



# **Christian Belief in a Scientific World**

**Dr. Sharon Dirckx**  
**[www.dirckx.org](http://www.dirckx.org)**

# 2015 survey of 'religiously unaffiliated' adults (USA)

**59%** - *'Science and religion are often in conflict'*

**38%** - *'Science and religion are mostly compatible'.*



Pew  
Research  
Center

# 2022 YouGov opinion poll of 5000 UK Adults

**57%** - *'Science and religion are incompatible'*

**30%** - *'Science and religion are compatible'*



The  
**Faraday  
Institute**  
for Science and Religion

**'THEOS**

Understanding faith. Enriching society.



## Stephen Hawking (1942-2018)

*Before we understood science, it was natural to believe that God created the universe, but now science offers a more convincing explanation.*

**El Mundo, 2014**



1) Why did *Christian Belief* give rise to scientific study?

2) What is the current climate?

3) What are some key areas of debate?

4) What does it mean in practice to be a Christian in a scientific world?



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Polytheism – Universe governed by many personal, finite gods - unpredictable



Pantheism – impersonal, infinite deities don't  
create – they just *are*

**Meditation rather  
than experimentation**





# Greek Philosophy – Understand the world by reason alone

**Deduction rather than  
experimentation**



Aristotle (384-322 BC)

Sun orbits Earth (geocentric)



Copernicus (1473-1543)

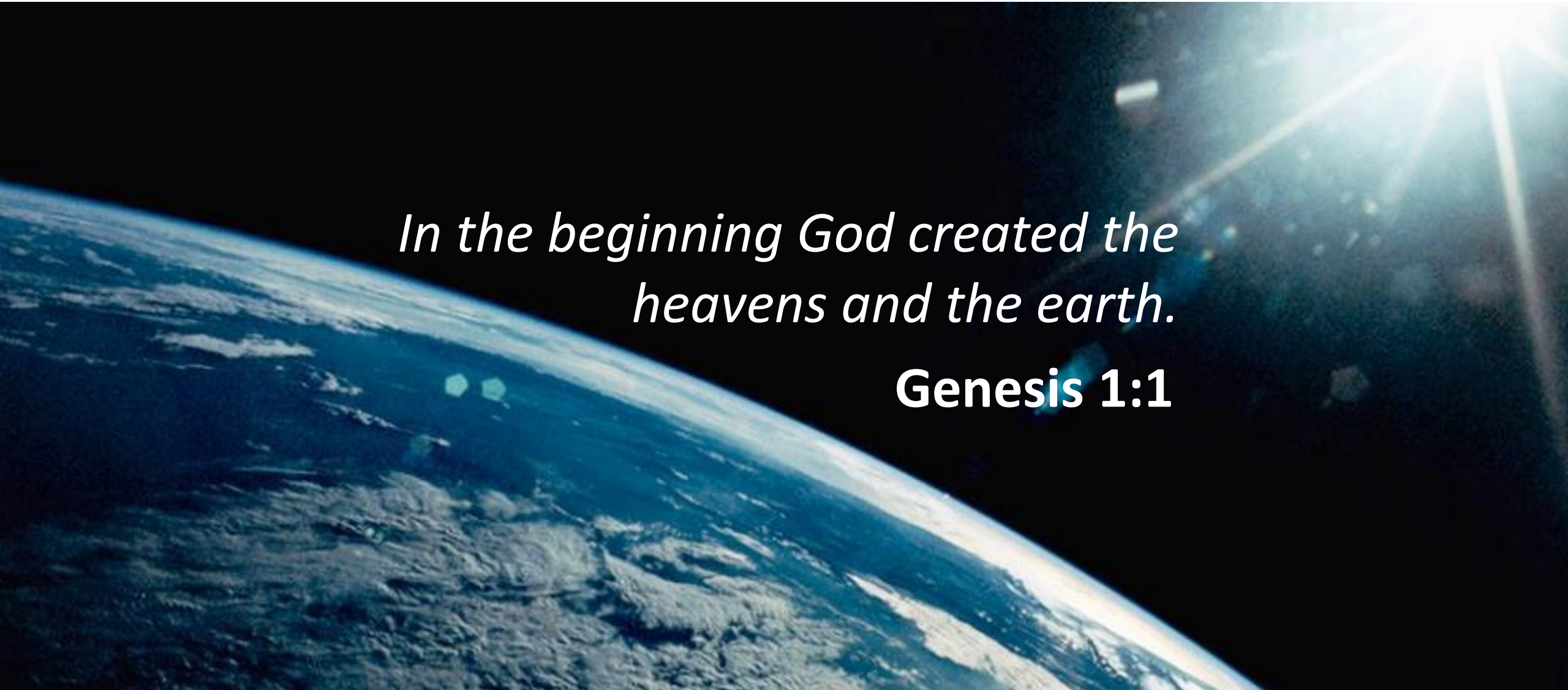
Galileo (1564-1642)

