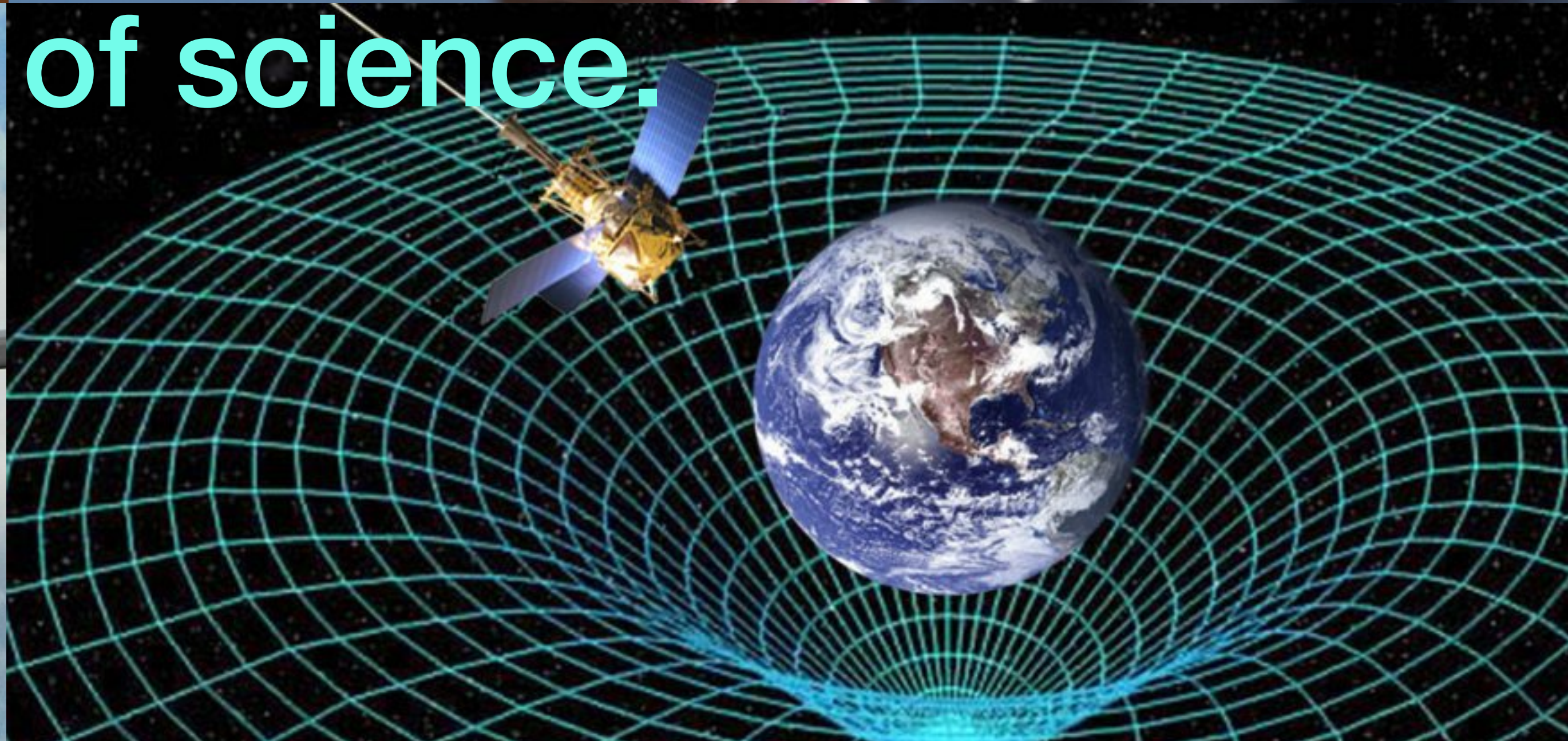
**Eugenie Smith**, *Director of National Center for Science Education*: Science neither denies or opposes the supernatural, but ignores the supernatural for methodological reasons.

**Ernan McMullin**, *Professor of Philosophy, University of Notre Dame*: But of course, methodological naturalism does not restrict our study of nature; it just lays down which sort of study qualifies as *scientific*. If someone wants to pursue another approach to nature—and there are many others—the methodological naturalist has no reason to object. Scientists *have* to proceed in this way; the methodology of natural science gives no purchase on the claim that a particular event or type of event is to be explained by invoking God's creative action directly.





