

**Has Science Refuted
Miracles and the
Supernatural?**

Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.
Provost
Norman L. Geisler Chair of Christian Apologetics
Professor of Philosophy and Apologetics
Southern Evangelical Seminary





∞ supernatural ∞

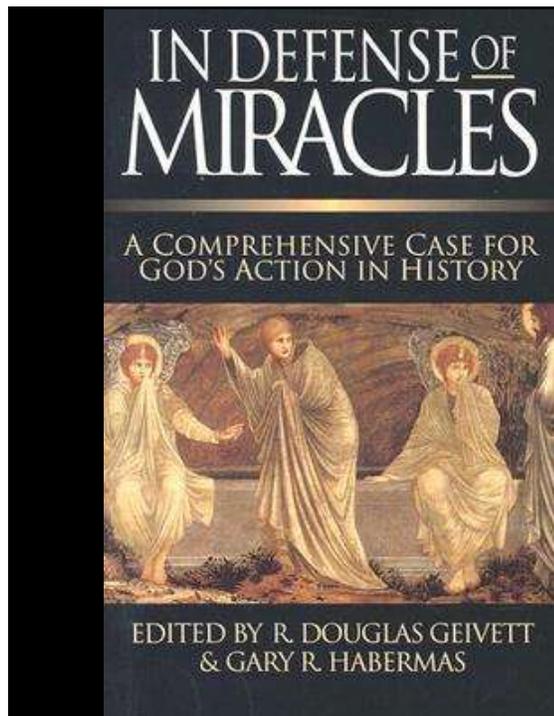
Some use the term 'supernatural' to refer not only to God, but also to any spiritual or immaterial being or action.

∞ supernatural ∞

Thus, according to this usage, the supernatural would include the being and actions of God, angels, and the paranormal / demonic.

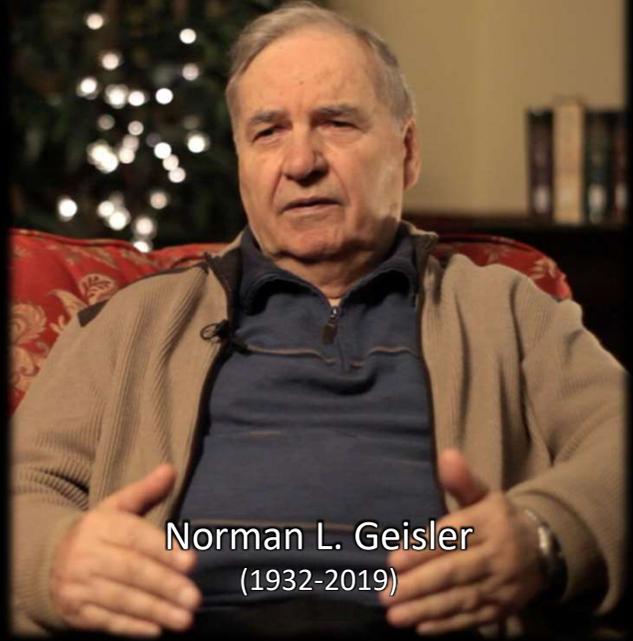
∞ supernatural ∞

I would urge that it is essential to preserve the term 'supernatural' to acts of God alone inasmuch as only God is truly super (i.e., beyond) the natural (i.e., the created).

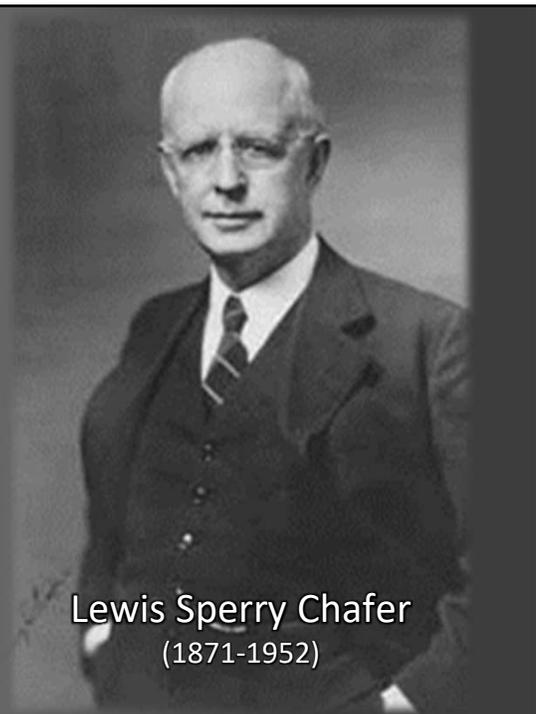
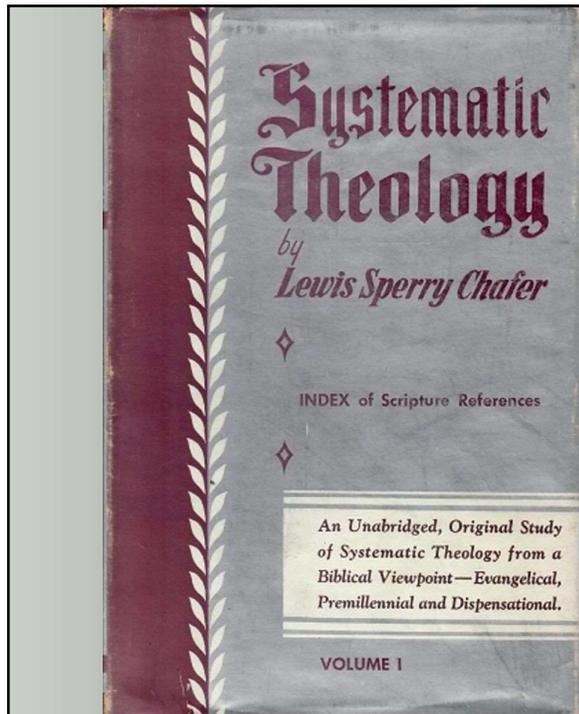


"A miracle is a divine intervention into the natural world. It is a supernatural exception to the regular course of the world that would not have occurred otherwise."

[Norman L. Geisler, *Miracles and the Modern Mind: A Biblical Defense of Miracles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 14]



Norman L. Geisler
(1932-2019)

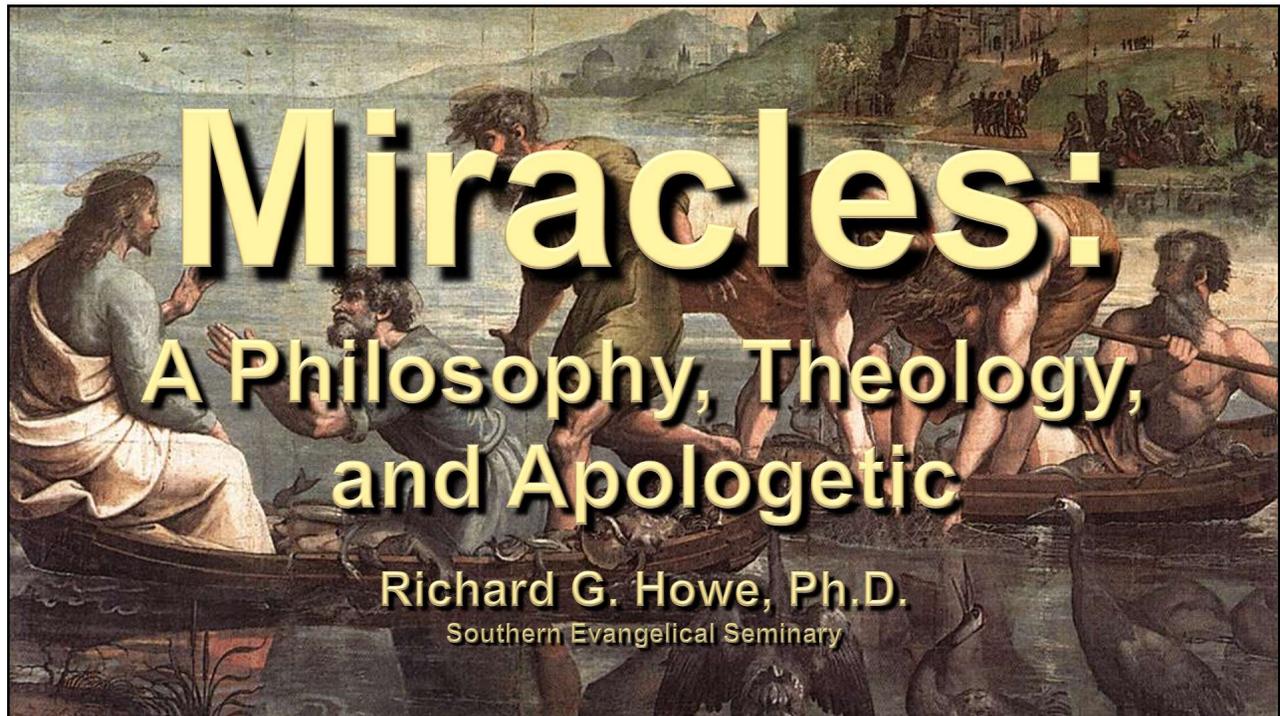


Lewis Sperry Chafer
(1871-1952)

"Though miracles are wonders (Acts 2:19) in the eyes of men and display the power of God, their true purpose is that of a 'sign' (Matt. 12:38; John 2:18). They certify and authenticate a teacher or his doctrine."

[Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947), I, 256-257]

Lewis Sperry Chafer
(1871-1952)



∞ science ∞

ancient and medieval use of the term

Here 'science' is any area of study and body of knowledge whose truths can be reduced to the first principles of that area.

∞ science ∞

ancient and medieval use of the term

In this regard, not only would areas like physics be regarded as a science but also metaphysics and theology.

∞ science ∞

contemporary use of the term

In contemporary usage, the term 'science' has become difficult to define to everyone's satisfaction.

∞ science ∞

contemporary use of the term

But one relatively uncontroversial aspect of definition of science is that it is confined to the study of the physical or material world.

∞ science ∞

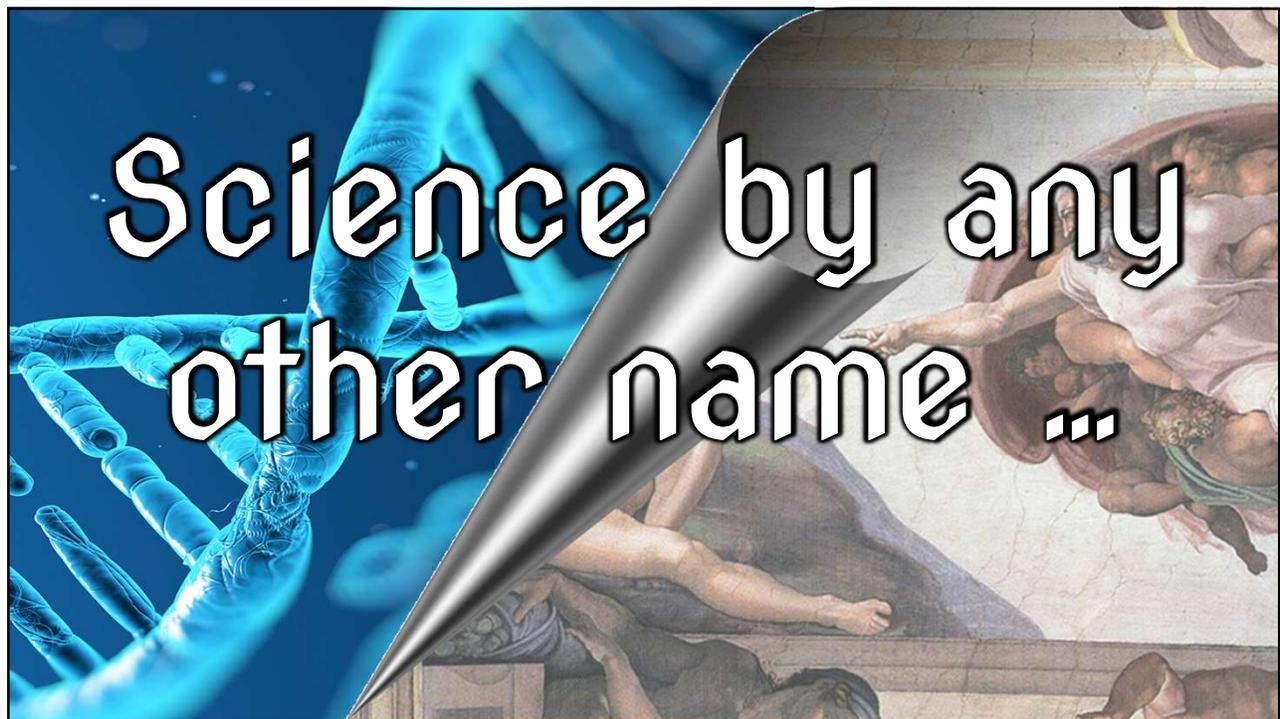
contemporary use of the term

In this regard, while physics would be considered a science, metaphysics and theology would not.

∞ science ∞

contemporary use of the term

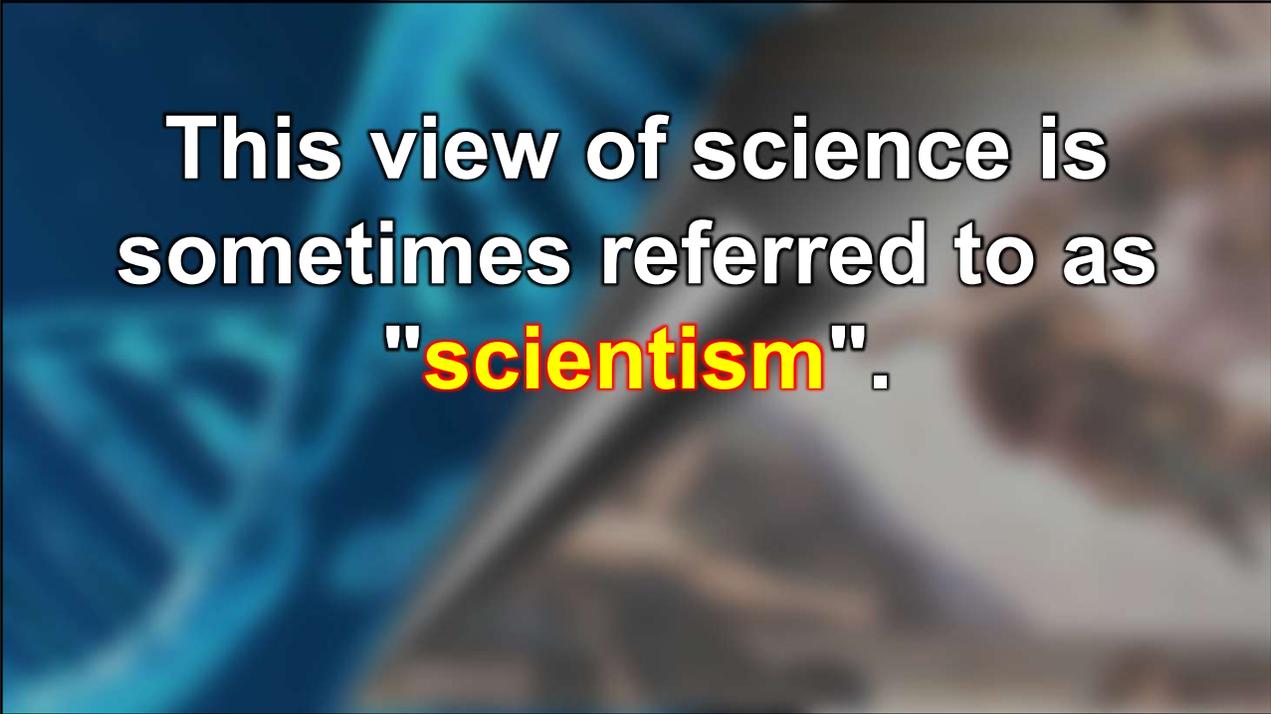
The issue before us is whether there is any aspect of reality that is beyond the physical or material world and is thus beyond science in the contemporary sense of the term.



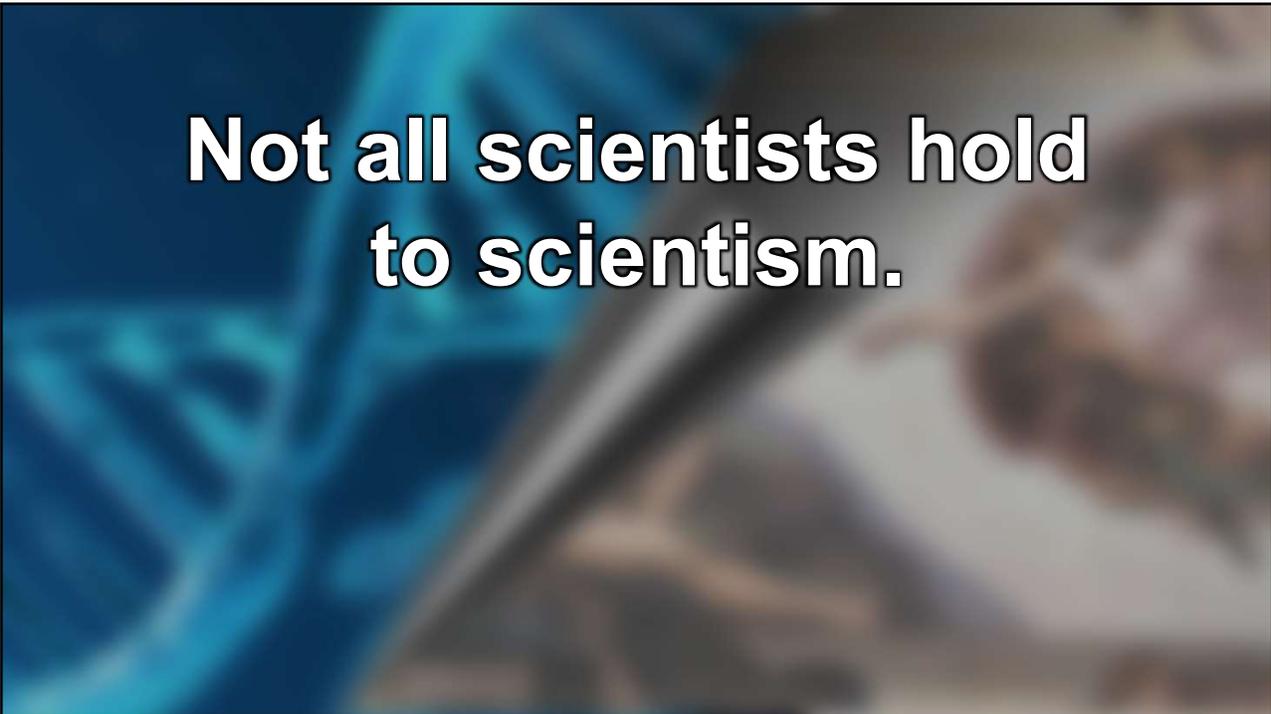
**Some scientists insist that
that science and its
methods are the only way
to discover or measure
truths about reality.**

**They maintain that
miracles and the
supernatural fall outside
the scope of the
"scientific method."**

**In effect, this amounts to
saying that that miracles
and the supernatural
are not real.**



This view of science is sometimes referred to as "**scientism**".