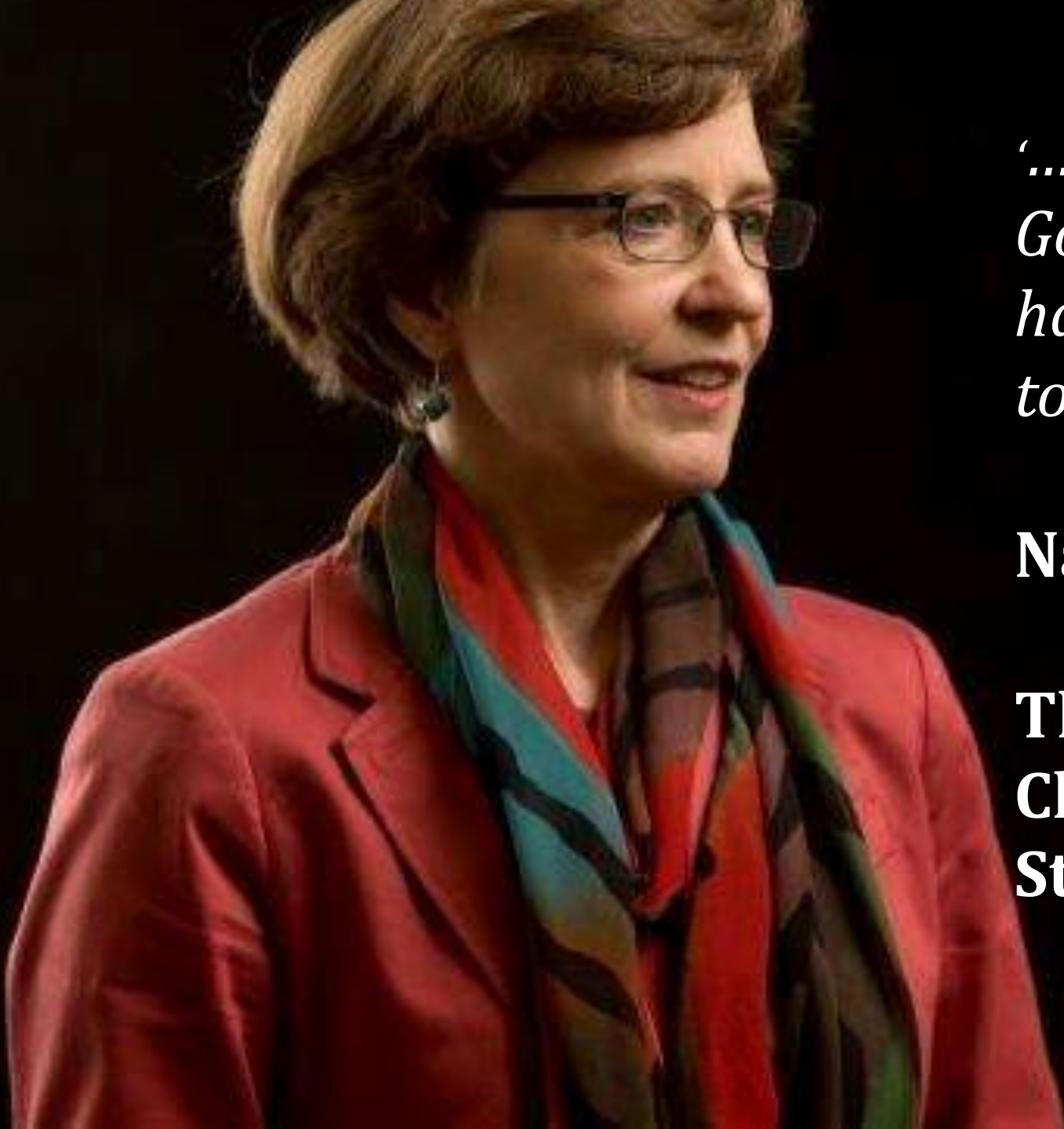
Earth orbits Sun (heliocentric)