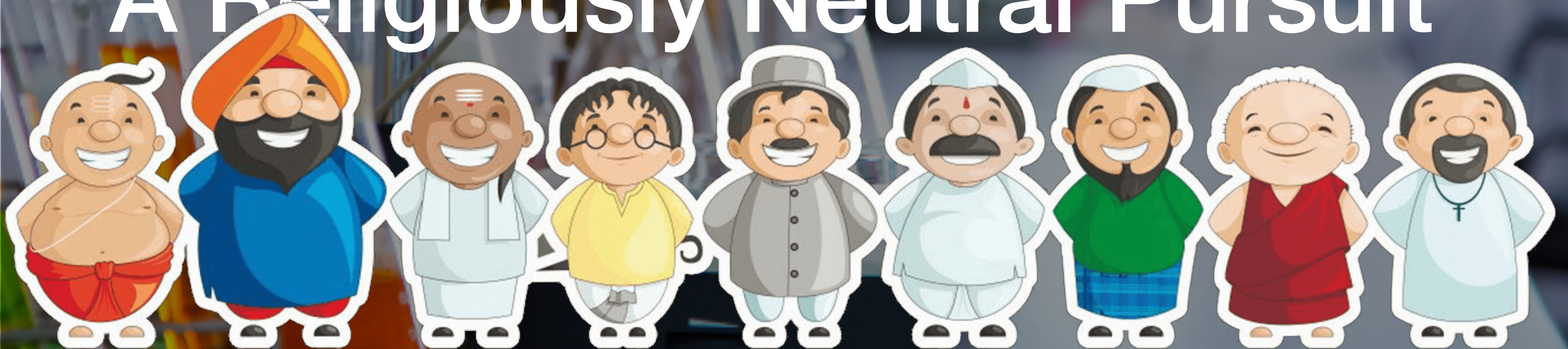
The stunning success



of science.



# Science: A Religiously Neutral Pursuit







LOGIC



# “God Did It”: A Science-Stopper





# What is the goal of science?

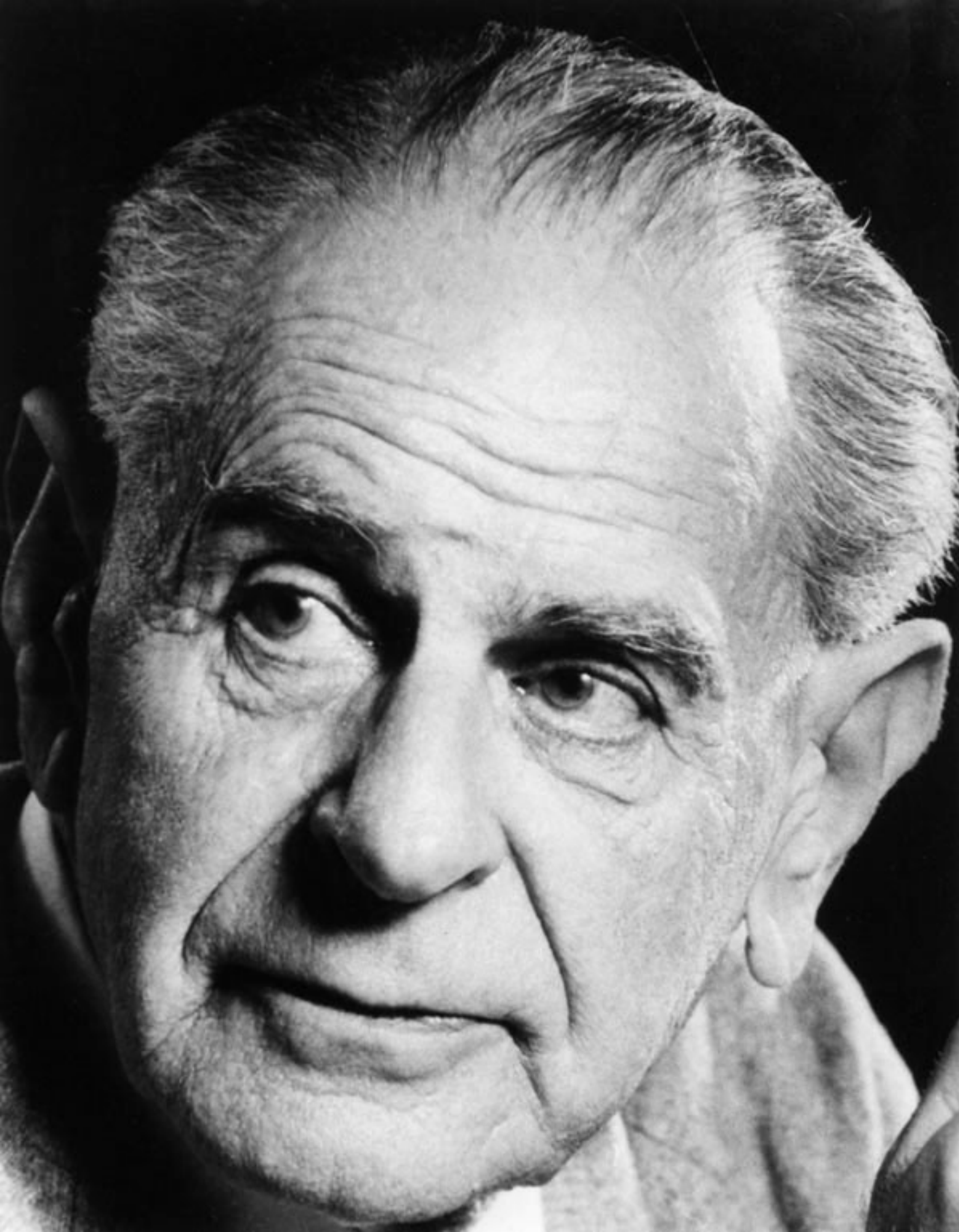
Most people assume that the goal of science is to find out what the world is actually like—to find out what is true about the world.