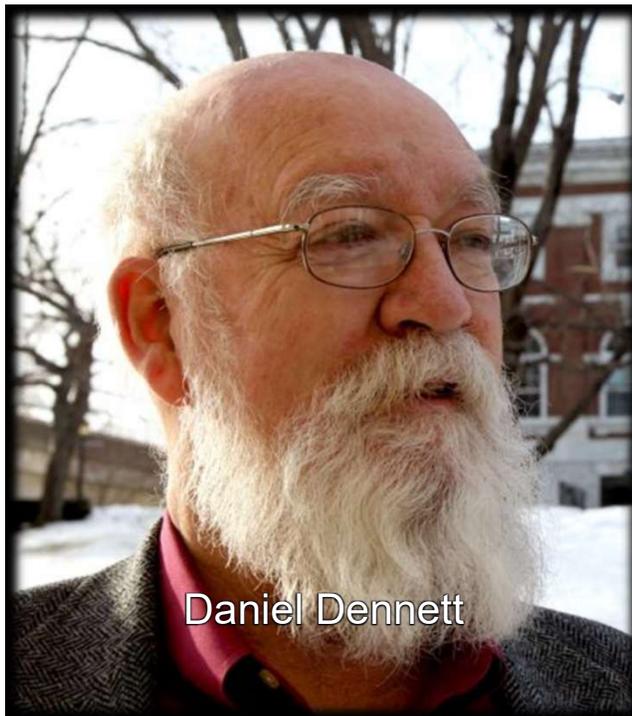


Not all scientists hold to scientism.

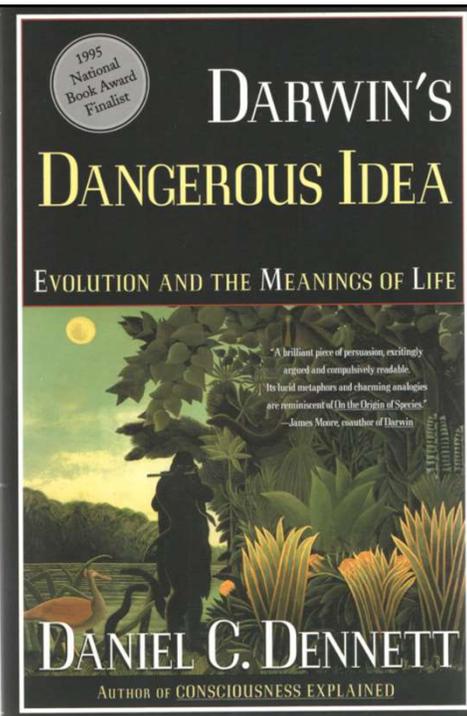
For the most part, those who hold to scientism do not use this term to refer to their own views.

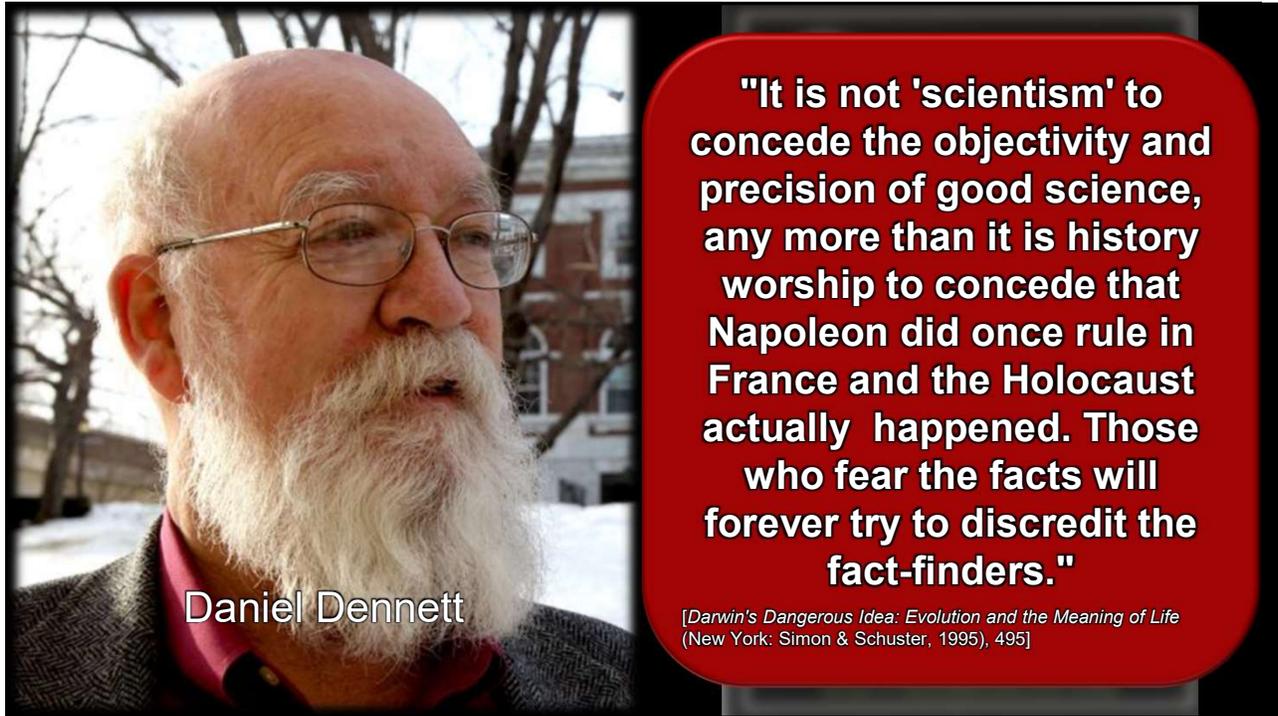
It originated more or less as a pejorative term used by critics of the view.

It would seem, however, to be no less an appropriate label of the view.



Daniel Dennett

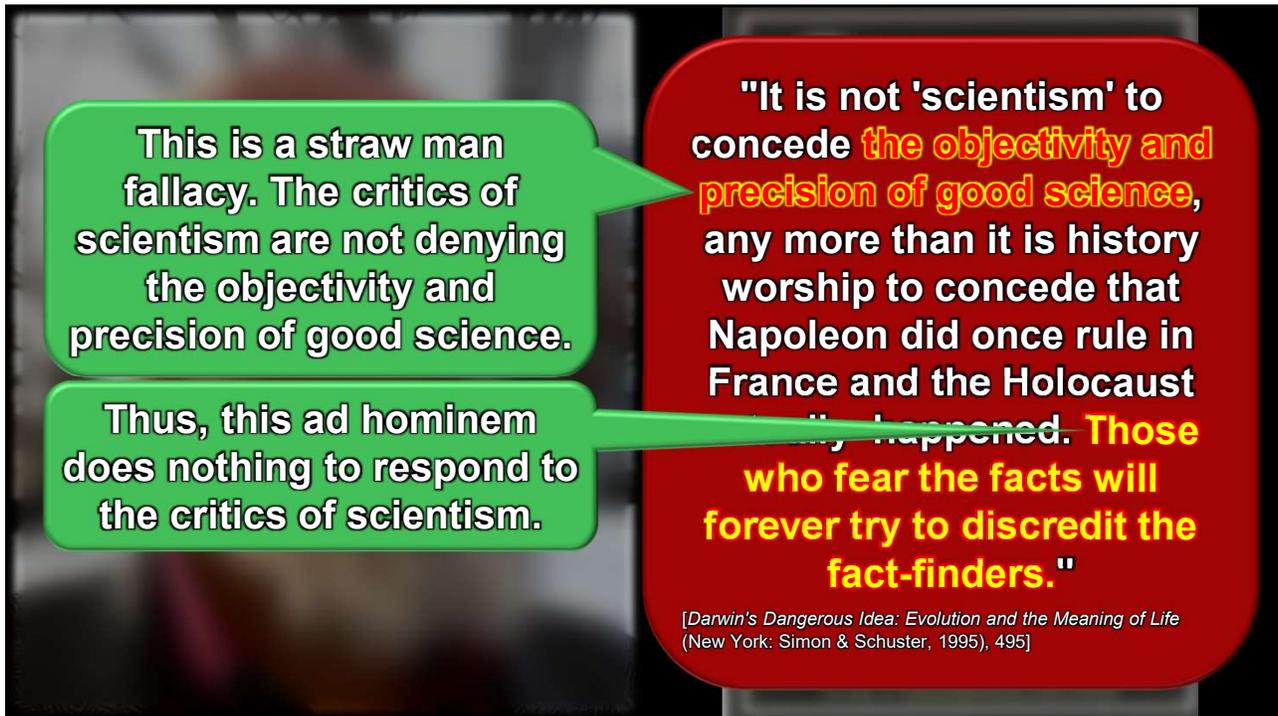




Daniel Dennett

"It is not 'scientism' to concede the objectivity and precision of good science, any more than it is history worship to concede that Napoleon did once rule in France and the Holocaust actually happened. Those who fear the facts will forever try to discredit the fact-finders."

[Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meaning of Life (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 495]



This is a straw man fallacy. The critics of scientism are not denying the objectivity and precision of good science.

Thus, this ad hominem does nothing to respond to the critics of scientism.

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Instead, the critic of scientism is disputing whether science alone is the arbiter of what constitutes facts in the first place and whether scientists are the only fact-finders.

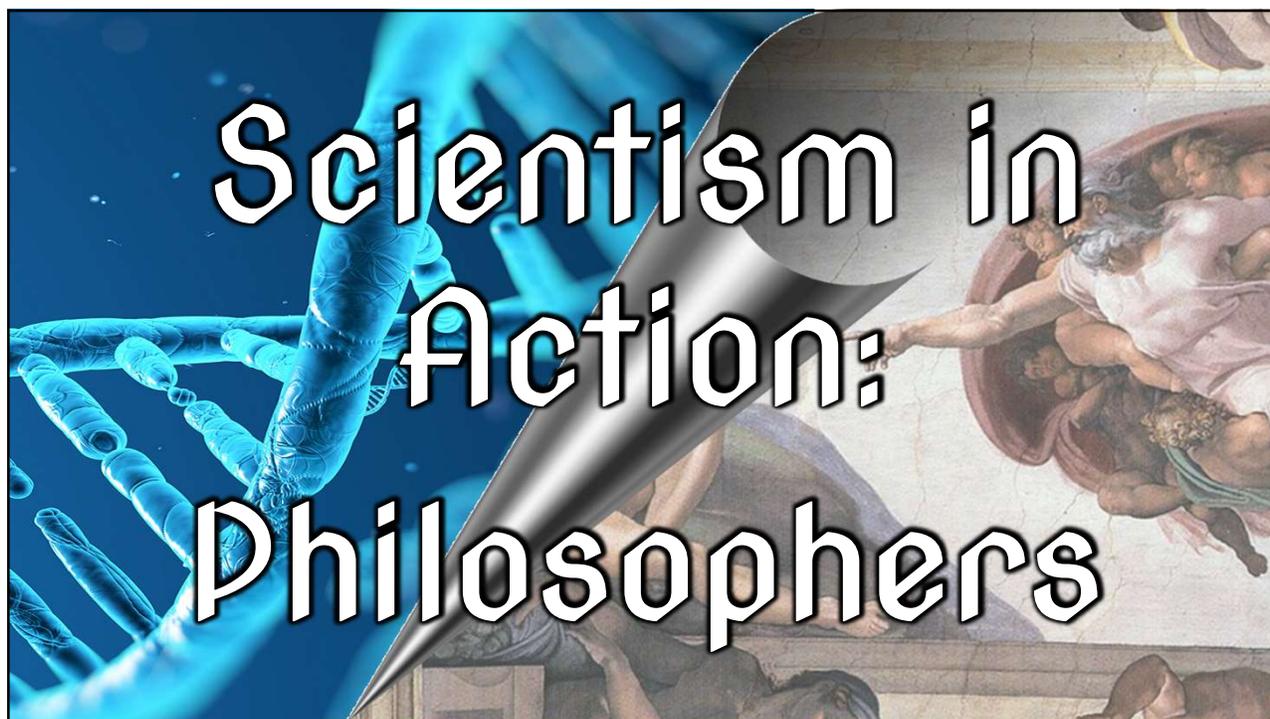
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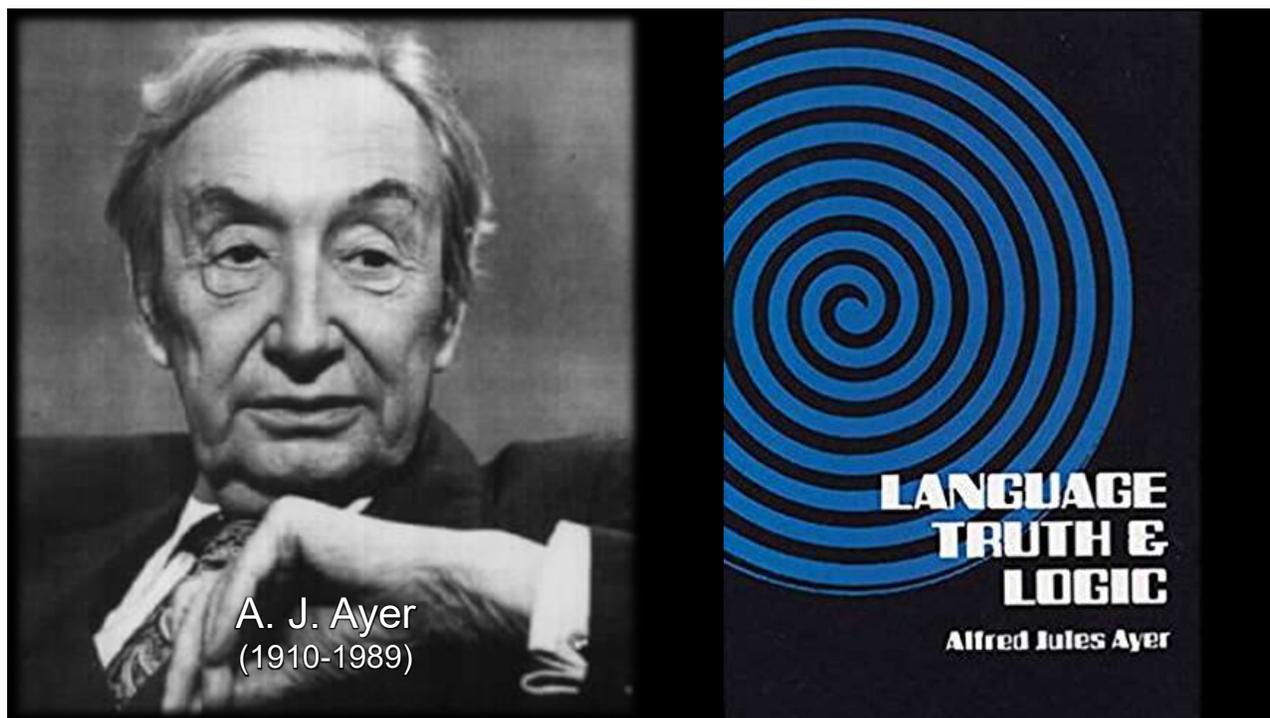
The critics of scientism will argue that there are facts that are no less true about reality but are not amenable to the tools and methods of the natural sciences.

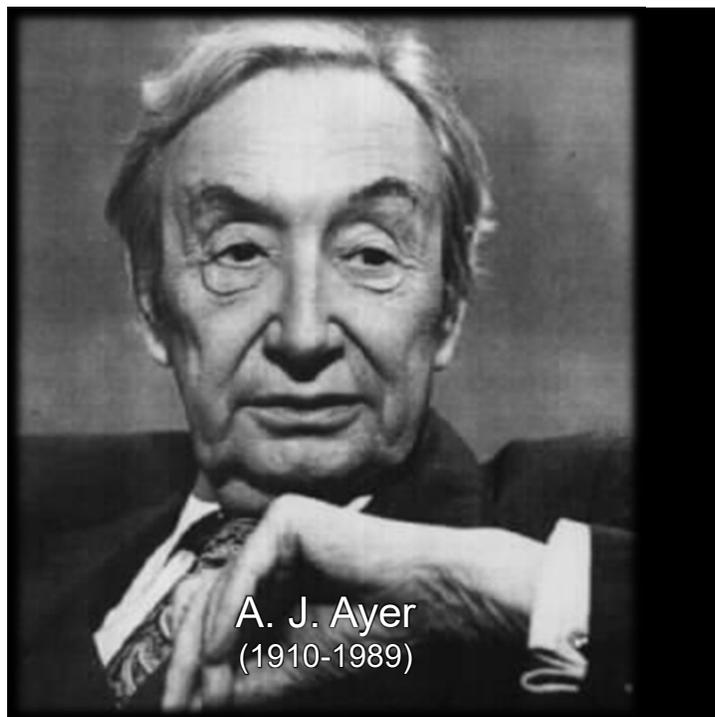
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Scientism in Action: Philosophers

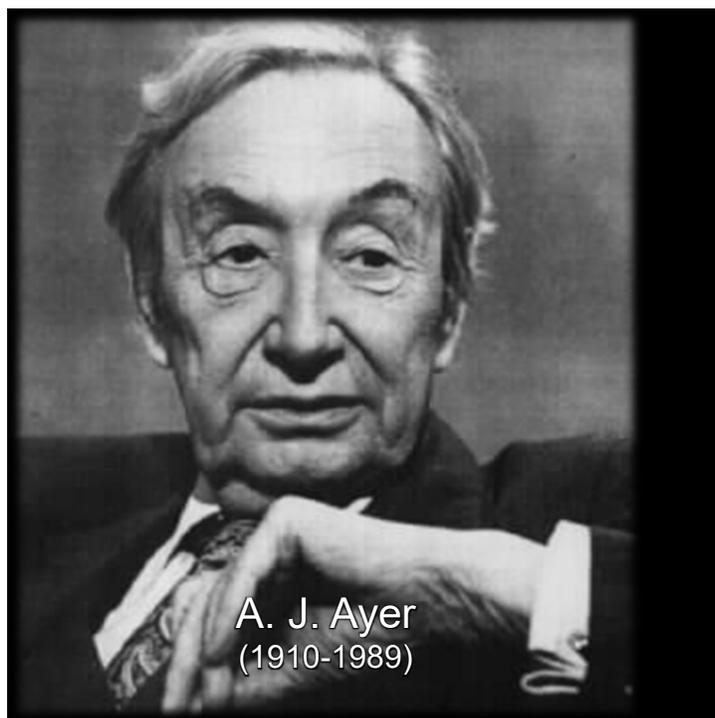




A. J. Ayer
(1910-1989)

"We mean also to rule out the supposition that philosophy can be ranged alongside the existing sciences, as a special department of speculative knowledge."