# Christian Monotheism – a single divine Being outside of time & space

*In the beginning God created the  
heavens and the earth.*

**Genesis 1:1**





*'....we cannot simply deduce what God must have done; instead, we have to observe and experiment to discover what God in fact did.'*

**Nancey Pearcey**

**The War that Wasn't: Why Christianity Is a Science-Starter**

# **Scientific Endeavour flourished under Christian belief**

**Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) - Planetary Motion**

**Michael Faraday (1791-1867)- Electromagnetic Induction**

**Joseph Lister (1827-1912) – Antiseptic Surgery**

**Robert Boyle (1627-1691) – Chemistry**

**Louis Pasteur (1822-1895) – Pasteurisation**

**Gregor Mendel (1822-1884) – Genetics**

**James Clarke Maxwell (1831-1879)– Physics**

**Professor John Lennox, *Gods Undertaker***



# James Clarke Maxwell (1831-1879)

First Cavendish  
Professor of Physics,  
Cambridge University

*Great are the works of the  
Lord – they are pondered  
by all who delight in them.*

**Psalm 111:2**





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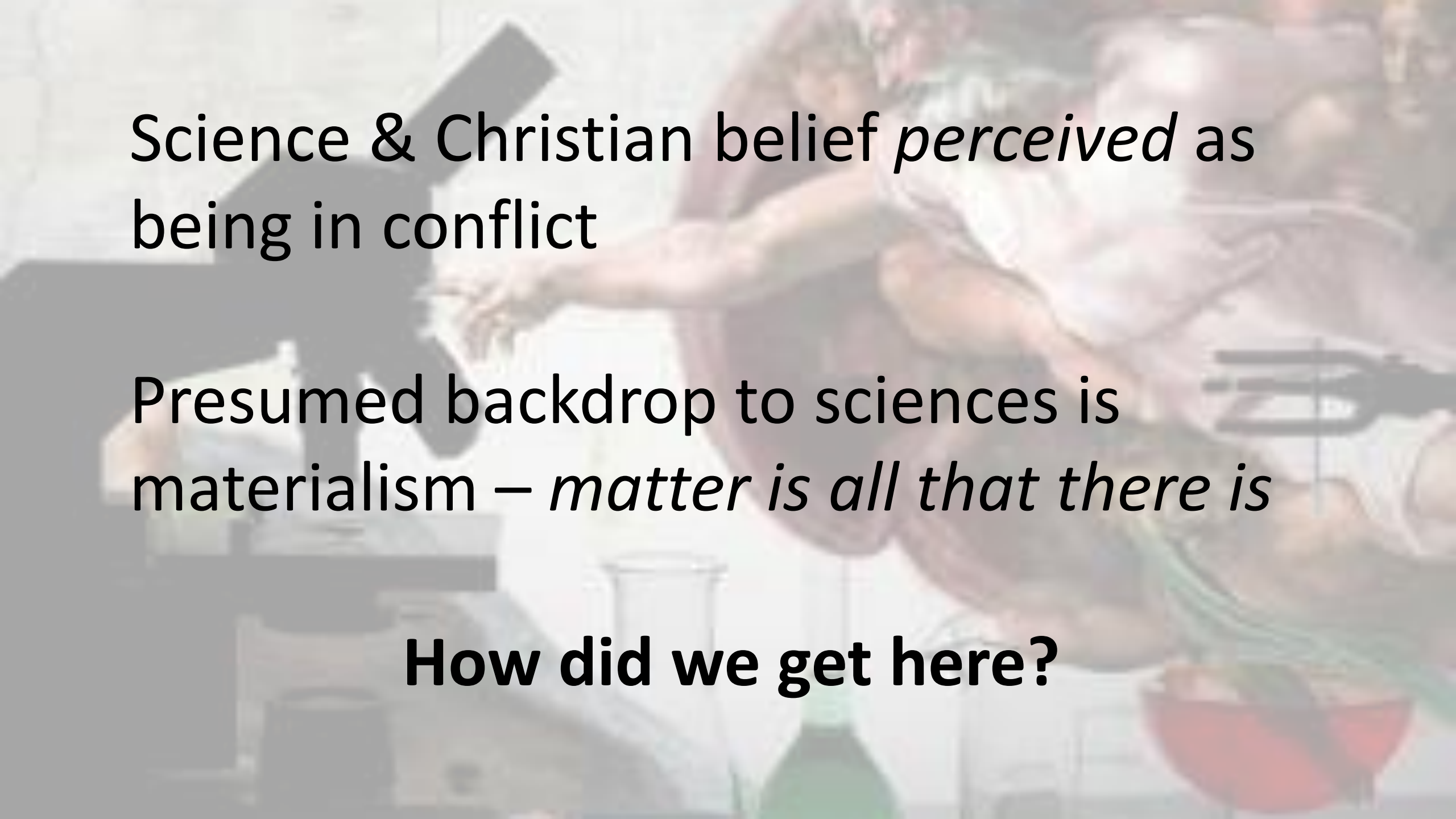