BUT, if science is restricted to methodological naturalism, then the real goal of science is actually to develop natural explanations.



This means that standard science does not necessarily identify what it is true.





Science is not a system of certain, or well-established, statements; nor is it a system which steadily advances towards a state of finality. Our science is not knowledge (*epistēmē*): it can never claim to have attained truth, or even to be a substitute for it, such as probability.

Yet science has more than mere biological survival value. It is not only a useful instrument. Although it can attain neither truth nor probability, the striving for knowledge and the search for truth are still the strongest motives for scientific discovery.

*We do not know: we can only guess.* And our guesses are guided by the unscientific, the metaphysical (though biologically explicable) faith in laws, in regularities which we can uncover—discover.

Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*  
(New York: Routledge, 2004), 278.



**Standard science can never lead us  
to a complete knowledge of truth,  
whenever a supernatural miracle occurs.**





# Does God supernaturally act in this world?

## **Biblically: Yes!**

- Jesus supernaturally turned water into wine.
- Jesus walked on water.
- Jesus healed a man born blind.
- Jesus cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene.
- Jesus rose back to life.
- Jesus can raise you back to life, if you put your trust in Him.





# Methodological Naturalism:

Restricting us to work from a limited evidence base.

The right to search for truth implies also a duty; one must not conceal any part of what one has recognised to be true. **Albert Einstein**