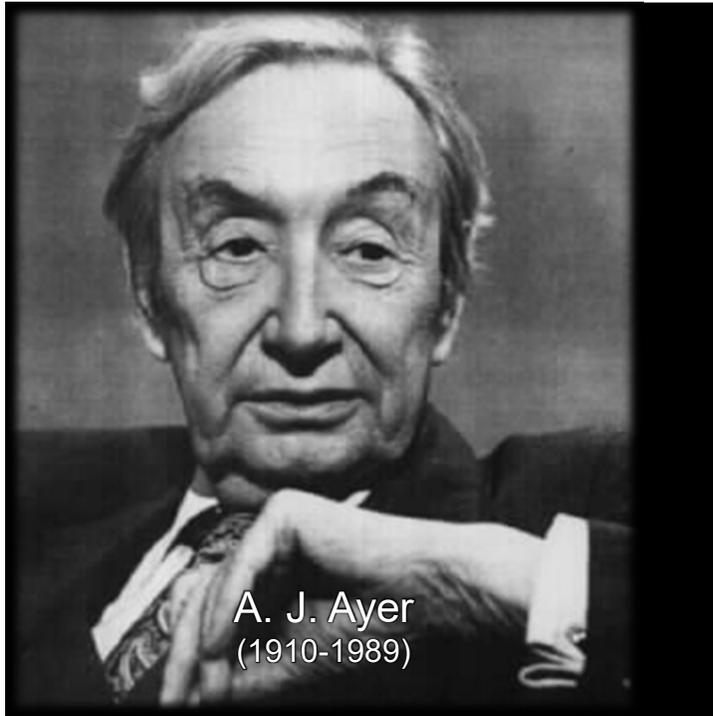
[A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), 48]



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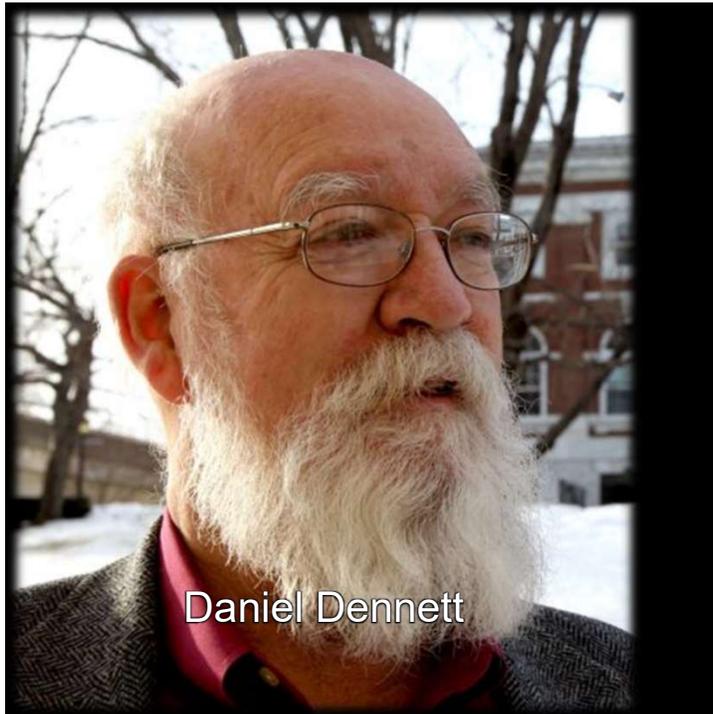
[Ayer, *Language*, 48]



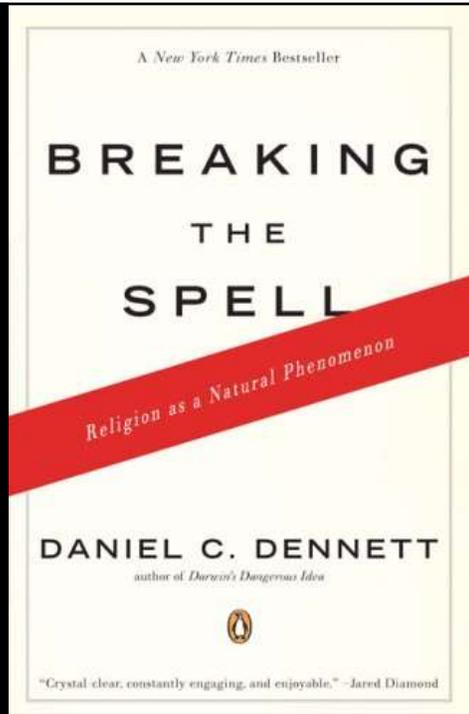
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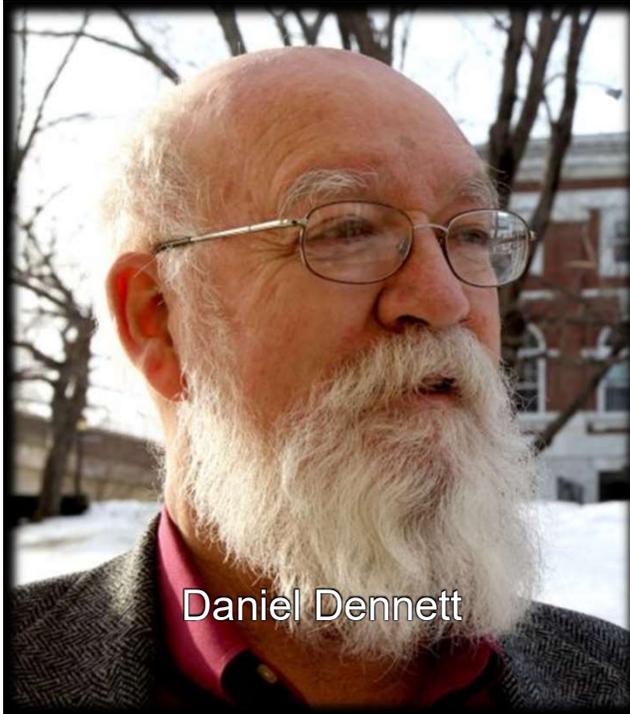
"The philosopher, as an analyst, is not directly concerned with the physical properties of things. **He is concerned only with the way in which we speak about them.** In other words, **the propositions of philosophy are not factual, but linguistic in character.**"

[Ayer, *Language*, 57]



Daniel Dennett





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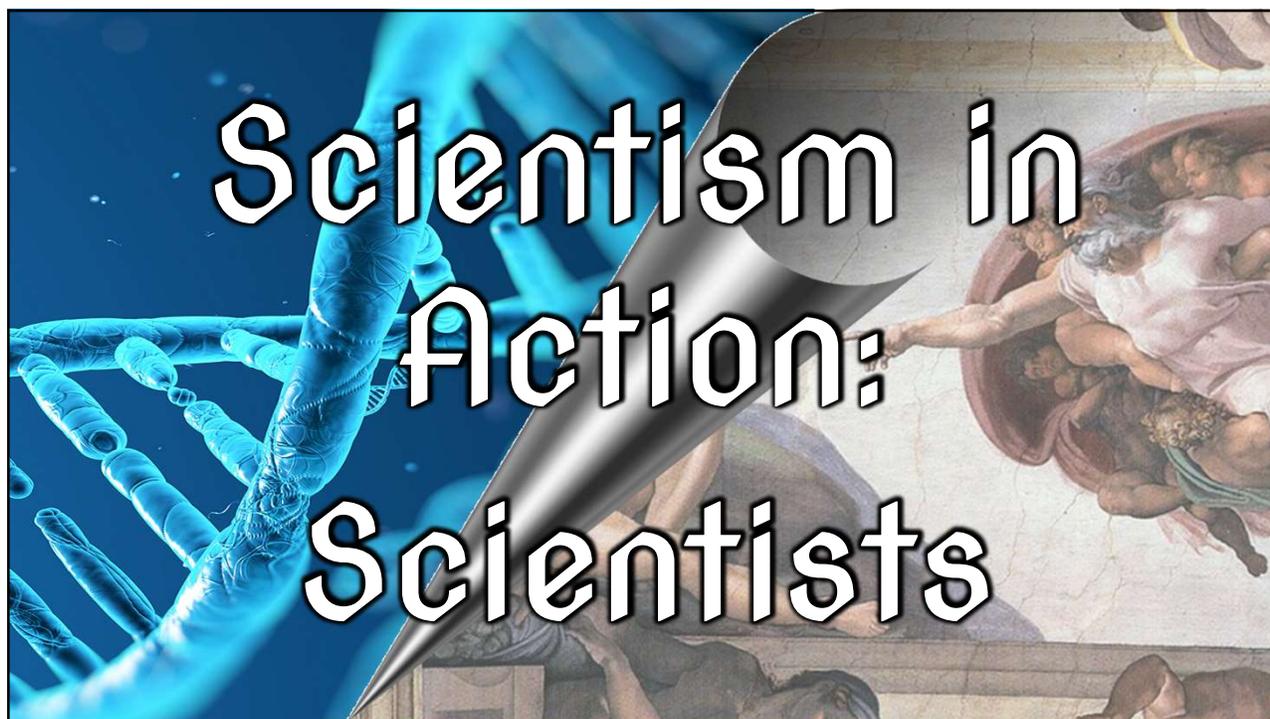
[*Breaking the Spell*, 26]



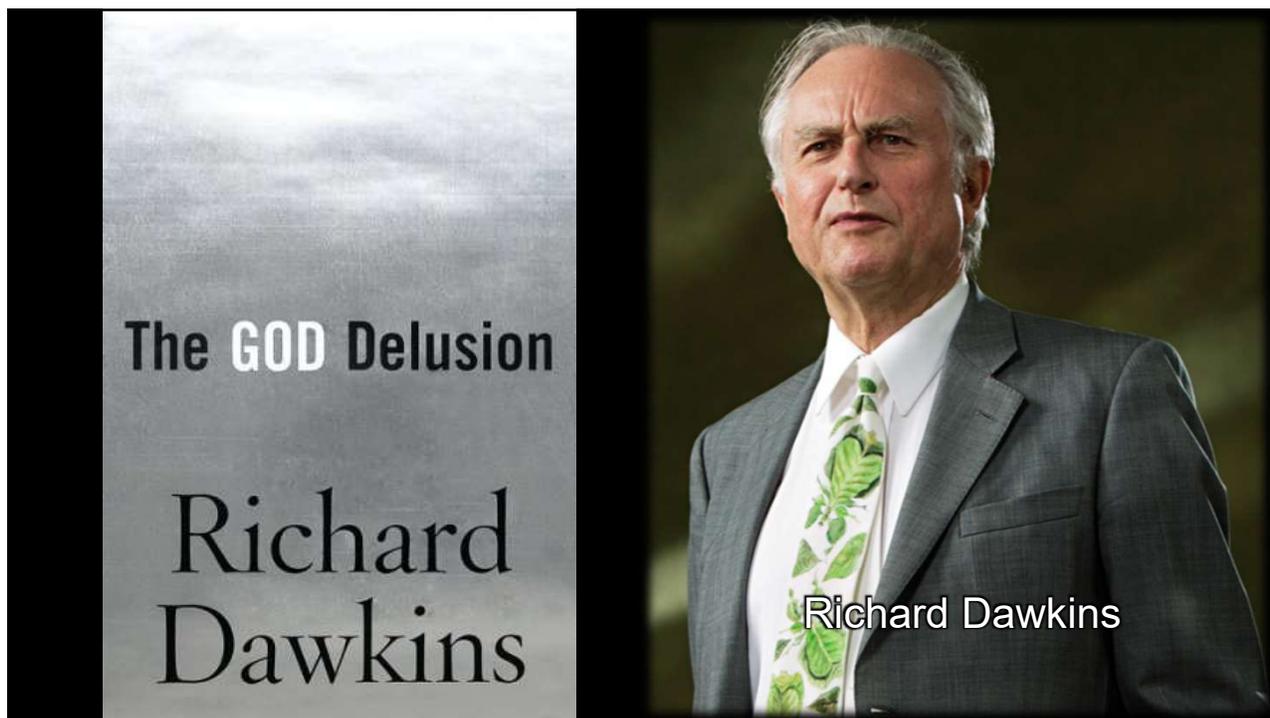
John Shook

*"Philosophical naturalism undertakes the responsibility for elaborating a comprehensive and coherent worldview based on experience, reason, and science, and for defending **science's exclusive right to explore and theorize about all of reality.**"*

[*"The Need for Naturalism in a Scientific Age"* https://centerforinquiry.org/blog/the_need_for_naturalism_in_a_scientific_age/, accessed 06/22/22, emphasis added]

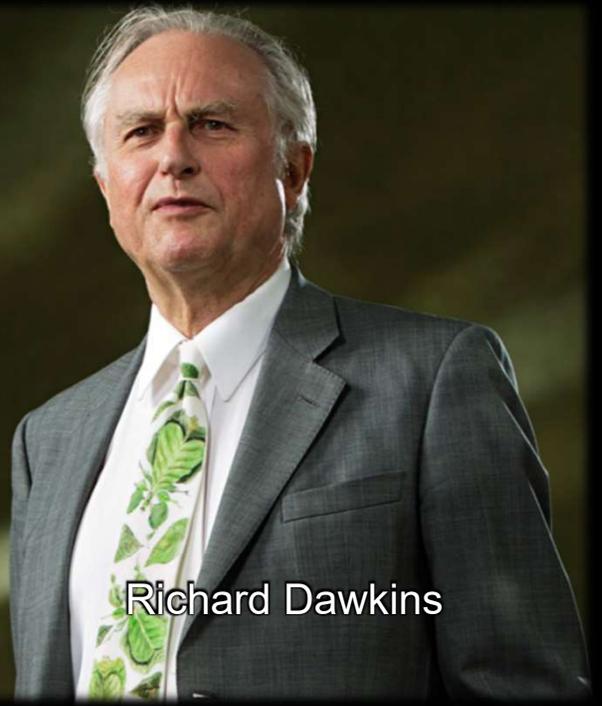


Scientism in Action: Scientists

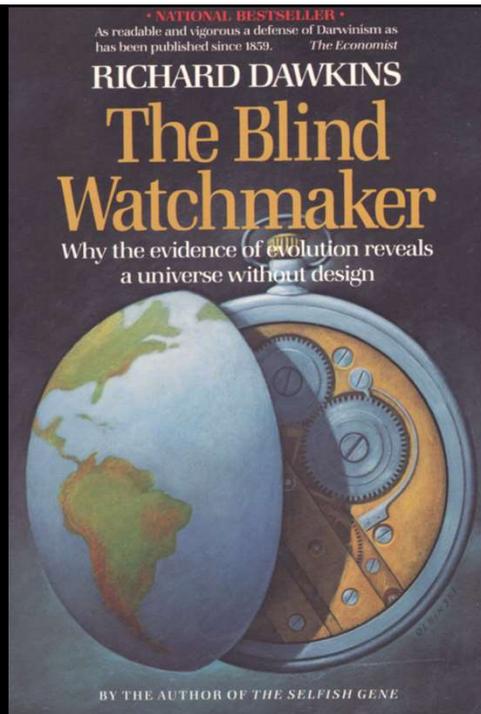
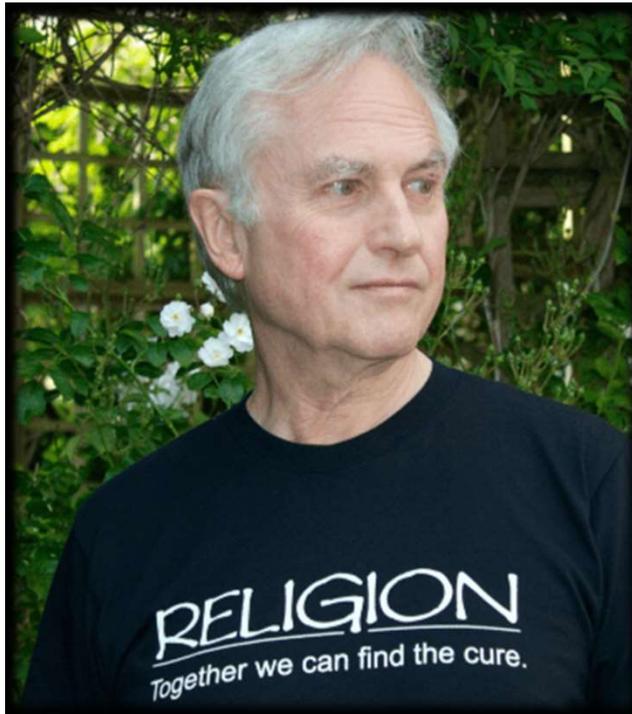


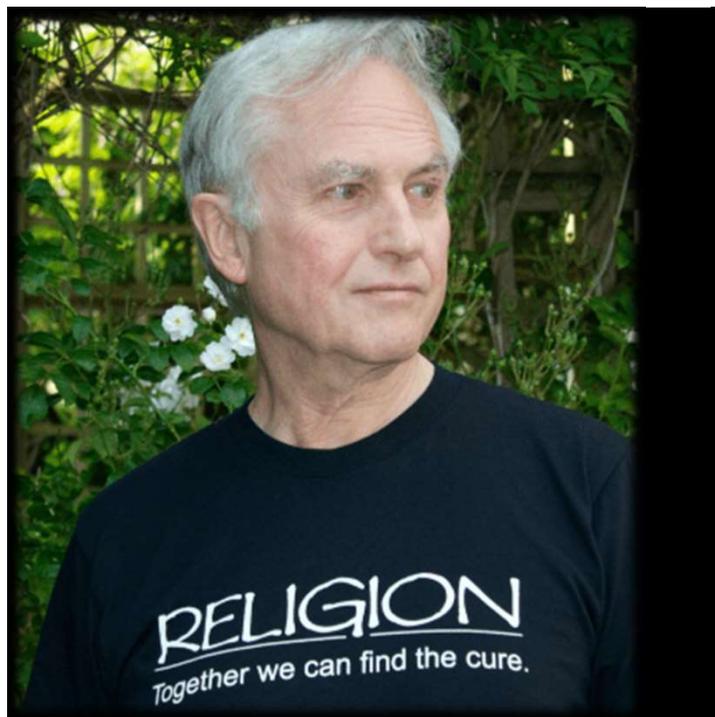
"The presence or absence of a creative super-intelligence is unequivocally a scientific question, even if it is not in practice—or not yet—a decided one."