*God is most certainly  
not threatened by  
science. He made it  
all possible.*

**Francis Collins**

Former Director of NIH,  
Human Genome Project,  
COVID-19 Vaccine rollout





Science & Christian belief *perceived* as  
being in conflict

Presumed backdrop to sciences is  
materialism – *matter is all that there is*

**How did we get here?**

# Do we need to choose? *Faulty Dilemmas*

- *Has science displaced God?*  
Science or God?
- *Is faith irrational?*  
'Thinker' or 'person of faith'?
- *Are miracles anti-scientific?*  
Miracles or laws of nature?

# Jeff Bezos? Or Programmes & Processes?



```
def add5(x):  
    return x+5  
  
def dotwrite(ast):  
    nodename = getNodeName()  
    label=symbol.sym_name.get(int(ast[0]),ast[0])  
    print '    %s [label="%s' % (nodename, label),  
    if isinstance(ast[1], str):  
        if ast[1].strip():  
            print '= %s'];' % ast[1]  
    else:
```



**A Faulty Dilemma**



**faith** (*noun*)

**1. complete trust or confidence in someone or something.**

***Everyone has faith in something***

The image shows the interior of a tomb, possibly the tomb of Jesus. A white shroud is draped over a stone slab on the right side. The walls are made of rough, textured stone. An opening in the wall on the left provides a view of a bright outdoor scene with a path leading up a hillside. The text "Miracles – We need 'the natural' to recognize 'the supernatural'" is overlaid on the right side of the image.

**Miracles – We need 'the natural' to recognize 'the supernatural'**

# Mutual Enrichment

The science and religion dialogue...offers us a deeper understanding of things than either religion or science could offer unaided.