God exists

Jesus is the Son of God

The Bible is divinely inspired

Jesus rose from the dead

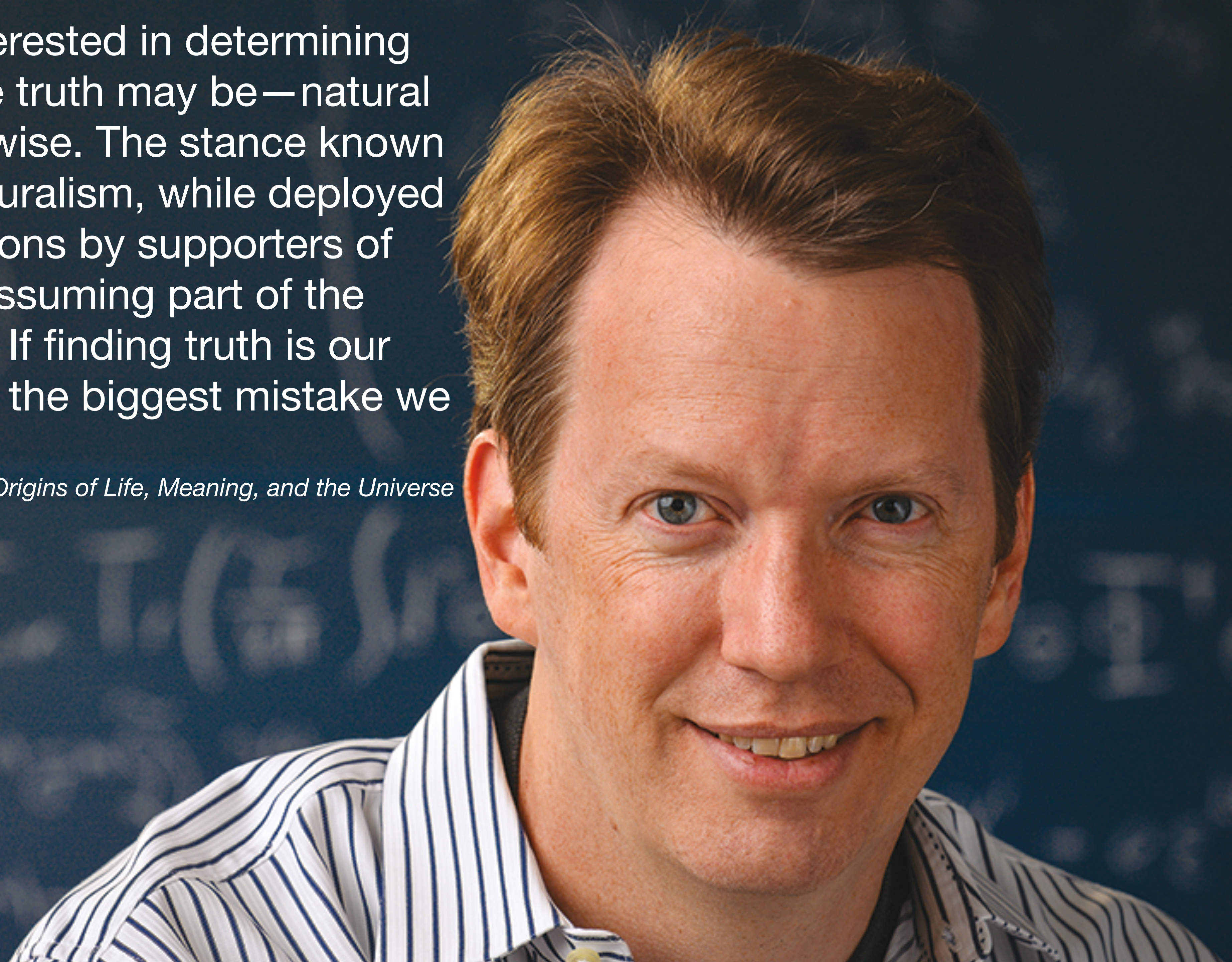
God performs miracles

People can be born again

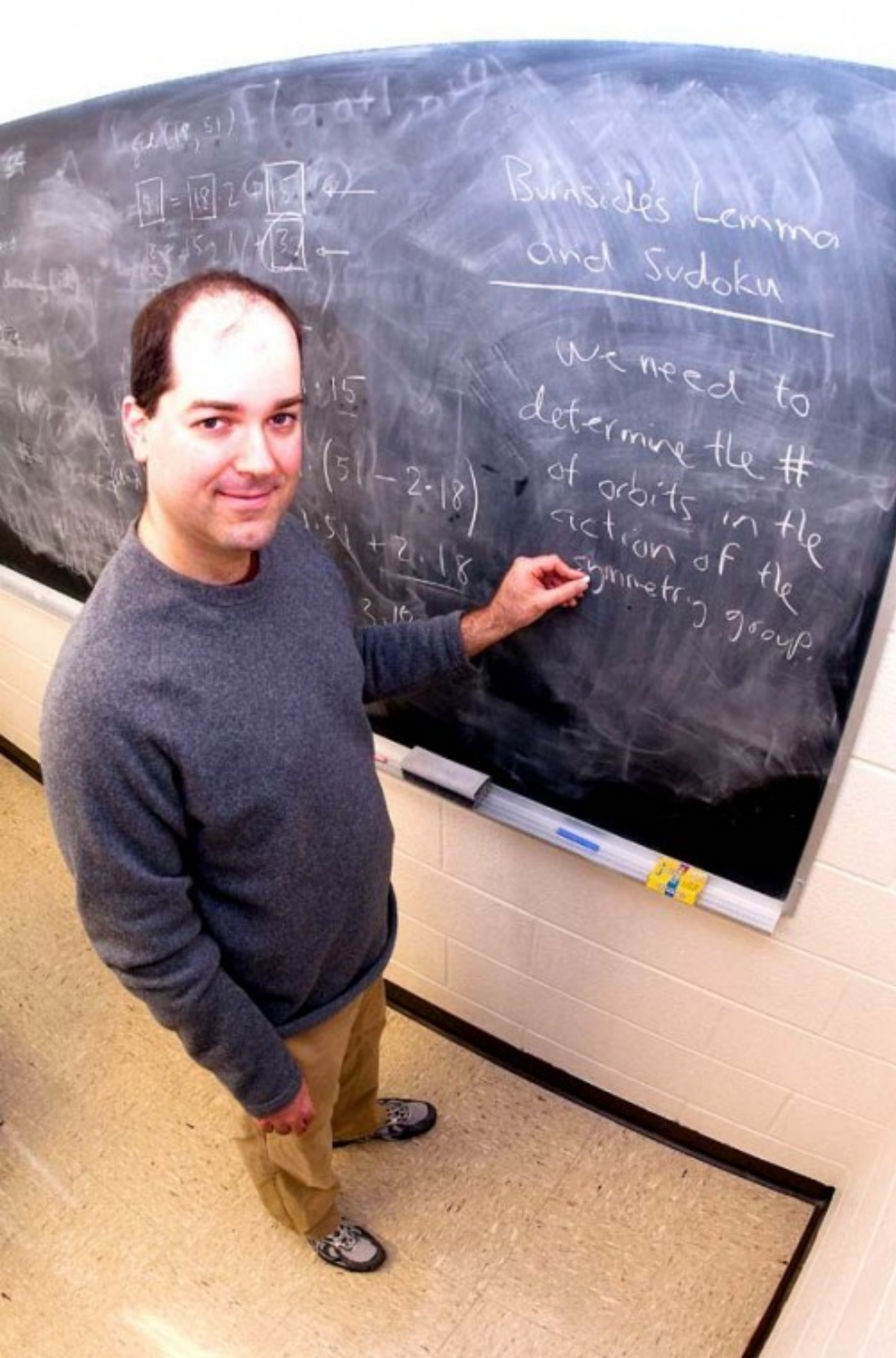


Science should be interested in determining the *truth*, whatever the truth may be—natural supernatural, or otherwise. The stance known as methodological naturalism, while deployed with the best of intentions by supporters of science, amounts to assuming part of the answer ahead of time. If finding truth is our goal, that is just about the biggest mistake we can make.

Sean Carroll, *The Big Picture: On the Origins of Life, Meaning, and the Universe Itself* (New York: Dutton, 2016), 133.