[*The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 58-59]



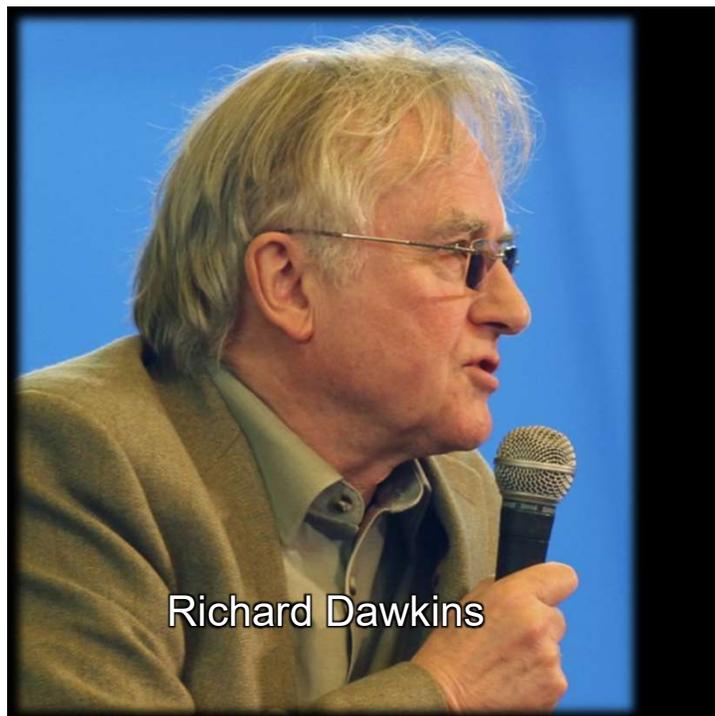
Richard Dawkins



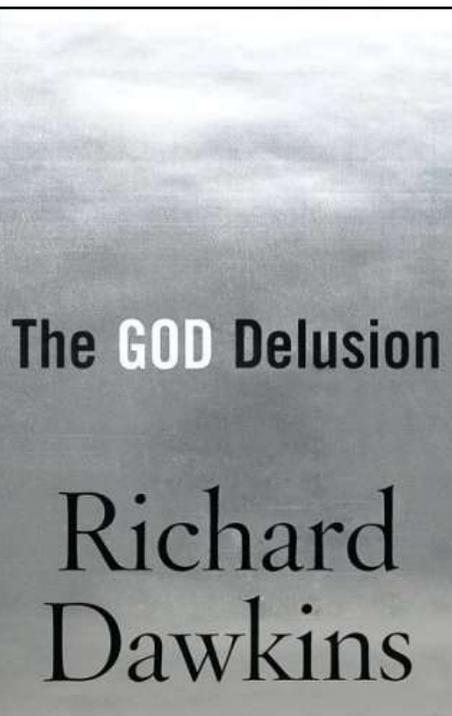


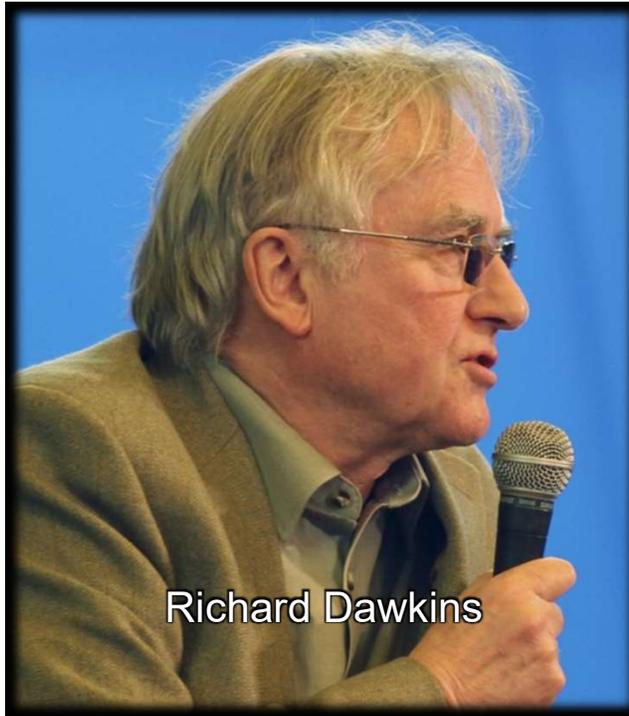
"Unlike some of his theological colleagues, Bishop Montefiore is not afraid to state that the question of whether God exists is a definite question of fact."

[The Blind Watchmaker, 37-38]



Richard Dawkins

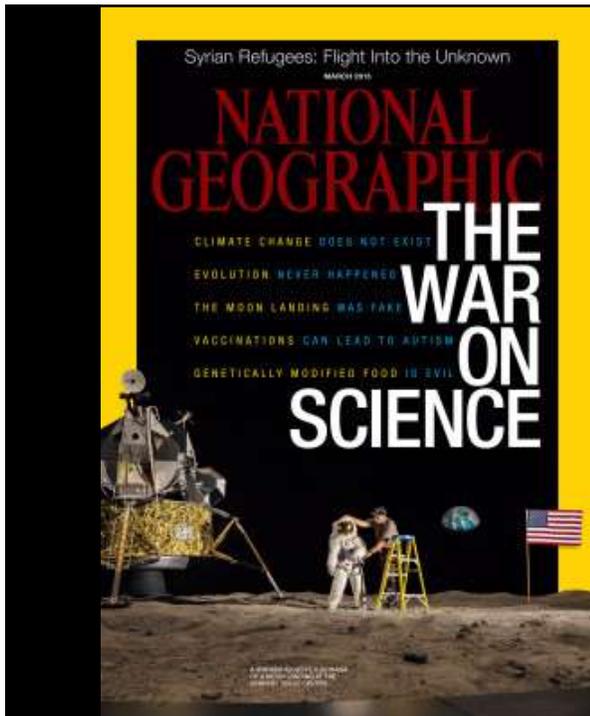




Richard Dawkins

"There is an answer to every such question [about God and miracles], whether or not we can discover it in practice, and it is a strictly scientific answer. The methods we should use to settle the matter, in the unlikely event that relevant evidence ever became available, would be purely and entirely scientific methods."

[Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 59.]



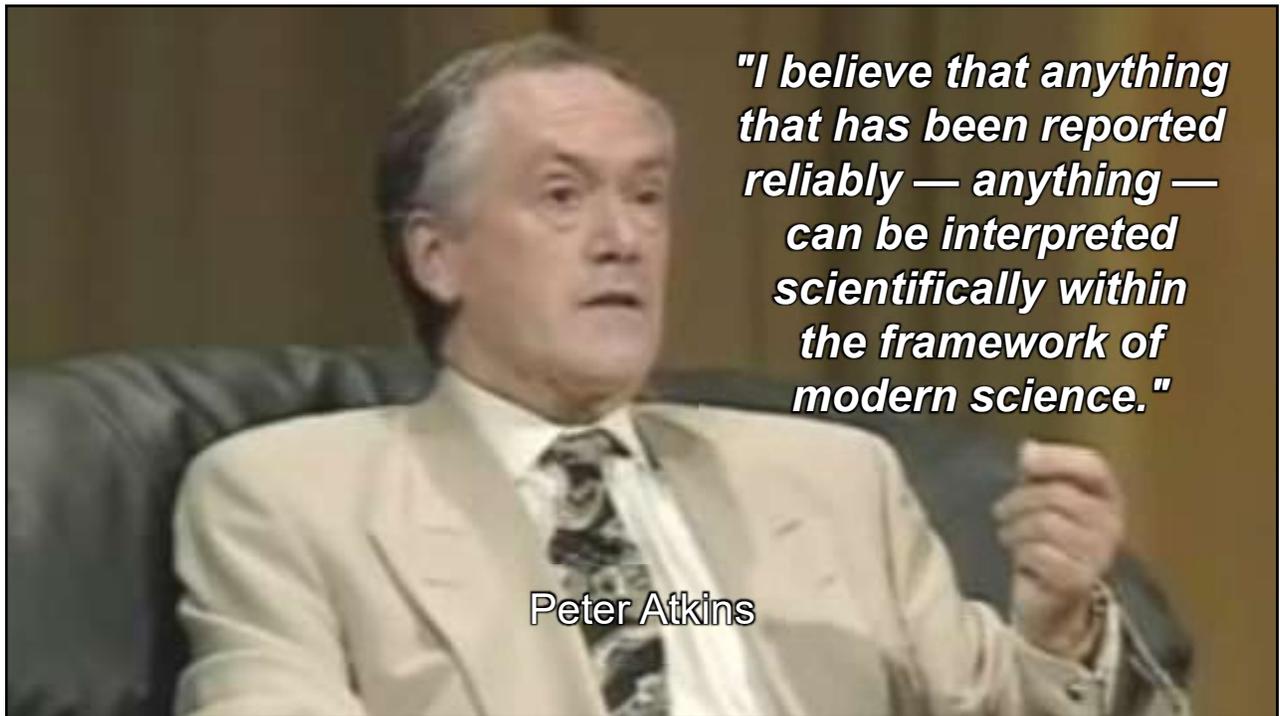
Marcia McNutt

"Science is a method for deciding whether what we choose to believe has a basis in the laws of nature or not."

[In Joel Achenbach, "The Age of Disbelief," *National Geographic* (March 2015): 40]



Marcia McNutt



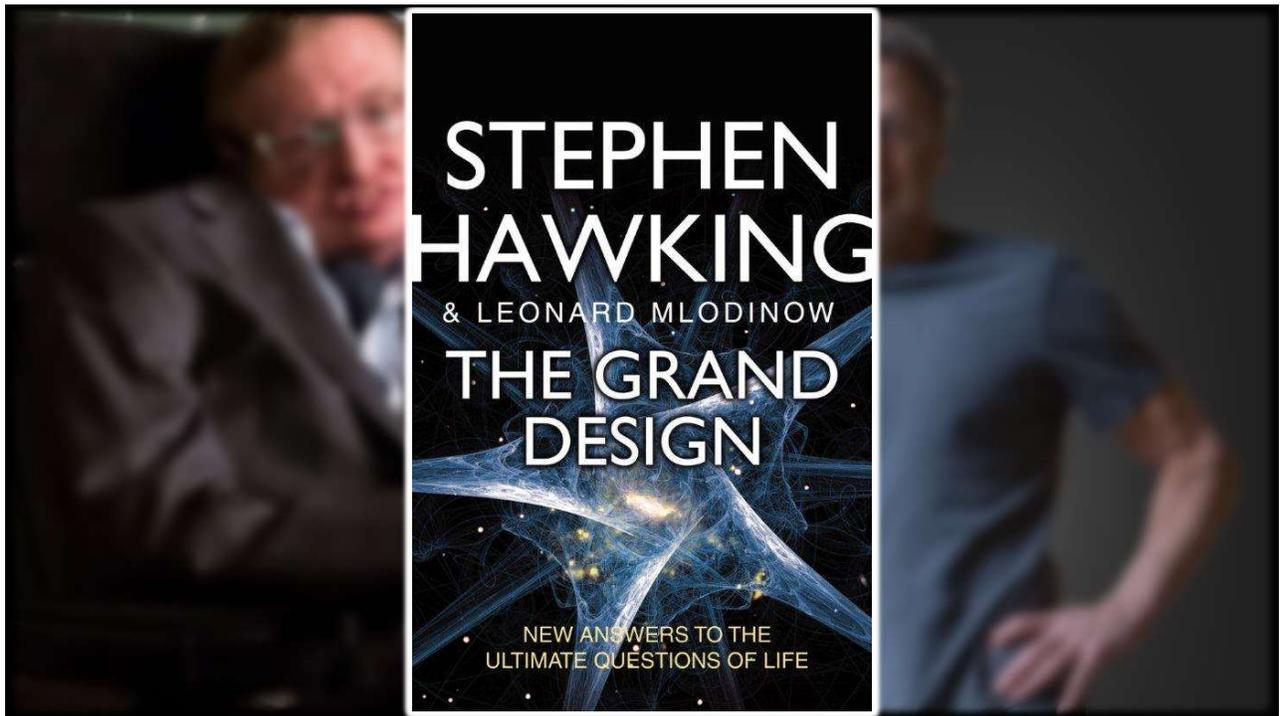
"I believe that anything that has been reported reliably — anything — can be interpreted scientifically within the framework of modern science."

Peter Atkins



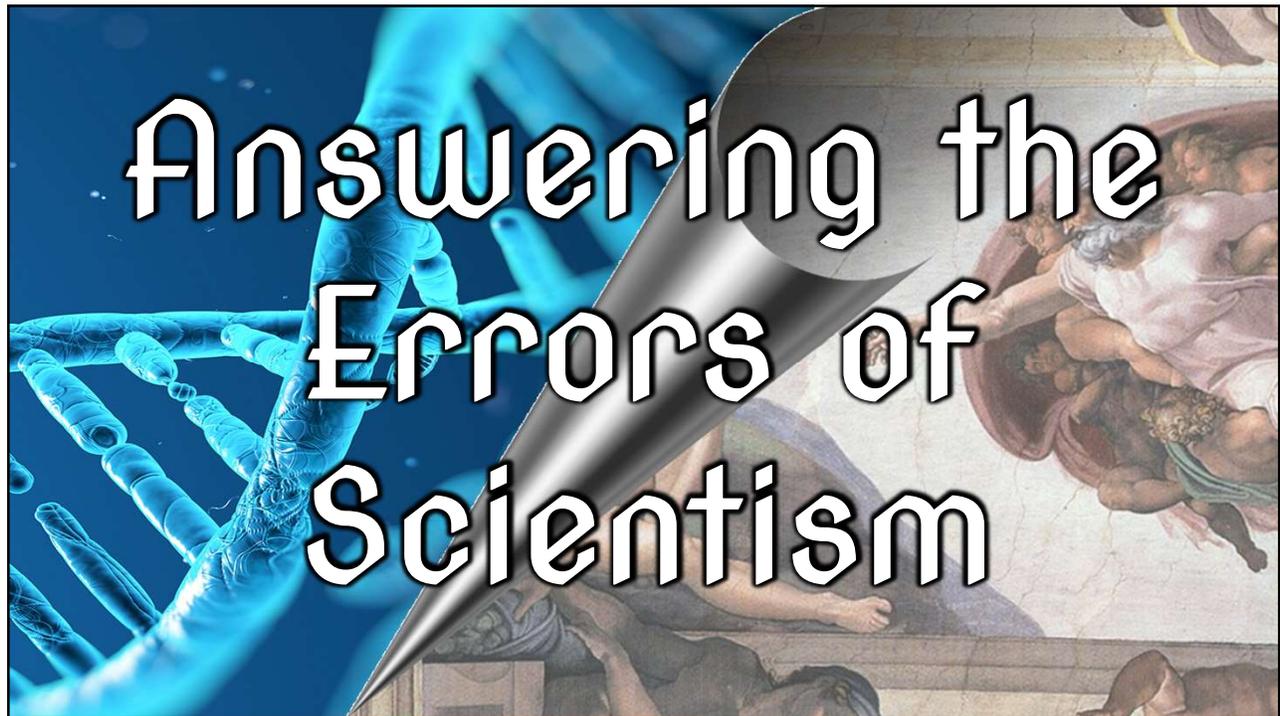
Stephen Hawking
(1942-2018)

Leonard Mlodinow

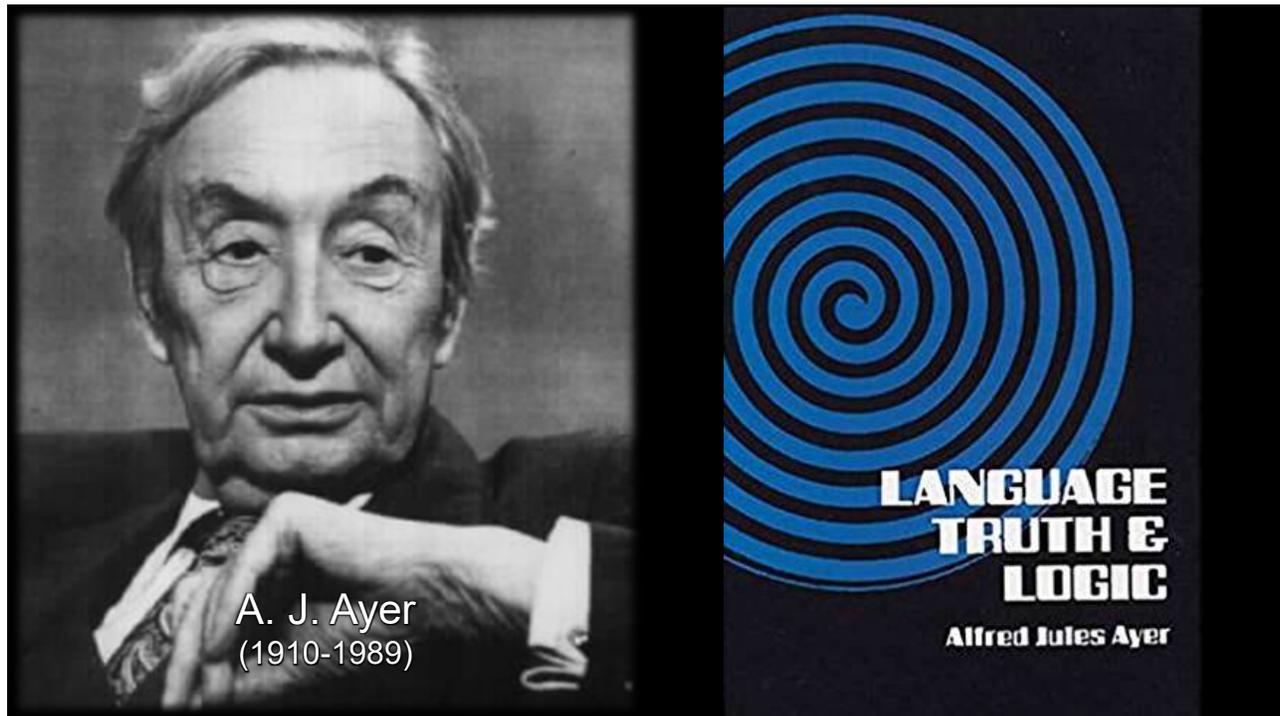


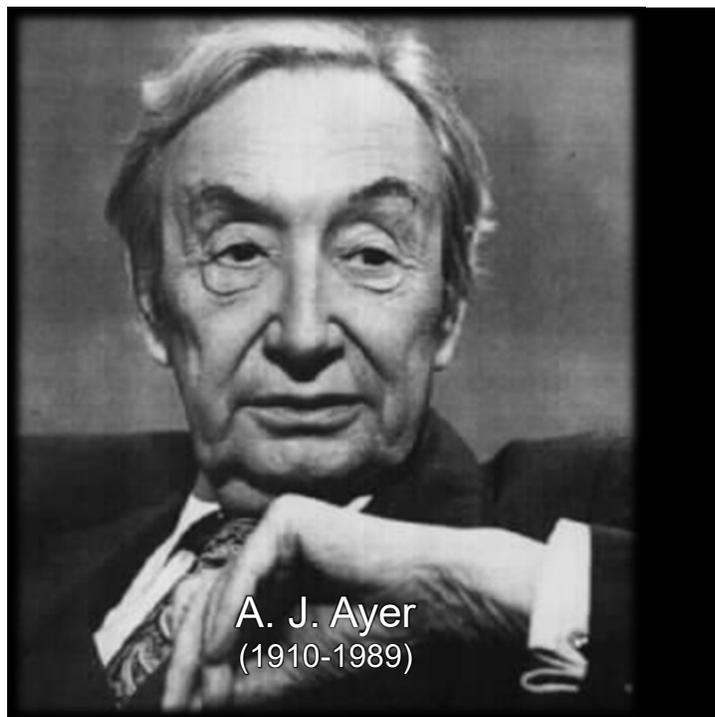
*"How can we understand the world in which we find ourselves? How does the universe behave? What is the nature of reality? Where did all this come from? Did the universe need a creator? ... Traditionally these are questions for philosophy, but **philosophy is dead**. Philosophy has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly physics."*

[Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), 5]



Answering the Philosophers: A. J. Ayer

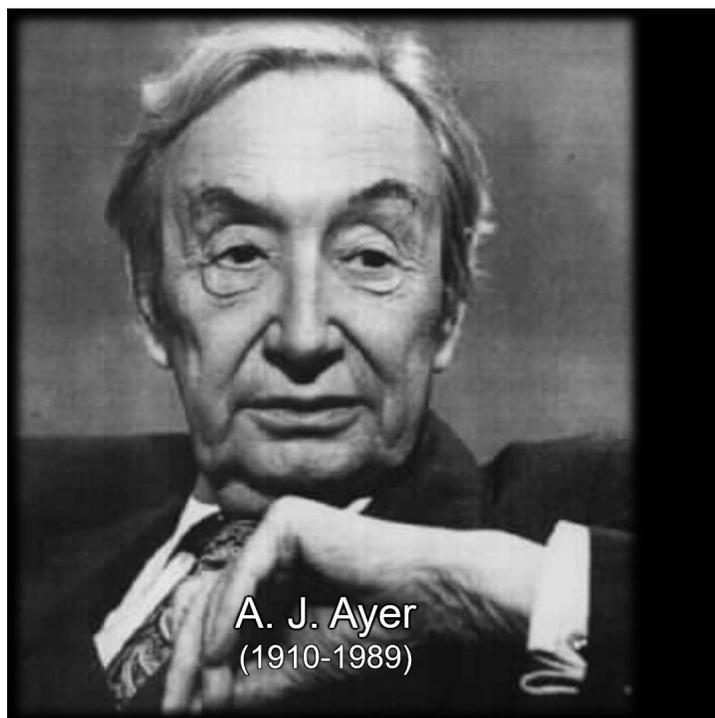




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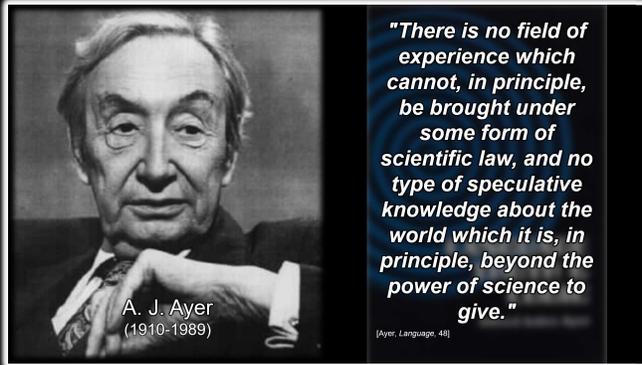
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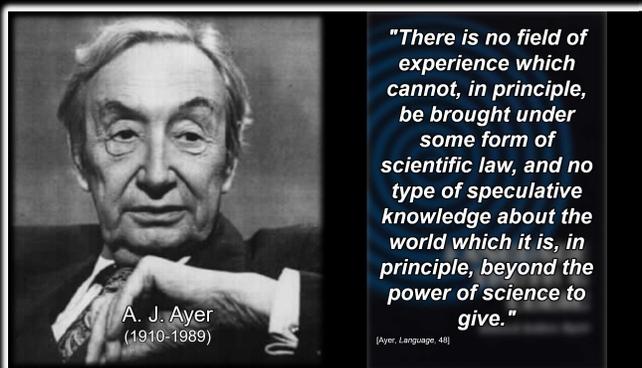
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"There is no field of experience which cannot, in principle, be brought under some form of scientific law, and no type of speculative knowledge about the world which it is, in principle, beyond the power of science to give."

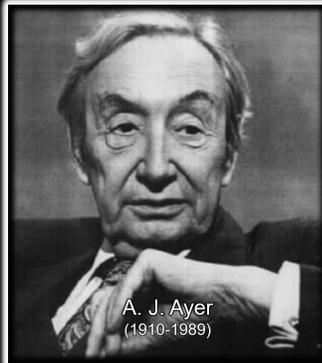
[Ayer, *Language*, 48]



Can this statement be "brought under some form of scientific law"?



If the answer is no, then this statement is not a scientific statement.

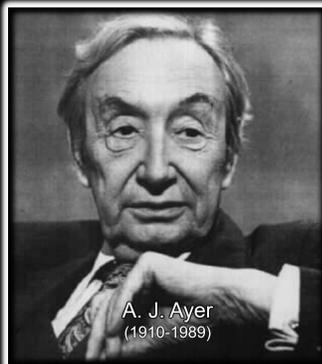


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[Ayer, Language, 48]

If this statement is not a scientific statement, what kind of statement is it?

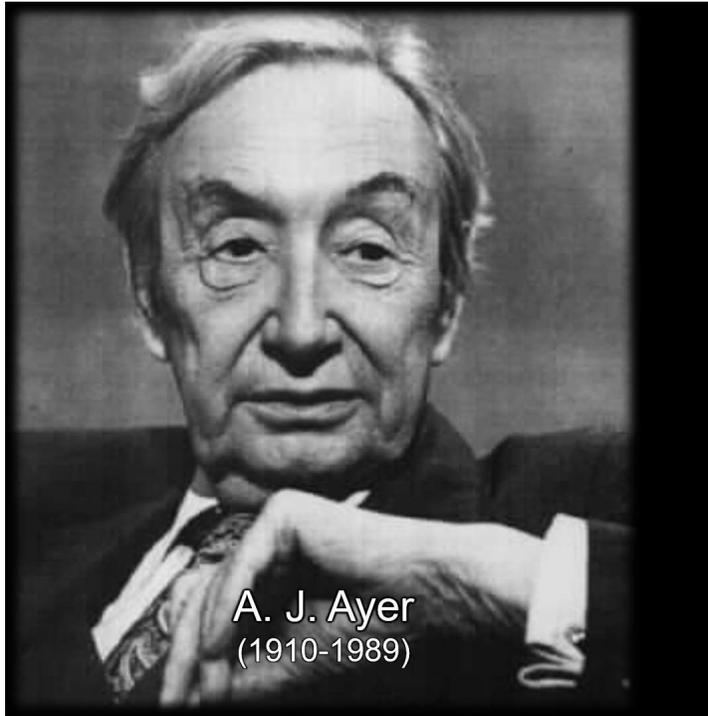


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"The philosopher, as an analyst, is not directly concerned with the physical properties of things. **He is concerned only with the way in which we speak about them.** In other words, the propositions of philosophy are not factual, but linguistic in character."

[Ayer, *Language*, 57]

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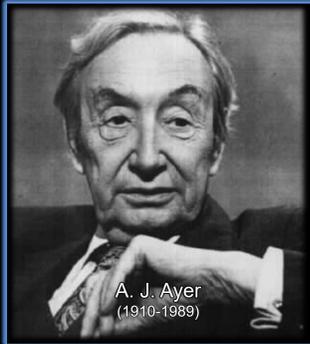
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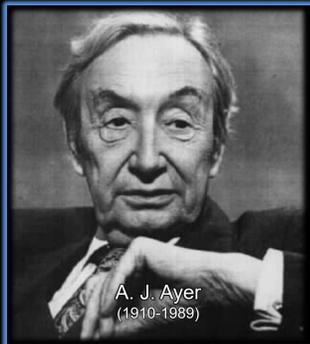


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[Ayer, Language, 57]

Is this statement factual or linguistic?

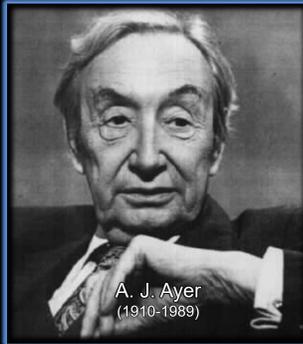


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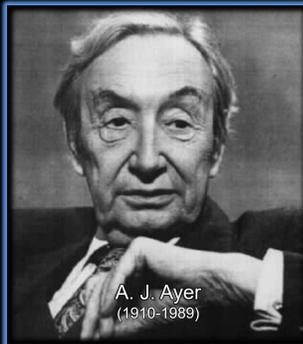


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[Ayer, Language, 57]

For Ayer,
exactly what is
it about
which the
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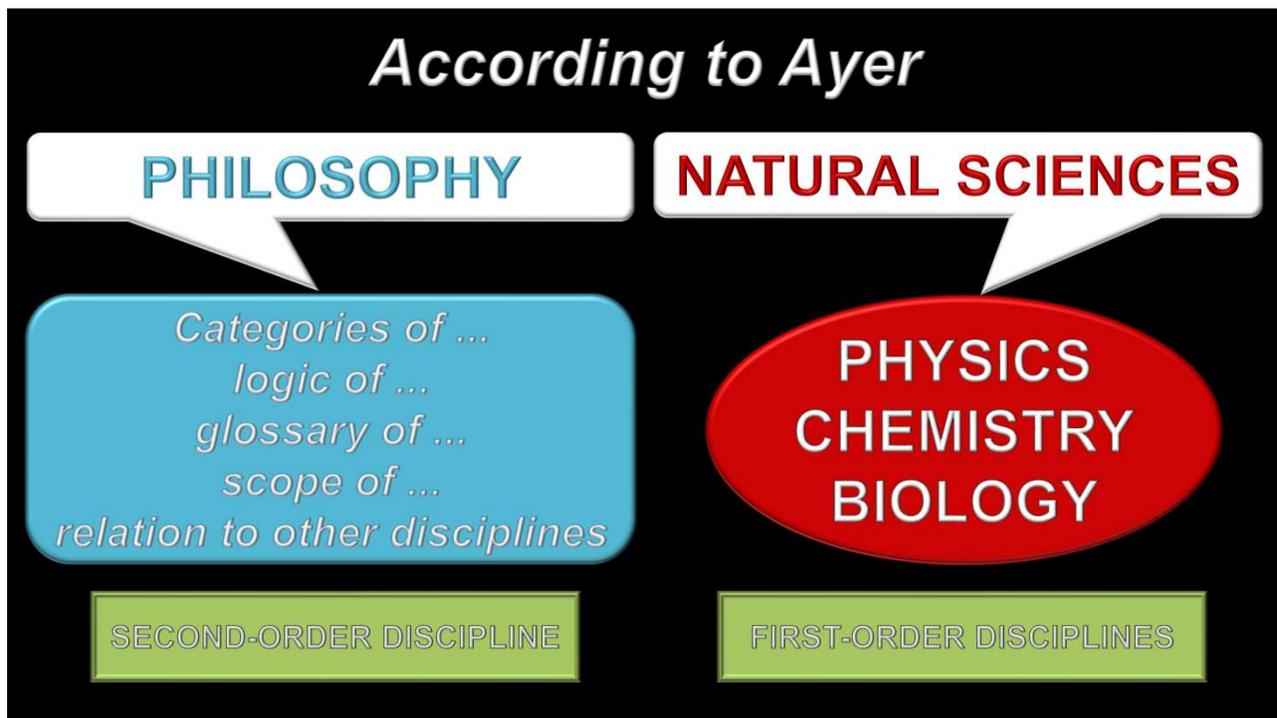


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For Ayer,
exactly what is
the way we speak
about things
philosopher is
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According to Classical Philosophy

PHILOSOPHY

act / potency
form / matter
particular / universal
substance / accident
essence / existence

FIRST-ORDER
DISCIPLINE

Categories of ...
logic of ...
glossary of ...
scope of ...
relation to other
disciplines

SECOND-ORDER
DISCIPLINE

NATURAL SCIENCES

PHYSICS
CHEMISTRY
BIOLOGY

FIRST-ORDER DISCIPLINES





Note that this entire position that Ayer puts forth is neither a physical property of a thing nor is it the way we speak about the physical property of a thing.

Rather, it is speaking about the way we speak about the physical properties of things.

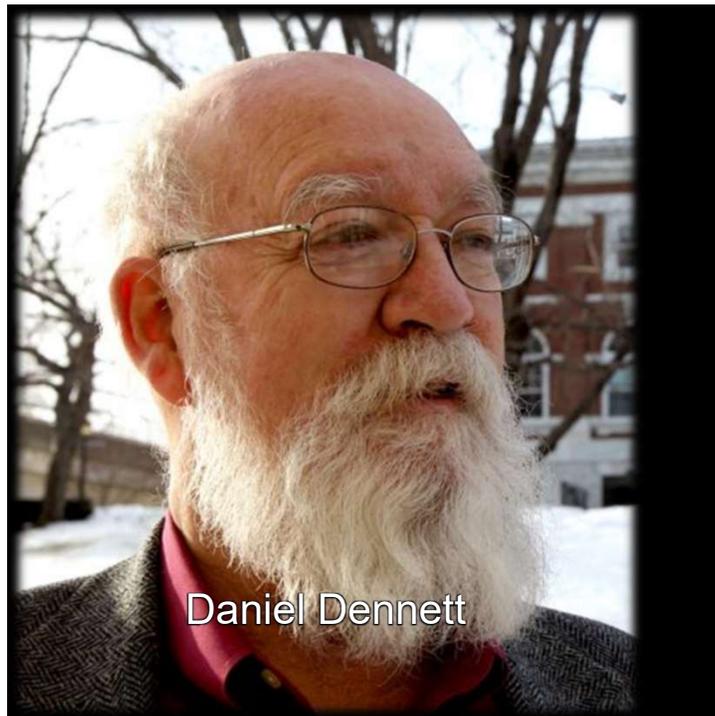
Thus, Ayer's view does not fit the criterion of Ayer's own view!



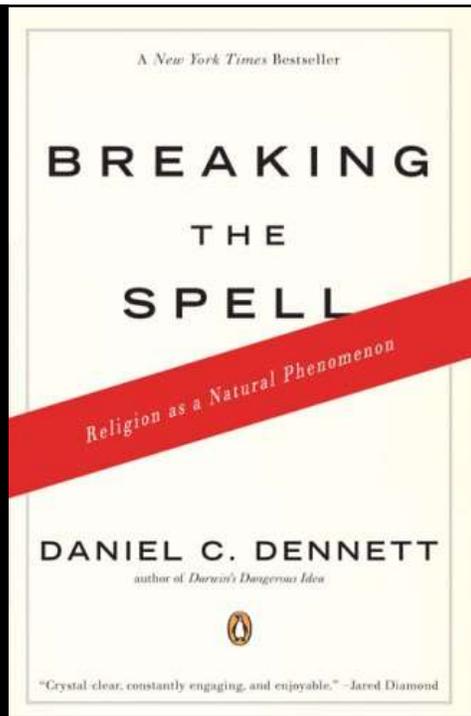
The reason is because, since his view is a philosophical view, it is about the philosophical aspects of physical things.

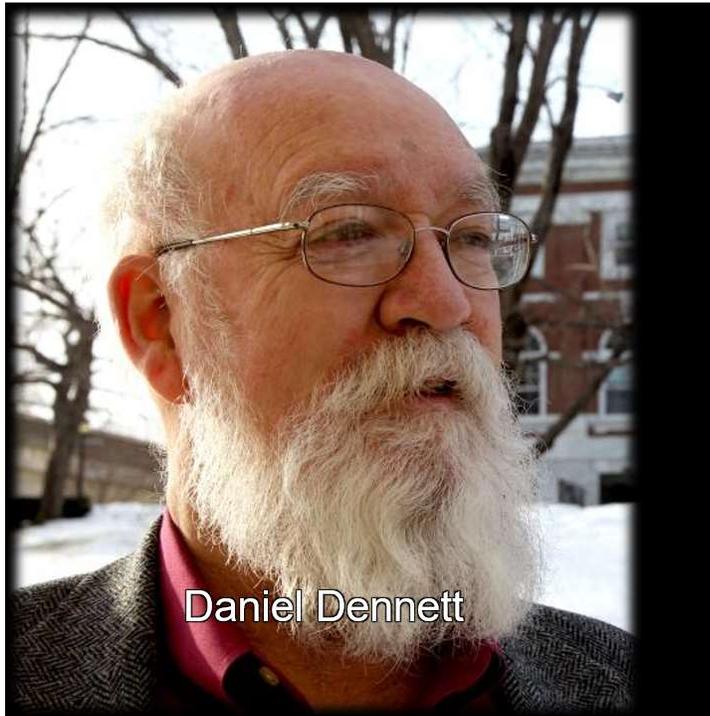
This make it just as factual a statement as are statements about the physical properties of things.

Answering the Philosophers: Daniel Dennett



Daniel Dennett





"Perhaps some cancer cures *are* miracles. If so, **the only hope of ever demonstrating this** to a doubting world would be by **adopting the scientific method**, with its assumption of no miracles, and showing that science was utterly unable to account for the phenomena."