**Professor Alister McGrath,  
Science & Religion**



# However – the ‘tide is turning’

## New Atheism is a thing of the past

*“About 15 years ago ..., a ComRes poll found that 42% ... of UK adults agreed that “faith is one of the world’s great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate.” Today, that figure is 20%.”*

## Gen Z (born 1997-2012)

-Opinions on science & God changing



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The  
Big  
Conversa-  
tion

## Biology, Belief & Covid

Premier.  
UnBelievable

*Collins: "I think of God as a mind, not as some grey-haired guy in the sky, which has been an unfortunate image foisted on generations of believers. ....; I think God is a mind that is capable of things that you and I cannot possibly imagine."*

*Dawkins: "If he exists, then that must be what he is, yes."*



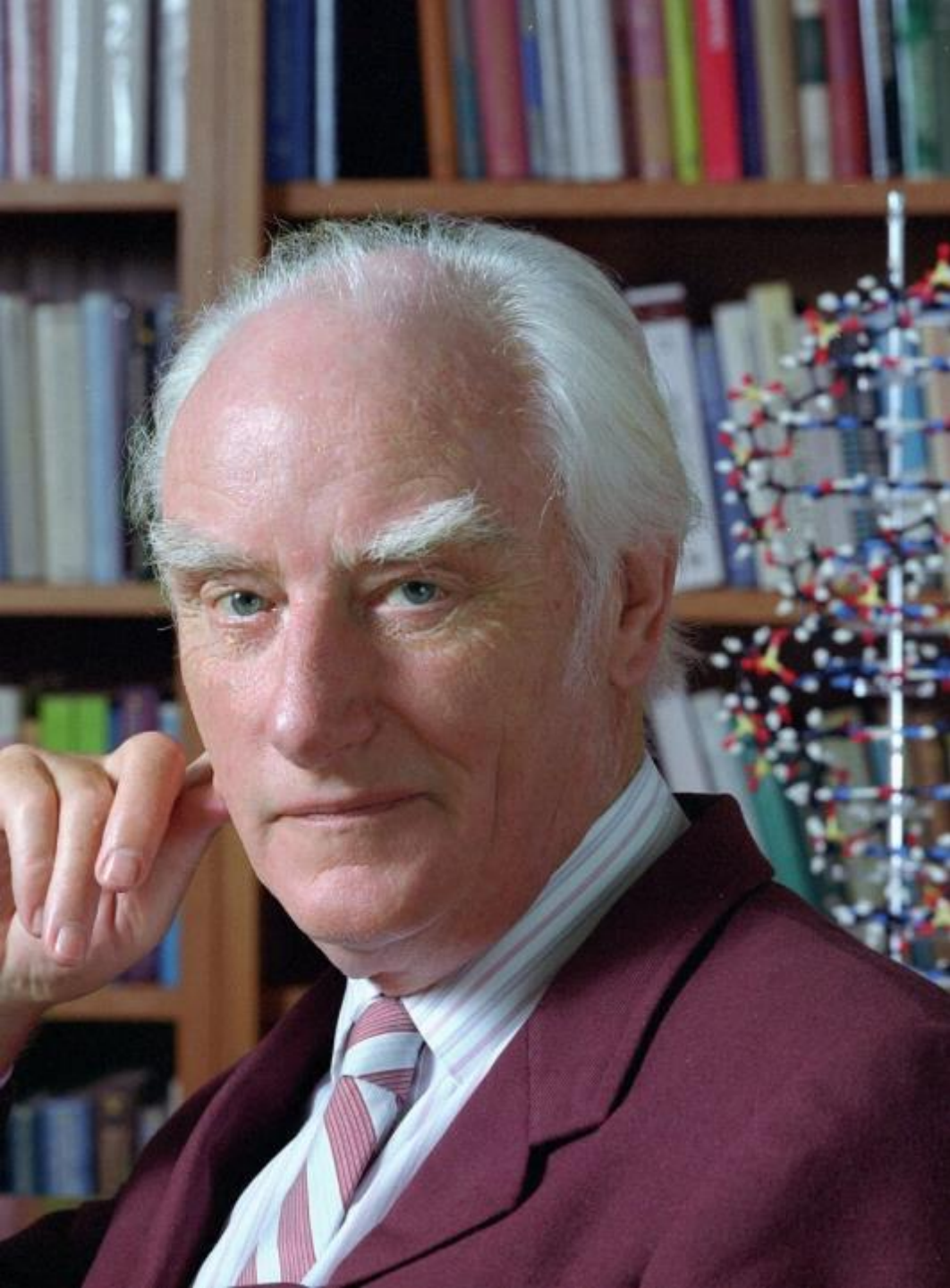


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# Is the mind just matter?