Viewed as a fundamental ground rule to which science must always and everywhere adhere, methodological naturalism seems dogmatic and unnecessary. Jason Rosenhouse, *Among the Creationists*, 123.




The most widespread view, which conceives of methodological naturalism as an intrinsic or self-imposed limitation of science, is philosophically indefensible.

Maarten Boudry, Stefaan Blancke, and Johan Braeckman, "How Not to Attack Intelligent Design Creationism: Philosophical Misconceptions about Methodological Naturalism," *Foundations of Science* 15 (2010): 227-244, at 228.





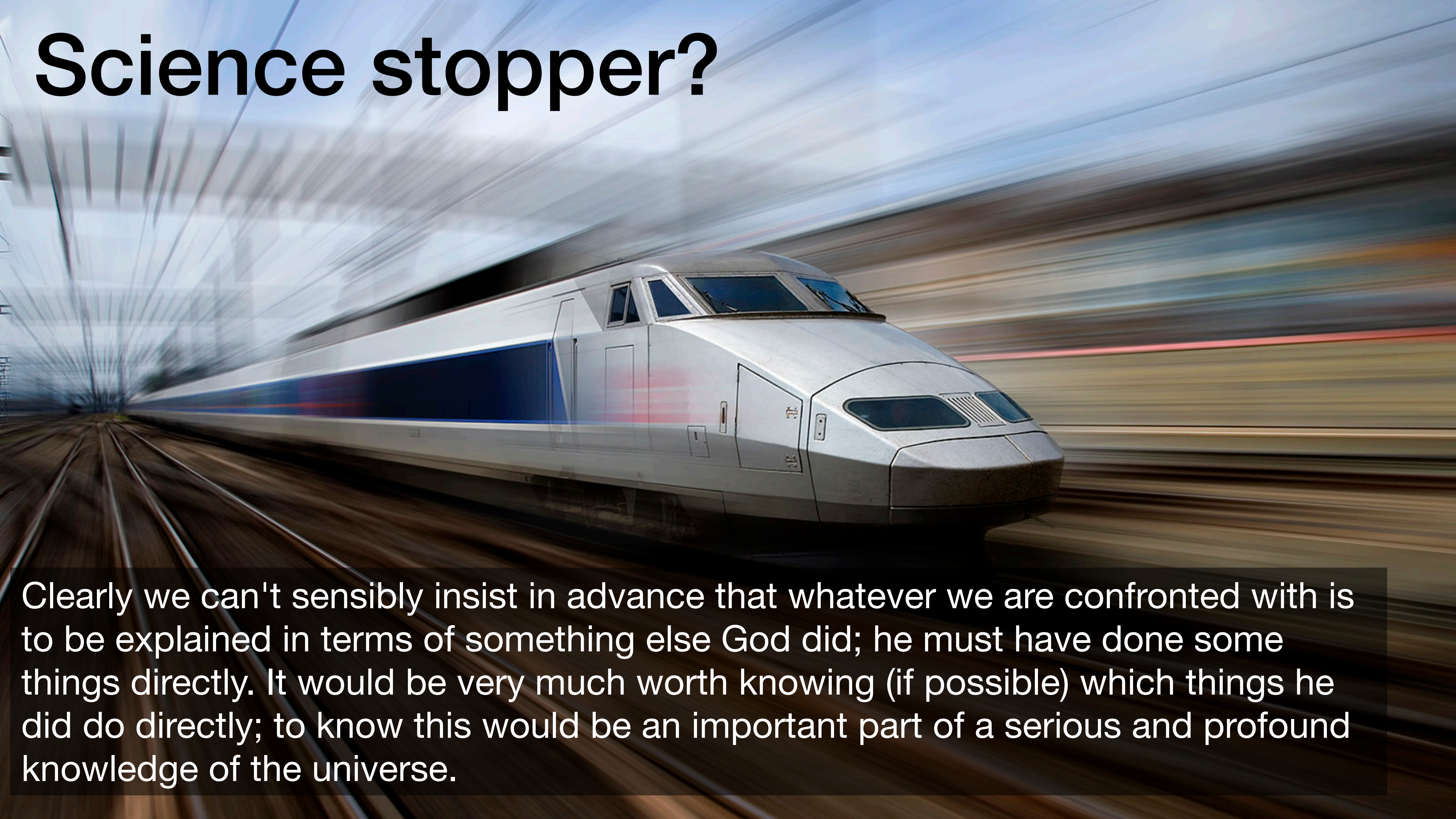
# Science stopper?



The claim that God has directly created life (for example) may be a science stopper; it doesn't follow that God didn't directly create life. Obviously we have no guarantee that God has done everything by way of employing secondary causes, or in such a way as to encourage further scientific inquiry, or for our convenience as scientists, or for the benefit of the NSF.