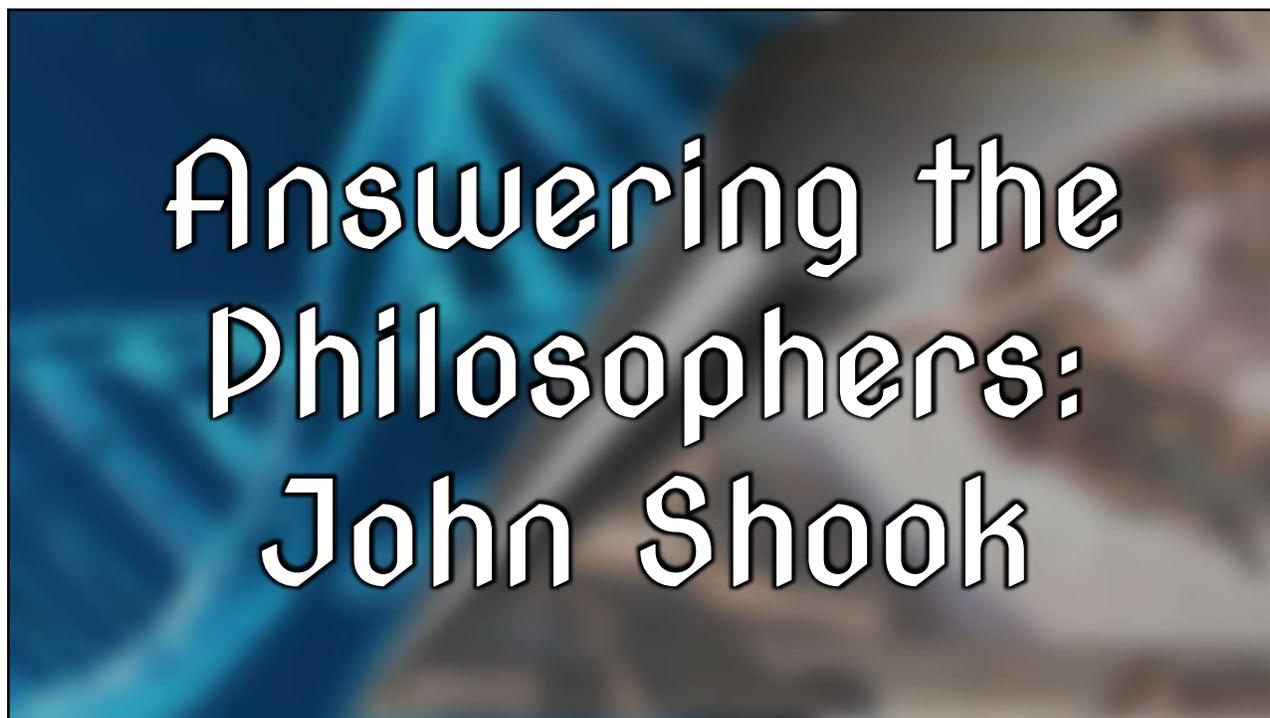
[*Breaking the Spell*, 26]

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[*Breaking the Spell*, 26]

What is the argument offered to support this claim?

Whatever that argument might be, what KIND of argument would it have to be?





John Shook

"Philosophical naturalism undertakes the responsibility for elaborating a comprehensive and coherent worldview based on experience, reason, and science, and for defending science's exclusive right to explore and theorize about all of reality."

["The Need for Naturalism in a Scientific Age" https://centerforinquiry.org/blog/the_need_for_naturalism_in_a_scientific_age/, accessed 06/22/22, emphasis added]



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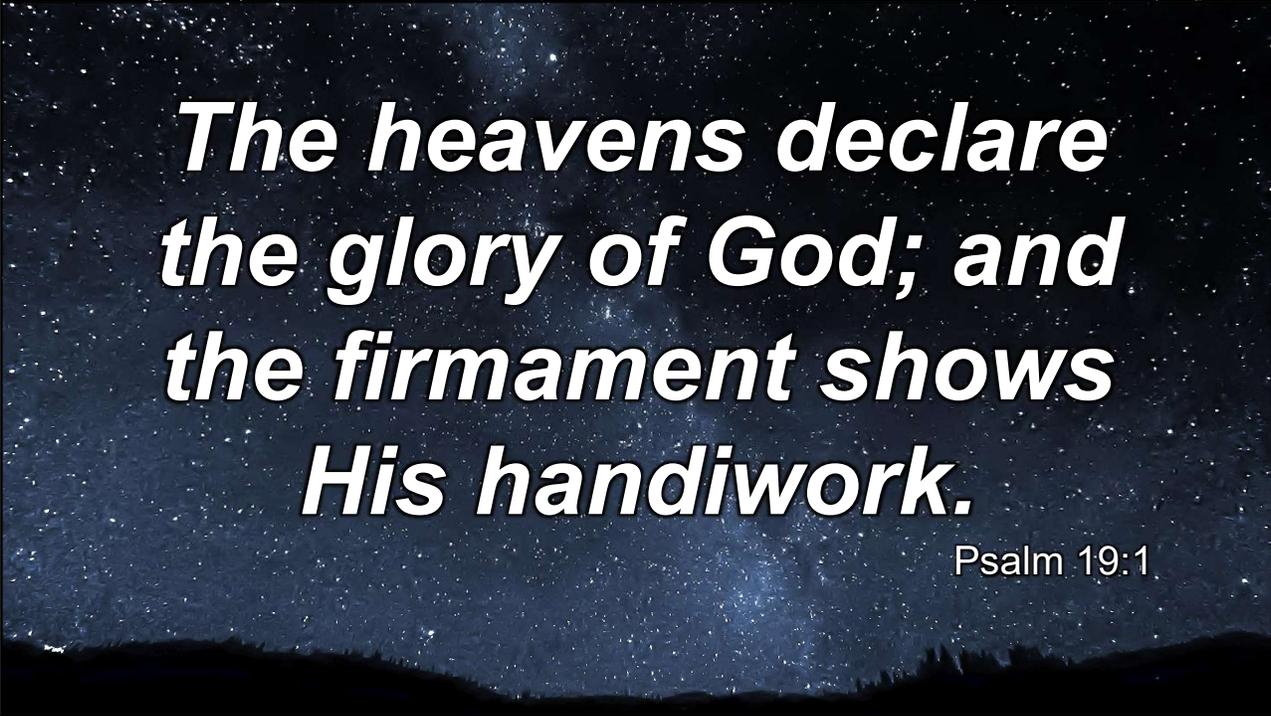
["The Need for Naturalism in a Scientific Age" https://centerforinquiry.org/blog/the_need_for_naturalism_in_a_scientific_age/, accessed 06/22/22, emphasis added]

Is Shook's statement a part of reality?

Then, what scientific method could possibly be used to prove that this statement is true?

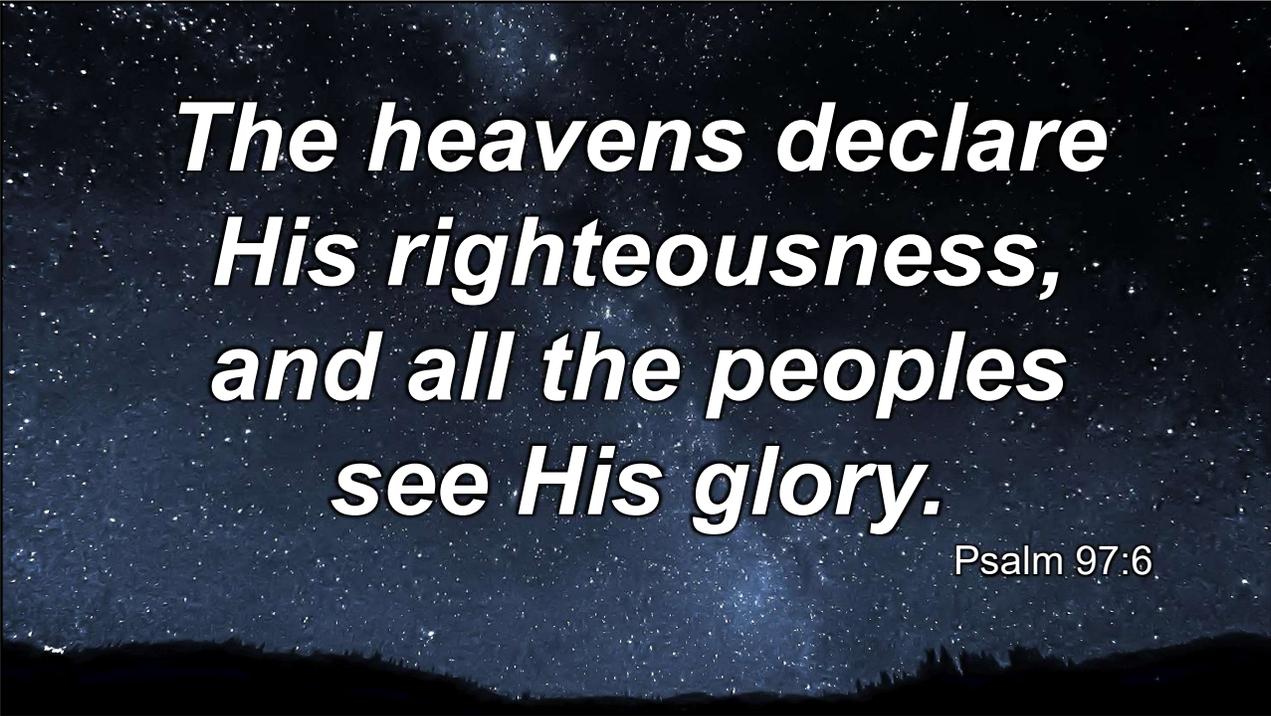
Answering the Scientists: Richard Dawkins

Many people have been able to believe that God is real merely by observing the wonders of creation.



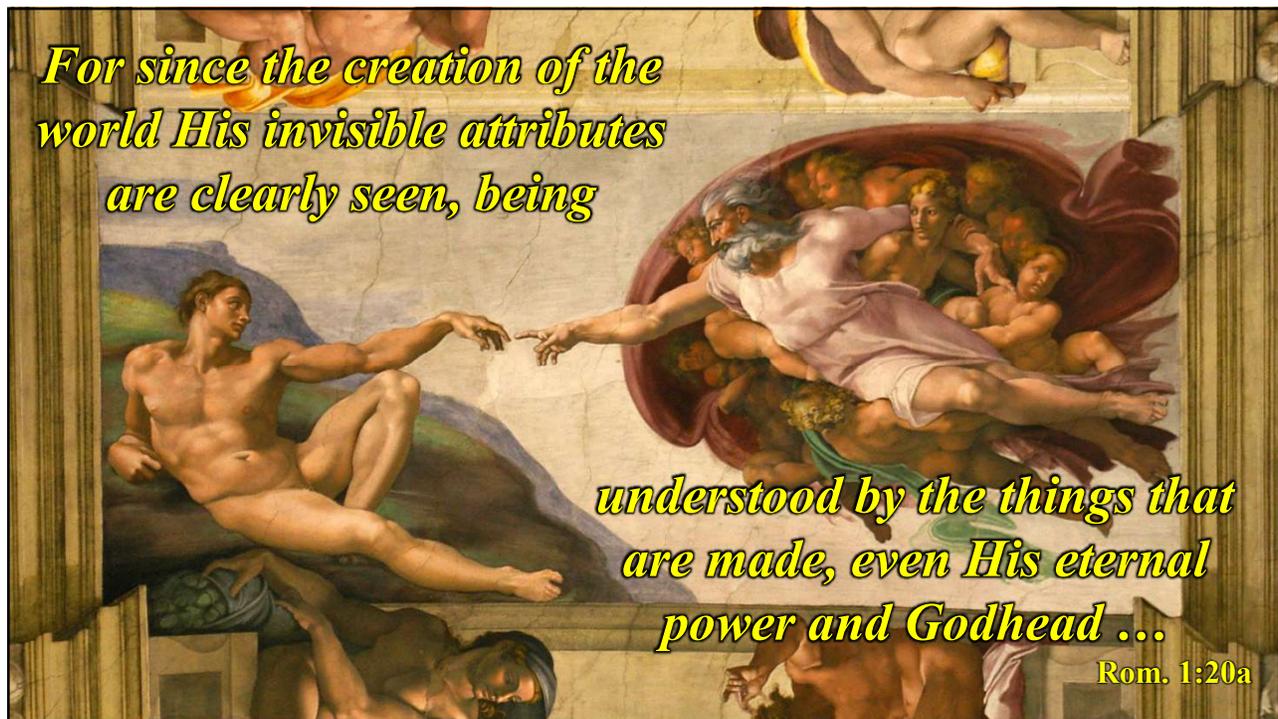
***The heavens declare
the glory of God; and
the firmament shows
His handiwork.***

Psalm 19:1



***The heavens declare
His righteousness,
and all the peoples
see His glory.***

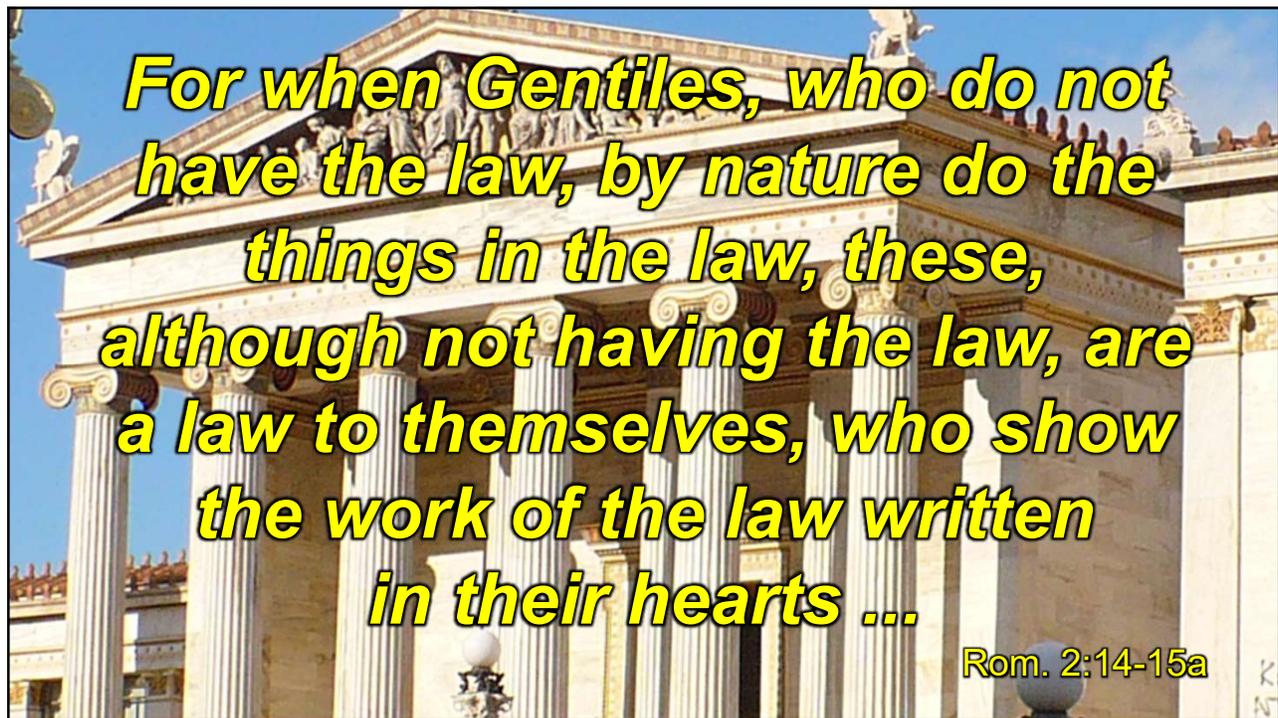
Psalm 97:6



For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being

understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead ...

Rom. 1:20a

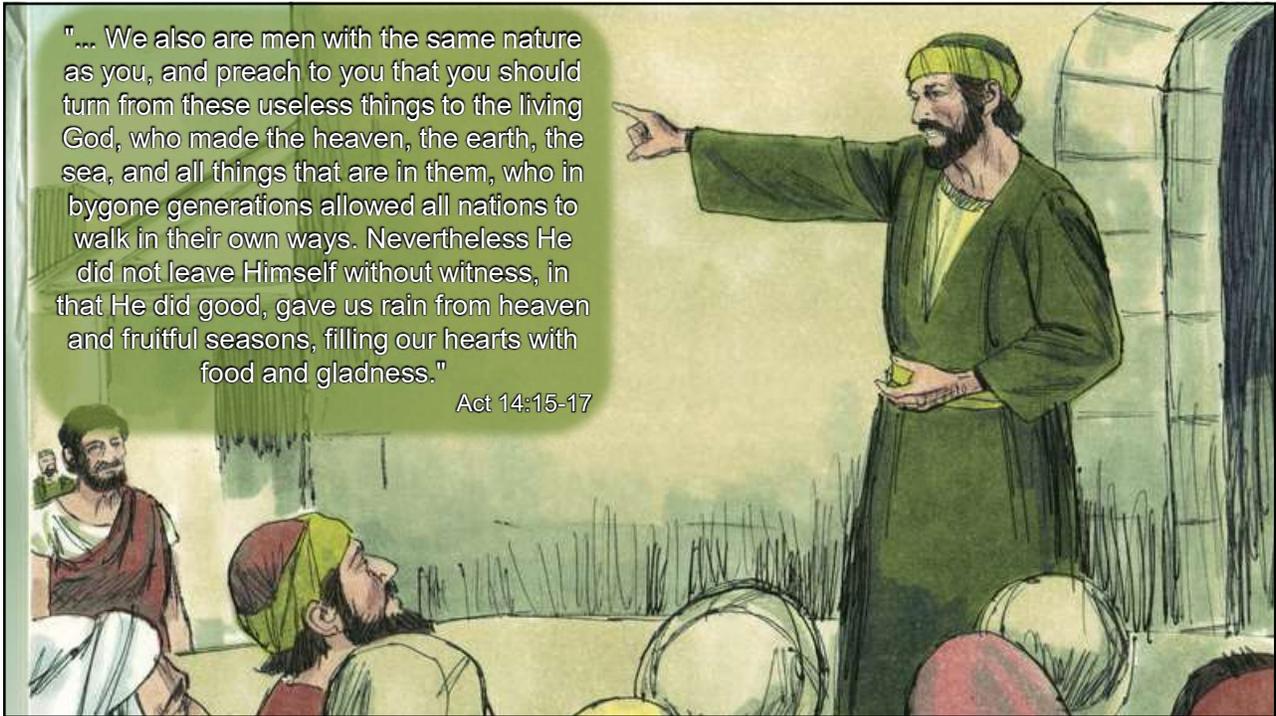


For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts ...