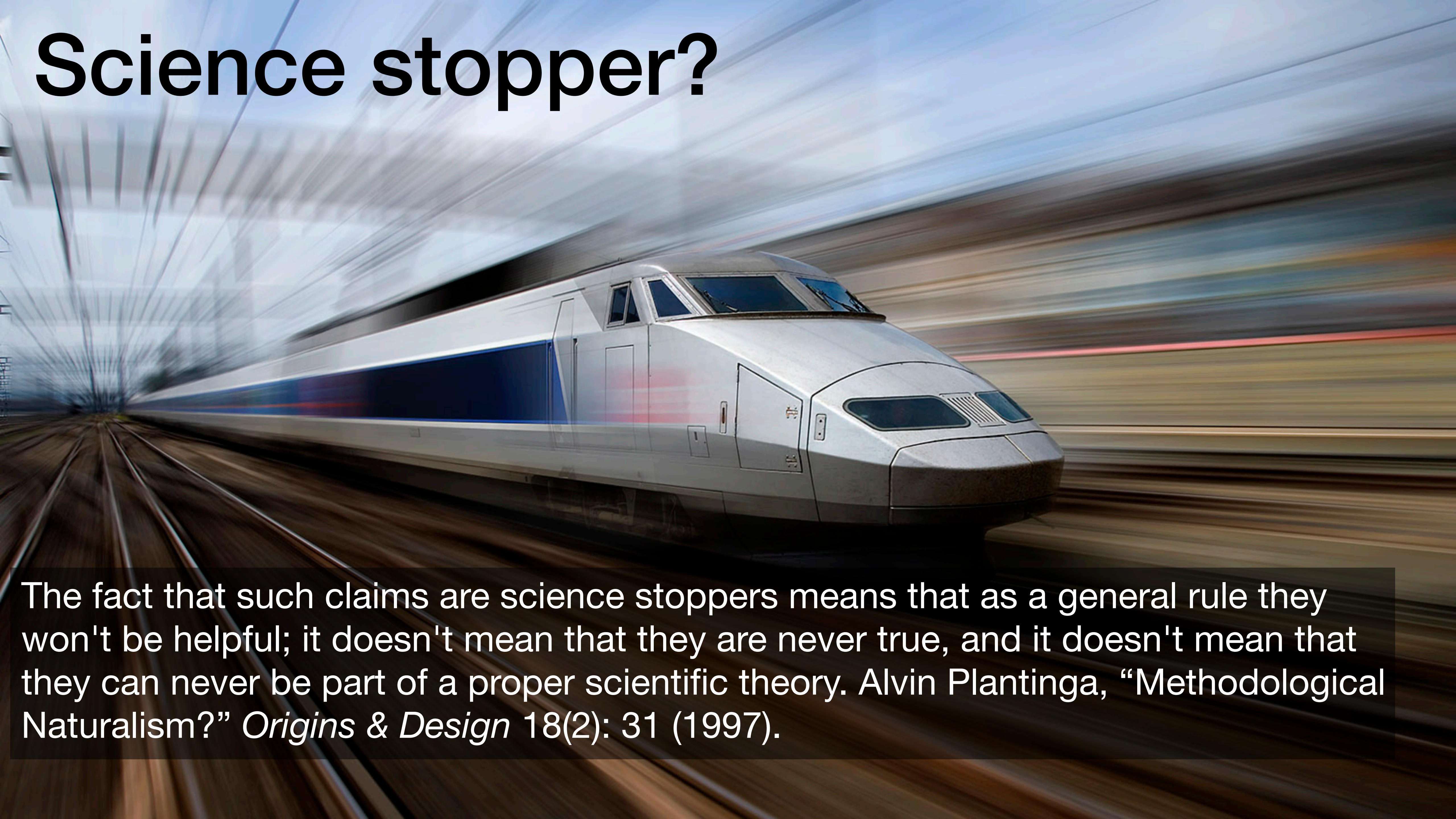
# Science stopper?



Clearly we can't sensibly insist in advance that whatever we are confronted with is to be explained in terms of something else God did; he must have done some things directly. It would be very much worth knowing (if possible) which things he did do directly; to know this would be an important part of a serious and profound knowledge of the universe.