Rom. 2:14-15a

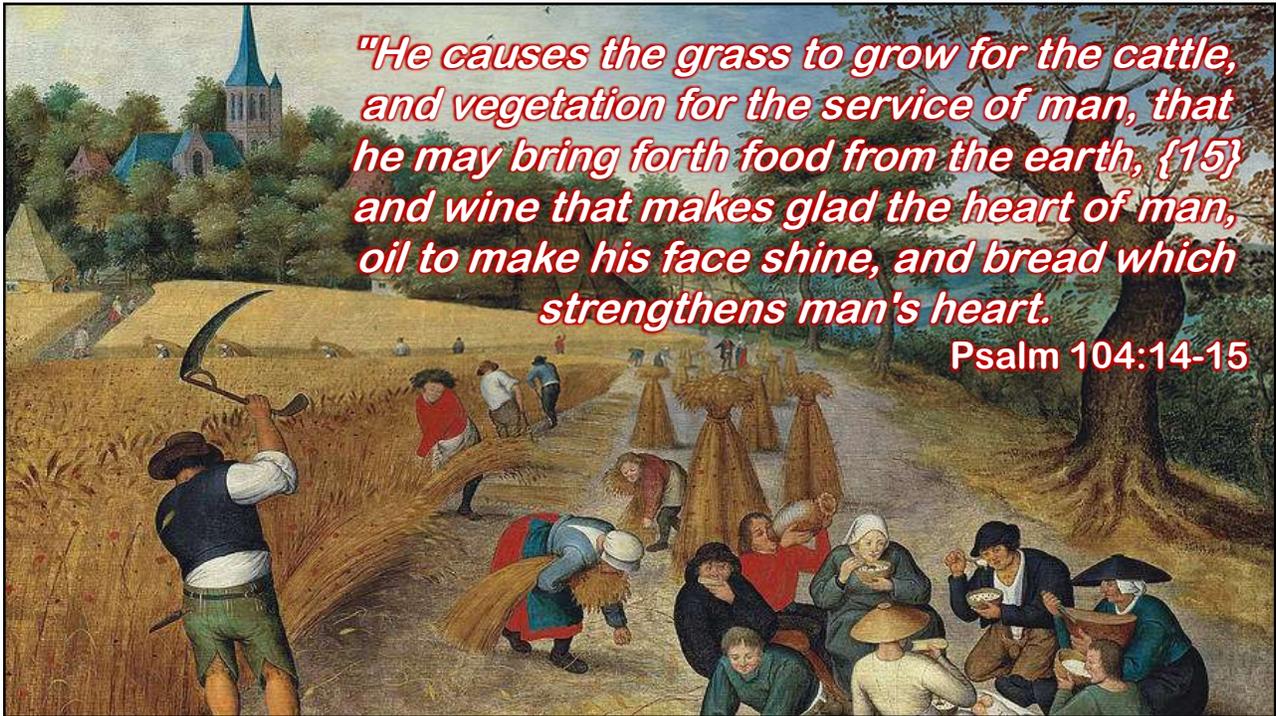
"... We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."

Act 14:15-17

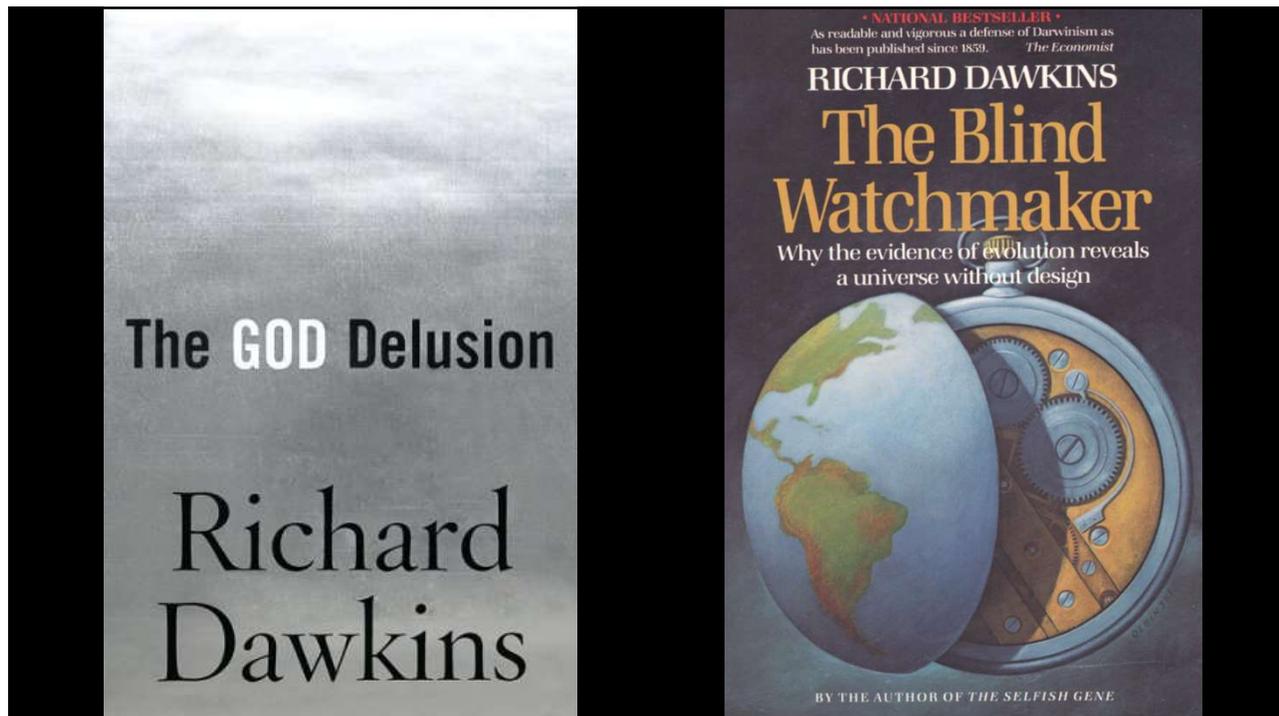


"He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth, {15} and wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man's heart.

Psalm 104:14-15



But as more toxic philosophical voices have fogged the conversation throughout history, the need arises to appeal to deeper issues in philosophy.

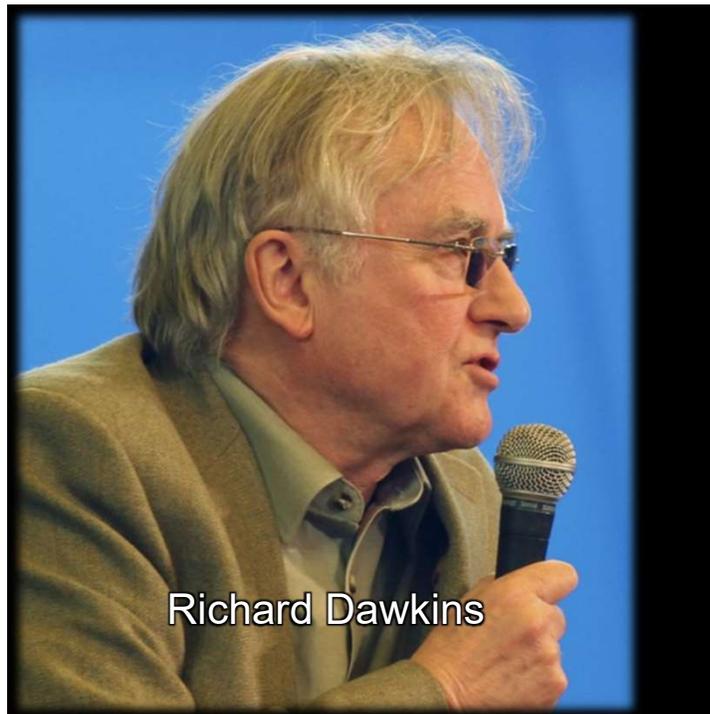


"The presence or absence of a creative super-intelligence is unequivocally a **scientific question**, even if it is not in practice—or not yet—a decided one."

[*The God Delusion*, 58-59]

*"Unlike some of his theological colleagues, Bishop Montefiore is not afraid to state that the question of whether God exists is a definite **question of fact.**"*

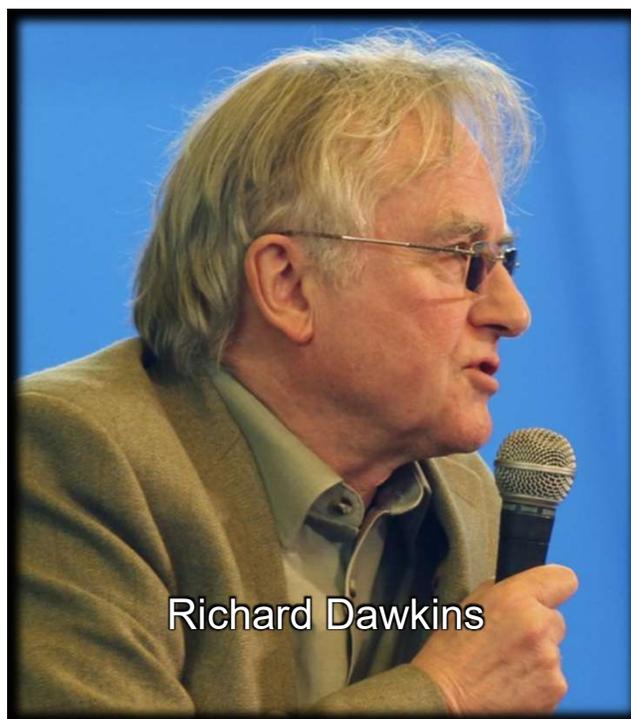
[*The Blind Watchmaker*, 37-38]



Richard Dawkins

The **GOD** Delusion

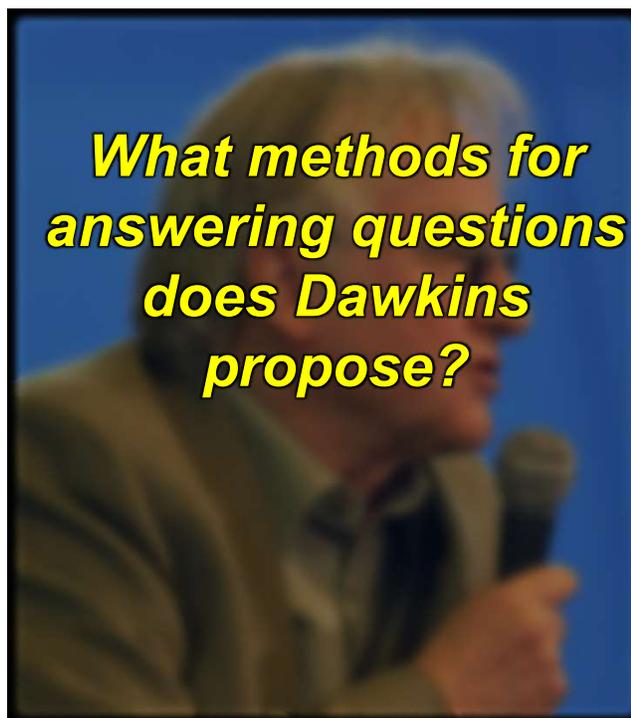
Richard
Dawkins



Richard Dawkins

"There is an answer to every such question [about God and miracles], whether or not we can discover it in practice, and it is a strictly scientific answer. The methods we should use to settle the matter, in the unlikely event that relevant evidence ever became available, would be purely and entirely scientific methods."

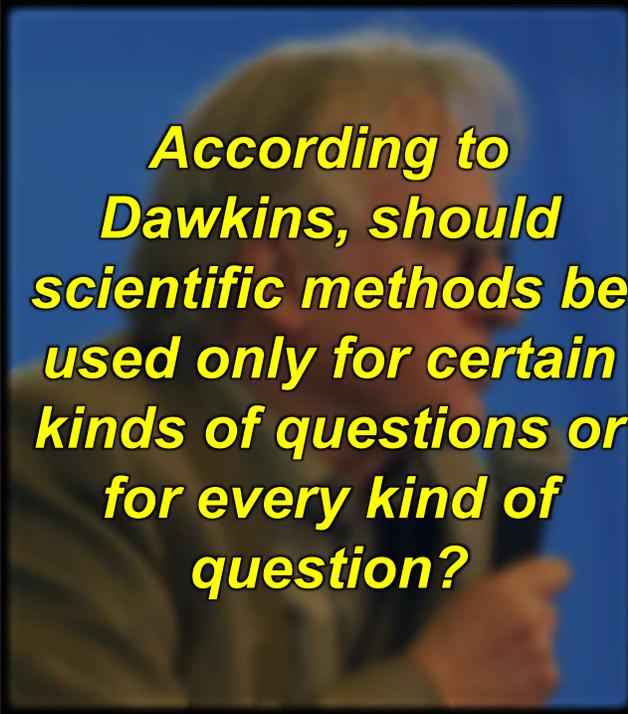
[Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 59.]



What methods for answering questions does Dawkins propose?

"There is an answer to every such question [about God and miracles], whether or not we can discover it in practice, and it is a strictly scientific answer. The methods we should use to settle the matter, in the unlikely event that relevant evidence ever became available, would be **purely and entirely scientific methods.**"

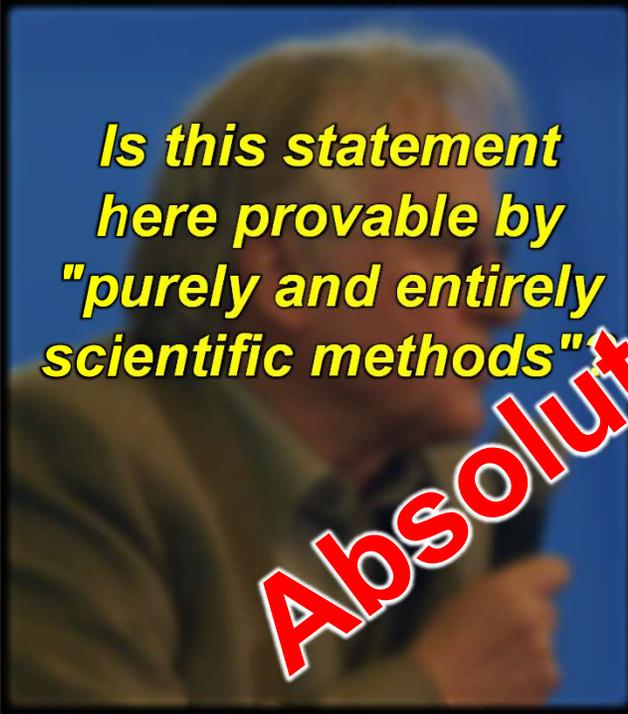
[Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 59.]



According to Dawkins, should scientific methods be used only for certain kinds of questions or for every kind of question?

"There is an answer to every such question [about God and miracles], whether or not we can discover it in practice, and it is a strictly scientific answer. The methods we should use to settle the matter, in the unlikely event that relevant evidence ever became available, would be purely and entirely scientific methods."

[Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 59.]



Is this statement here provable by "purely and entirely scientific methods"?

Absolutely Not!

"There is an answer to every such question [about God and miracles], whether or not we can discover it in practice, and it is a strictly scientific answer. The methods we should use to settle the matter, in the unlikely event that relevant evidence ever became available, would be purely and entirely scientific methods."

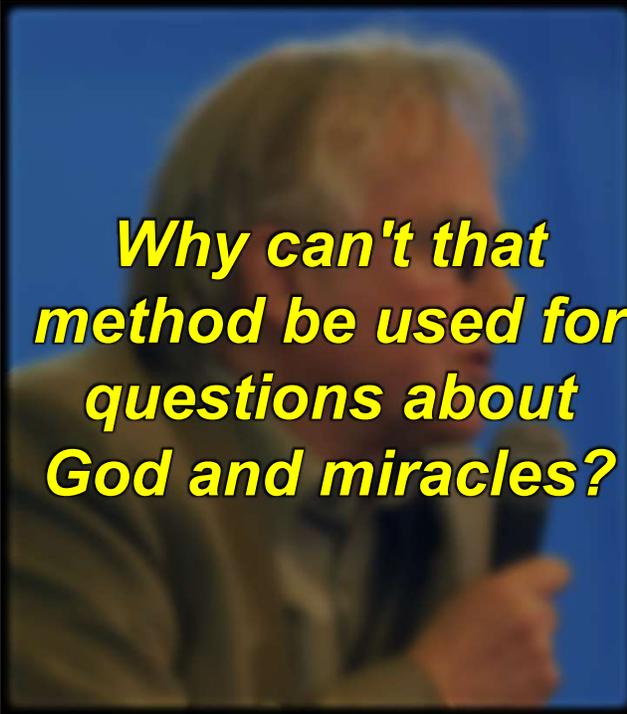
[Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 59.]

Since Dawkins' statement is not provable by "purely and entirely scientific methods," what kind of method must be used?

"There is an answer to every such question [about God and miracles], whether or not we can discover it in practice, and it is a strictly scientific answer. The methods we should use to settle the matter, in the unlikely event that relevant evidence ever became available, would be purely and entirely scientific methods."

[Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 59.]

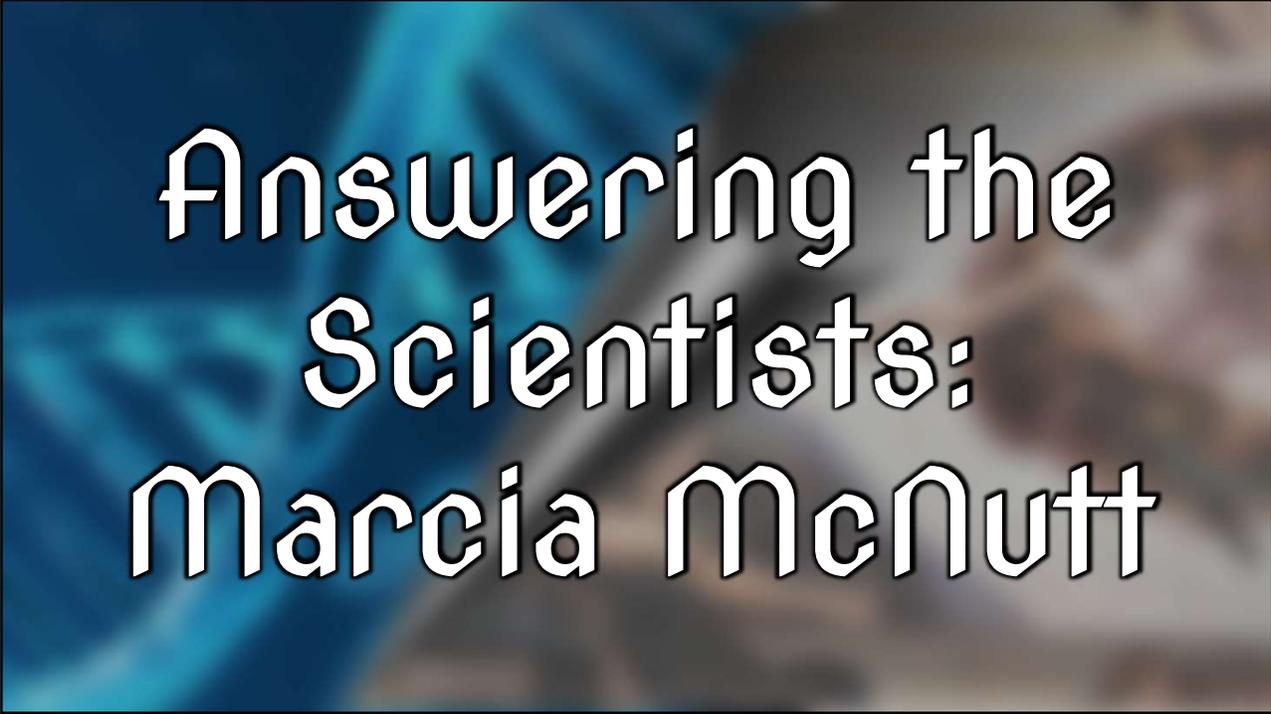
Philosophical Method!