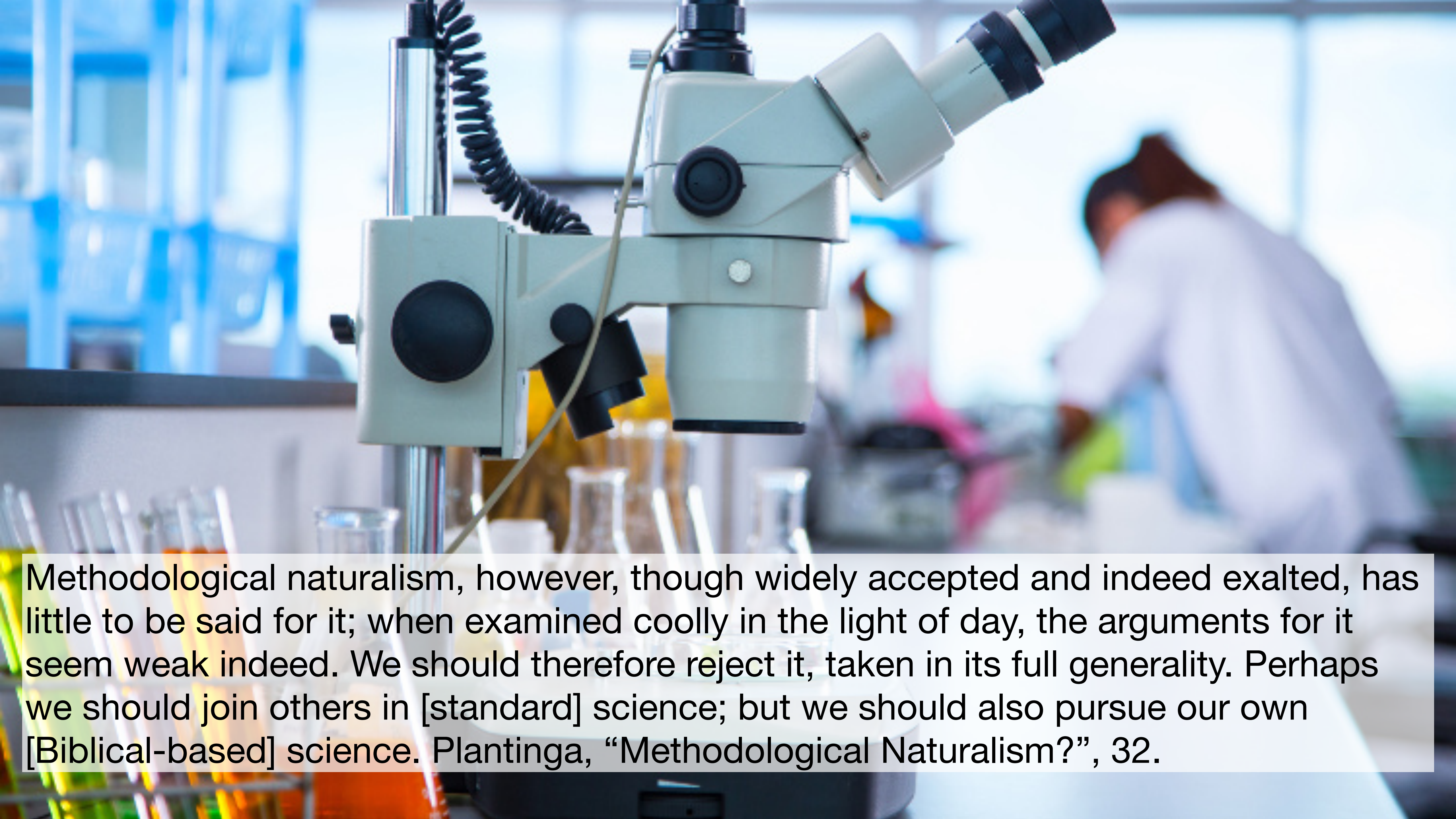


# Science stopper?



The fact that such claims are science stoppers means that as a general rule they won't be helpful; it doesn't mean that they are never true, and it doesn't mean that they can never be part of a proper scientific theory. Alvin Plantinga, "Methodological Naturalism?" *Origins & Design* 18(2): 31 (1997).





Methodological naturalism, however, though widely accepted and indeed exalted, has little to be said for it; when examined coolly in the light of day, the arguments for it seem weak indeed. We should therefore reject it, taken in its full generality. Perhaps we should join others in [standard] science; but we should also pursue our own [Biblical-based] science. Plantinga, “Methodological Naturalism?”, 32.



H<sub>C</sub>

God directly intervened to supernaturally create life on Earth over six literal days relatively recently.