***Why can't that
method be used for
questions about
God and miracles?***

"There is an answer to every such question [about God and miracles], whether or not we can discover it in practice, and it is a strictly scientific answer. The methods we should use to settle the matter, in the unlikely event that relevant evidence ever became available, would be purely and entirely scientific methods."

[Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 59.]



Answering the Scientists: Marcia McNutt

"Science is a method for deciding whether what we choose to believe has a basis in the laws of nature or not."

[In Joel Achenbach, "The Age of Disbelief," *National Geographic* (March 2015): 40]



Marcia McNutt

- Presumably, Marcia McNutt believes her own statement.
- If so, what **scientific method** did she use to decide whether this belief "has a basis in the laws of nature or not"?
- Further, exactly what "**laws of nature**" could possibly be the basis for this belief?

"Science is a method for deciding whether what we choose to believe has a basis in the laws of nature or not."

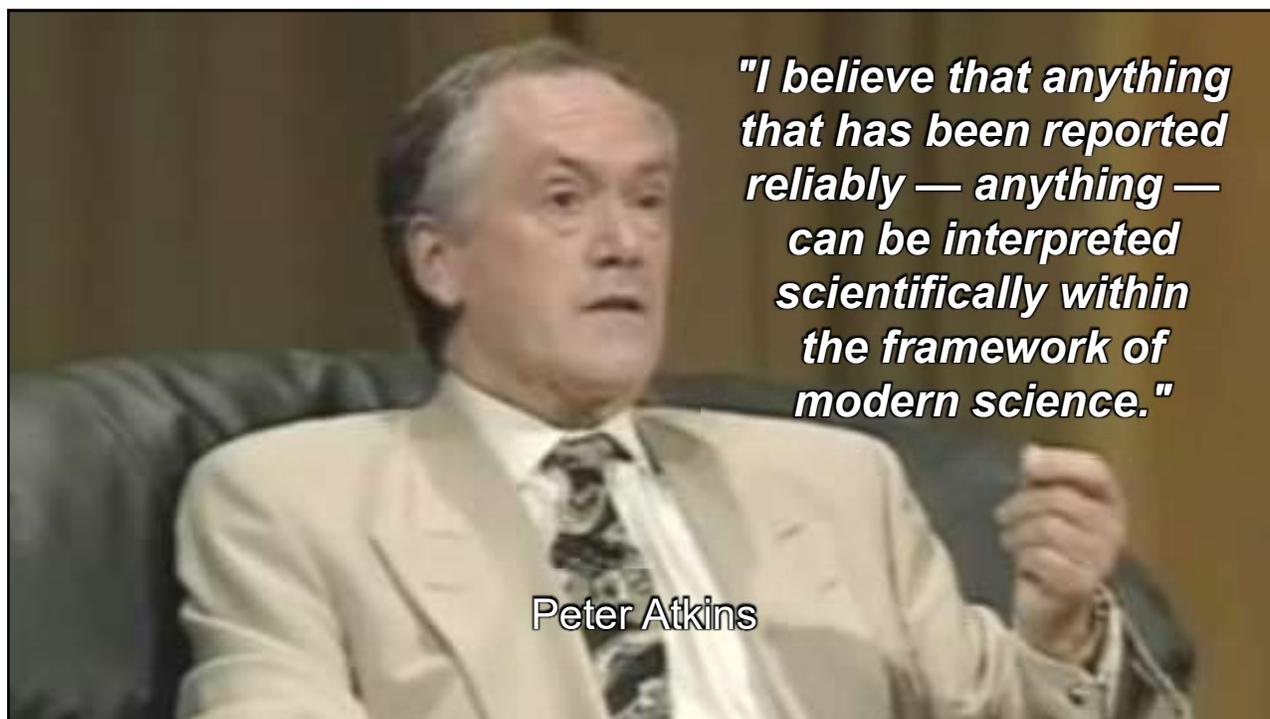
[In Joel Achenbach, "The Age of Disbelief," *National Geographic* (March 2015): 40]



Marcia McNutt

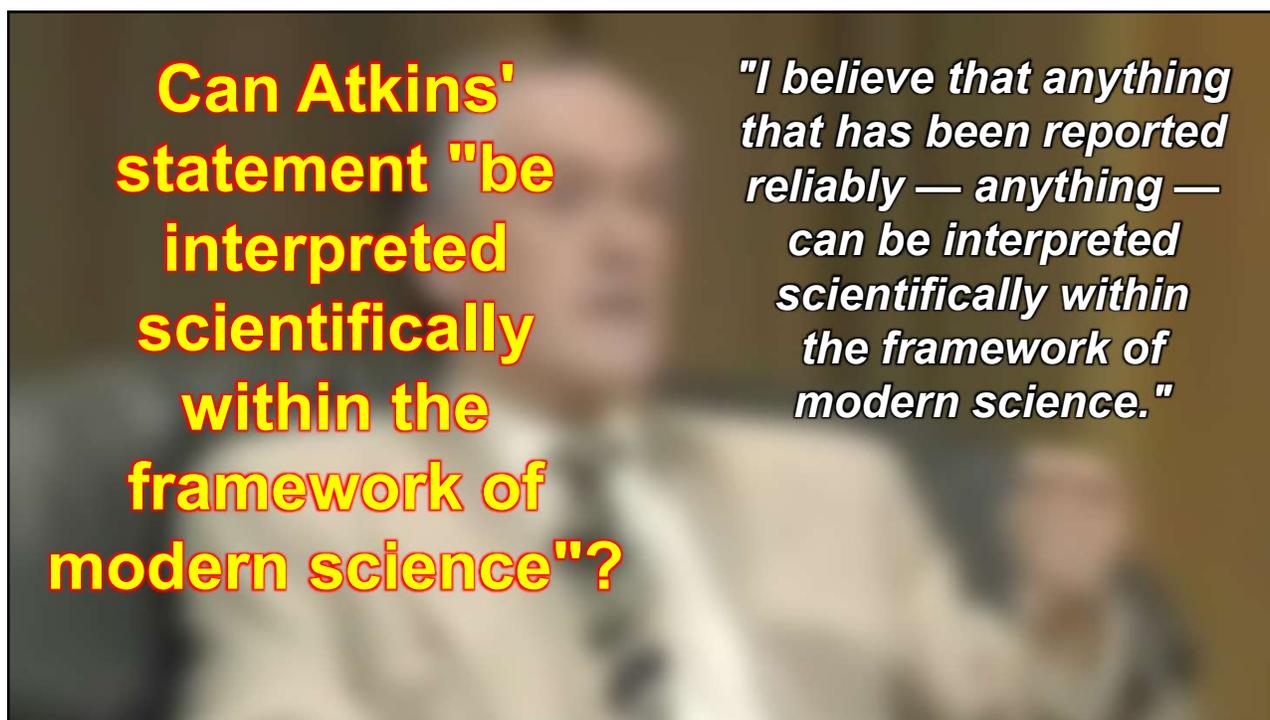
self-refuting statement

Answering the Scientists: Peter Atkins



"I believe that anything that has been reported reliably — anything — can be interpreted scientifically within the framework of modern science."

Peter Atkins



Can Atkins' statement "be interpreted scientifically within the framework of modern science"?

"I believe that anything that has been reported reliably — anything — can be interpreted scientifically within the framework of modern science."

It would seem one could interpret any statement within any framework.

"I believe that anything that has been reported reliably — anything — can be interpreted scientifically within the framework of modern science."

Can Atkins' statement "be CORRECTLY interpreted scientifically within the framework of modern science"?

"I believe that anything that has been reported reliably — anything — can be interpreted scientifically within the framework of modern science."

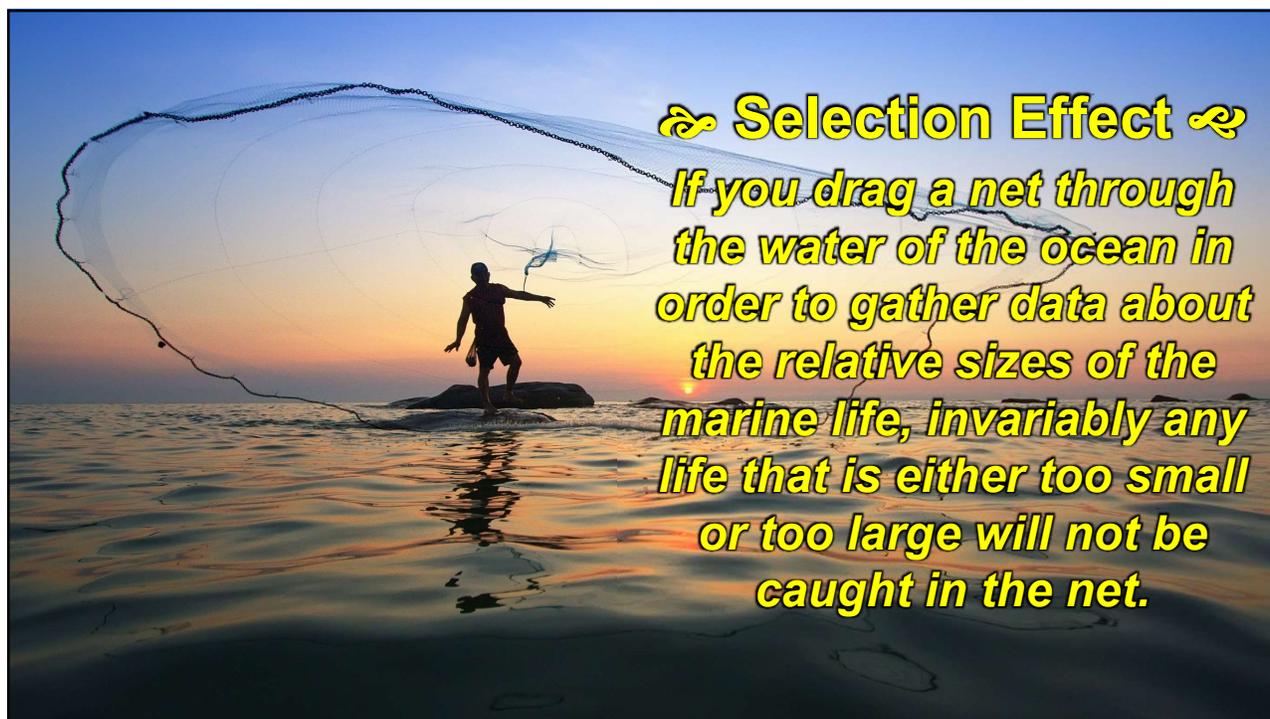


*"How can we understand the world in which we find ourselves? How does the universe behave? What is the nature of reality? Where did all this come from? Did the universe need a creator? ... Traditionally these are questions for philosophy, but **philosophy is dead**. Philosophy has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly physics."*

[Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), 5]

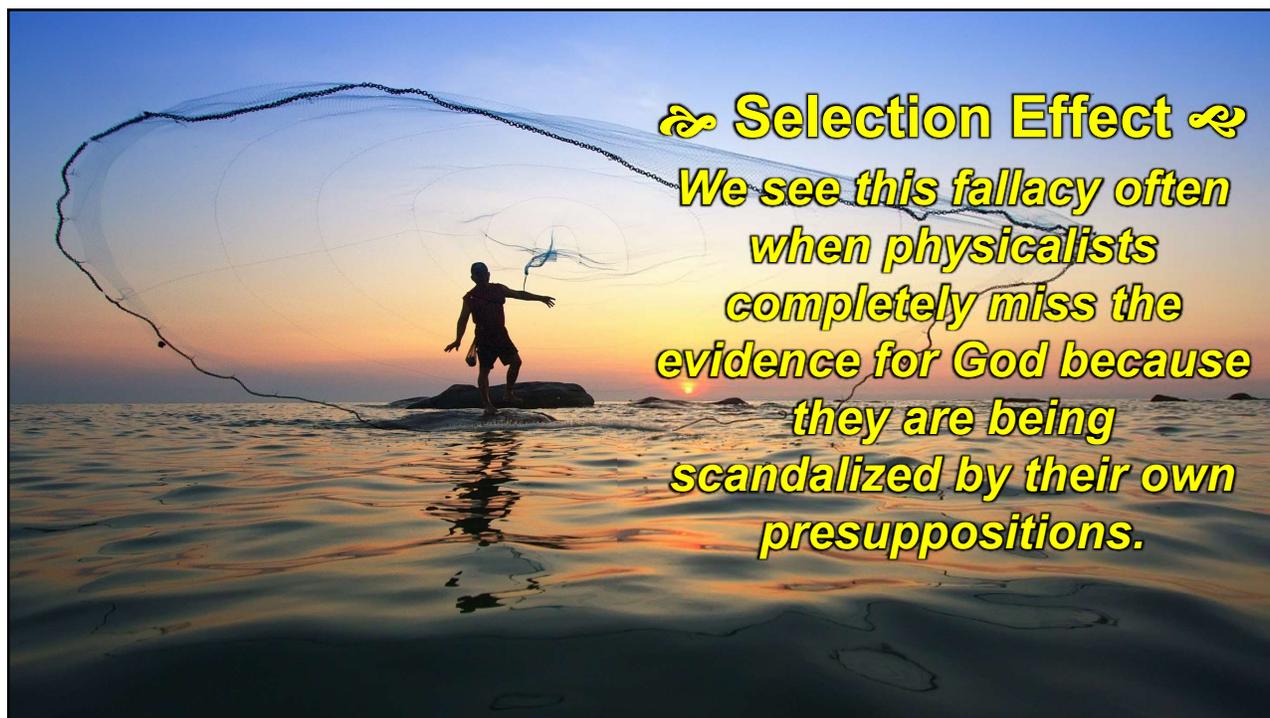






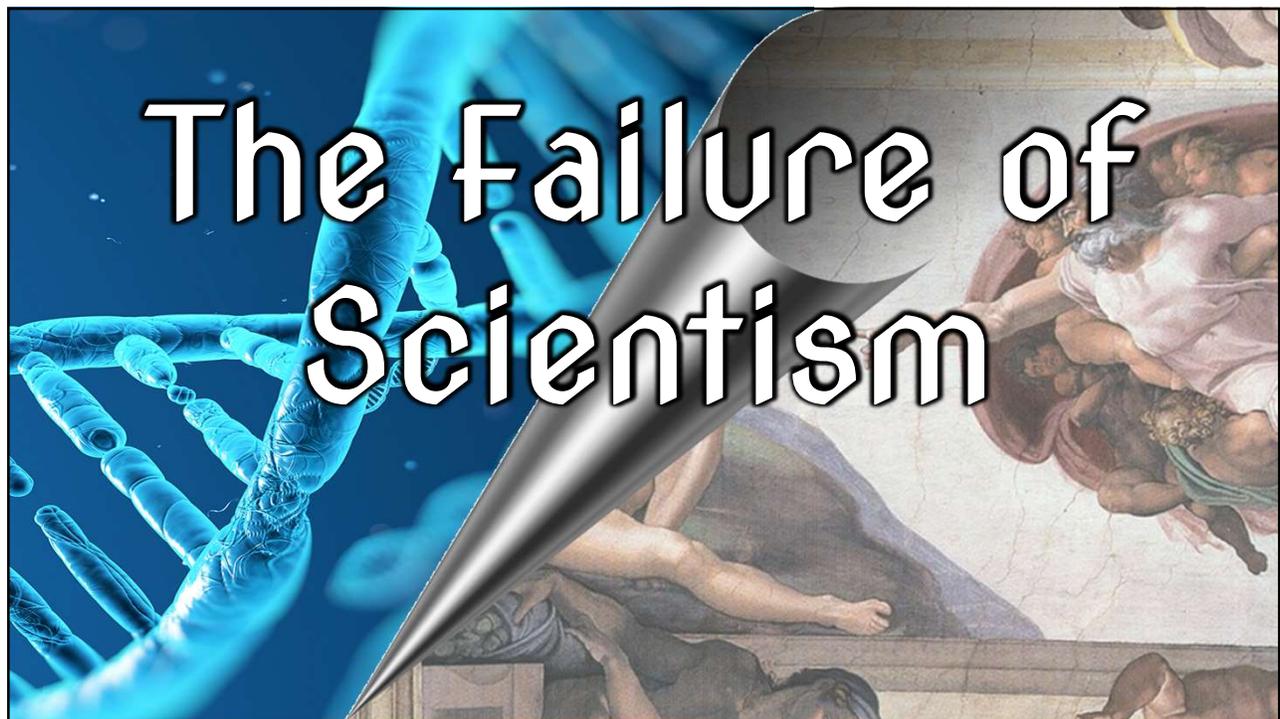
∞ Selection Effect ∞

If you drag a net through the water of the ocean in order to gather data about the relative sizes of the marine life, invariably any life that is either too small or too large will not be caught in the net.



∞ Selection Effect ∞

We see this fallacy often when physicalists completely miss the evidence for God because they are being scandalized by their own presuppositions.



- ❖ *We have seen that one of the fundamental mistakes of scientism is its failure to distinguish questions that are scientific from questions that are philosophical.*
- ❖ *The methods of science (as that term is commonly used today) are limited in their ability to plunge the depths of the nature of reality.*

- ❖ **Contemporary science often seeks to give answers along the contours and categories of mathematics.**
- ❖ **But on the occasion of our encounter with the sensible world around us, the human intellect is able to know truths that are beyond the physical, which is to say, metaphysical truths.**

- ❖ **Examples would be:**

- ✓ **teleology**
- ✓ **four causes: Efficient, Formal, Final, Material**
- ✓ **the distinction between substance and accident**
- ✓ **the distinction between universal and particular**
- ✓ **the distinction between form and matter**
- ✓ **the distinction between act and potency**
- ✓ **the distinction between essence and existence**

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- ✓ the distinction between essence and existence

With these metaphysical truths, the classical philosopher (i.e., the Thomist) can demonstrate the existence and attributes of the God of Classical Theism.