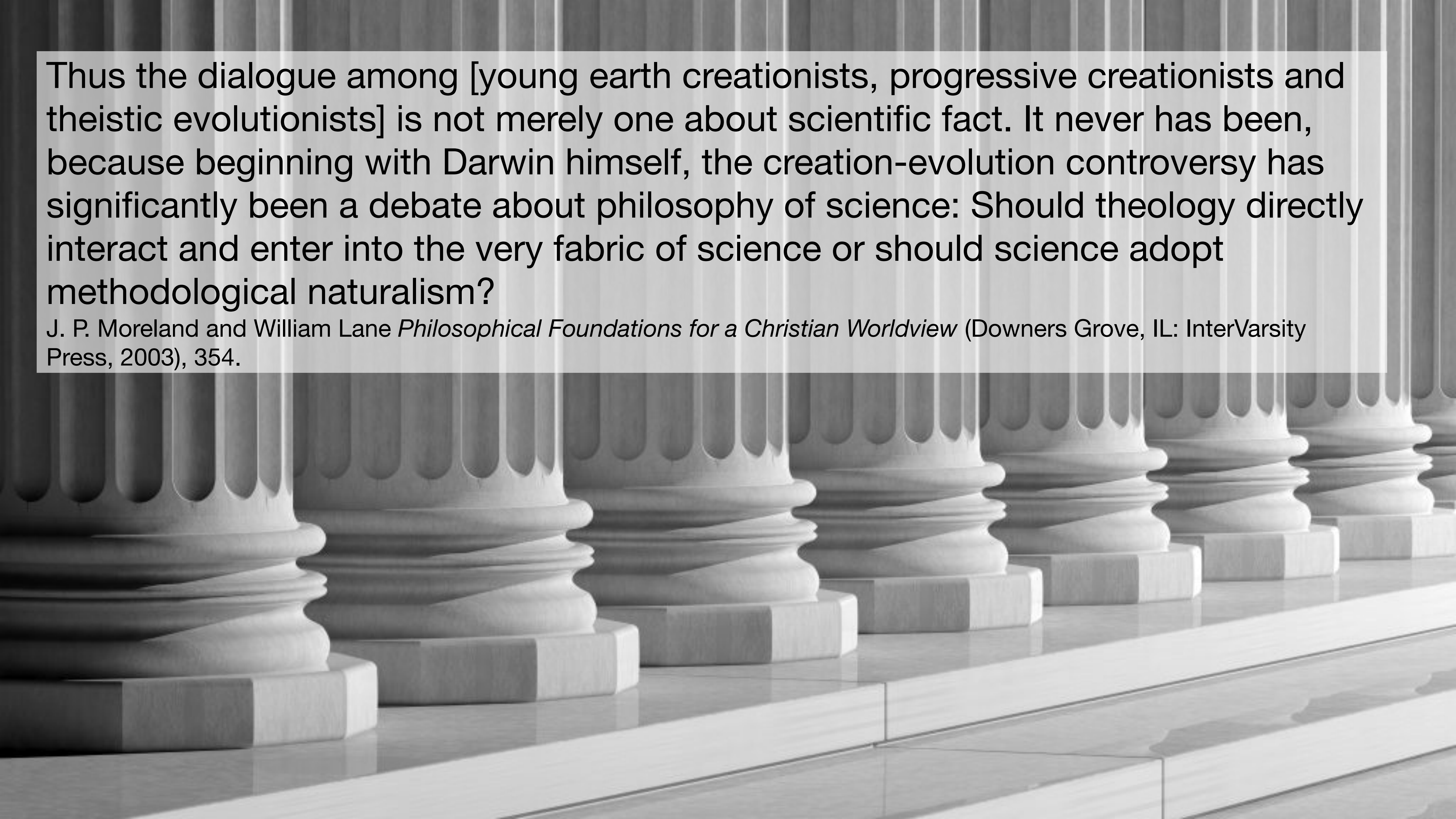
H<sub>P</sub>

God progressively intervened to directly create new forms of life on Earth over 4.54 billion years.

H<sub>T</sub>

God supervised the process of the evolution of life on Earth so that all life has common biological ancestry, yet human beings have acquired the properties of being 'in the image of God'.





Thus the dialogue among [young earth creationists, progressive creationists and theistic evolutionists] is not merely one about scientific fact. It never has been, because beginning with Darwin himself, the creation-evolution controversy has significantly been a debate about philosophy of science: Should theology directly interact and enter into the very fabric of science or should science adopt methodological naturalism?

J. P. Moreland and William Lane *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 354.



How can we identify  
if and when a supernatural miracle  
has occurred?





# Identifying Miracles

1. We cannot use science, when it is restricted by methodological naturalism, to confirm or disconfirm whether a miracle has occurred!
  - It is logically incoherent to claim that, by excluding supernatural miracles, that standard science has confirmed or disconfirmed that a miracle has occurred.
  - All standard science can do is offer a natural explanation for this particular event concerned, which may or may not be the true explanation.



# Identifying Miracles

2. We could identify gaps:

- Gaps could point to potential miracles.
- However, gaps could also be effectively closed with natural explanations.
- Gaps are not unequivocal empirical indicators of miracles.



# Identifying Miracles

3.The only effective ways of identifying whether miracles have occurred are:

- (A) First-person experience
- (B) Testimony from another human observer
- (C) Divine revelation



# Identifying Primordial Miracles

Only one source works for identifying primordial miracles:

~~1. Science restricted by methodological naturalism~~

~~2. First-person experience~~

~~3. Testimony from another human observer~~

4. Divine revelation



# The Self-Authenticating Nature of Scripture

Let this point therefore stand: those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticating.

John Calvin





# The Self-Authenticating Nature of Scripture

The Holy Spirit is a person, for He beareth witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. When this witness is borne, it carries with it its own evidence. At such times we believe and are sure that we are the children of God.

Ellen White





# True Science

Many teach that... the operations of nature are conducted in harmony with fixed laws, with which God Himself cannot interfere. This is false science, and is not sustained by the word of God. *Patriarchs & Prophets*, 114.

To know God in His works is true science. *To Be Like Jesus*, 216.





For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. **Romans 1:20**





Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.





But, as it is written,  
“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the heart of man imagined,  
what God has prepared for those who love him” —  
these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches  
everything, even the depths of God.





So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.





The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ. **1 Corinthians 2:6-16**





# Another Supernatural Miracle!

It requires another supernatural miracle of divine intervention and revelation for us to know whether the Biblical account of a series of supernatural miracles over six literal days is true.