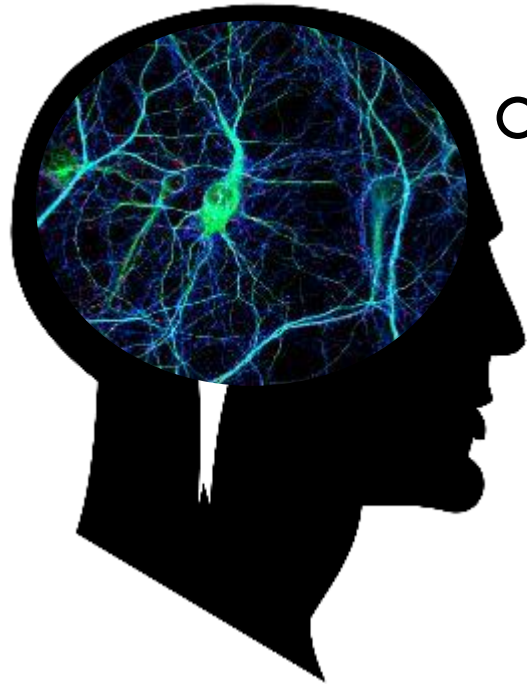
*'You're nothing but a  
pack of neurons'*

**Francis Crick FRS (1916-2004)**

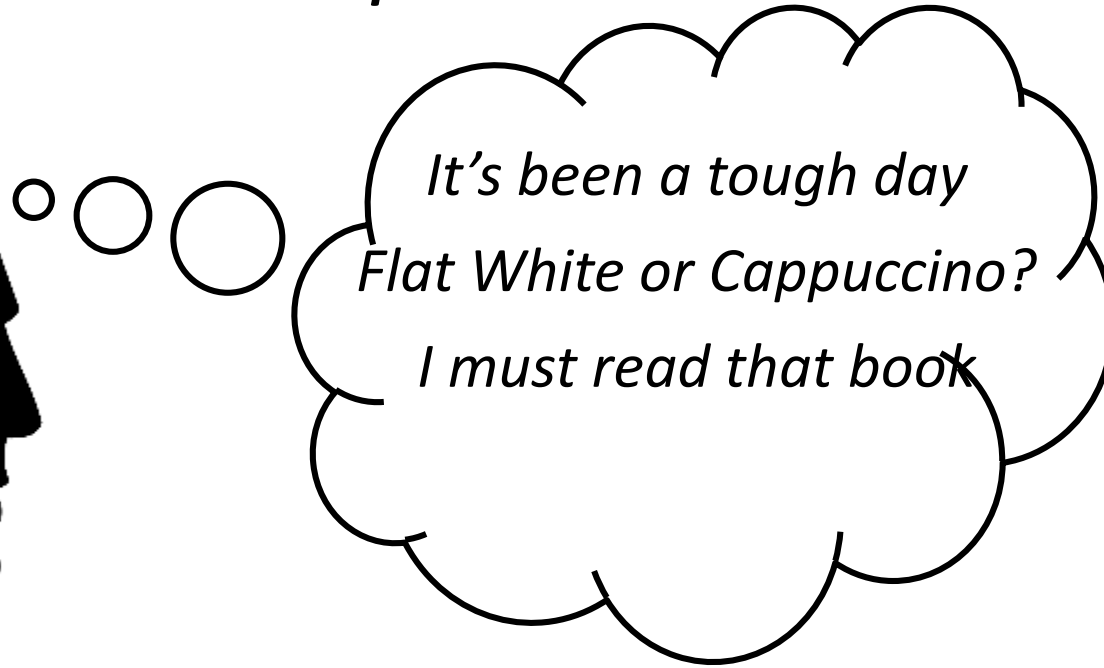
*The Astonishing Hypothesis*

# But how could non-conscious neurons generate a conscious mind?

*The Mind-Brain problem*

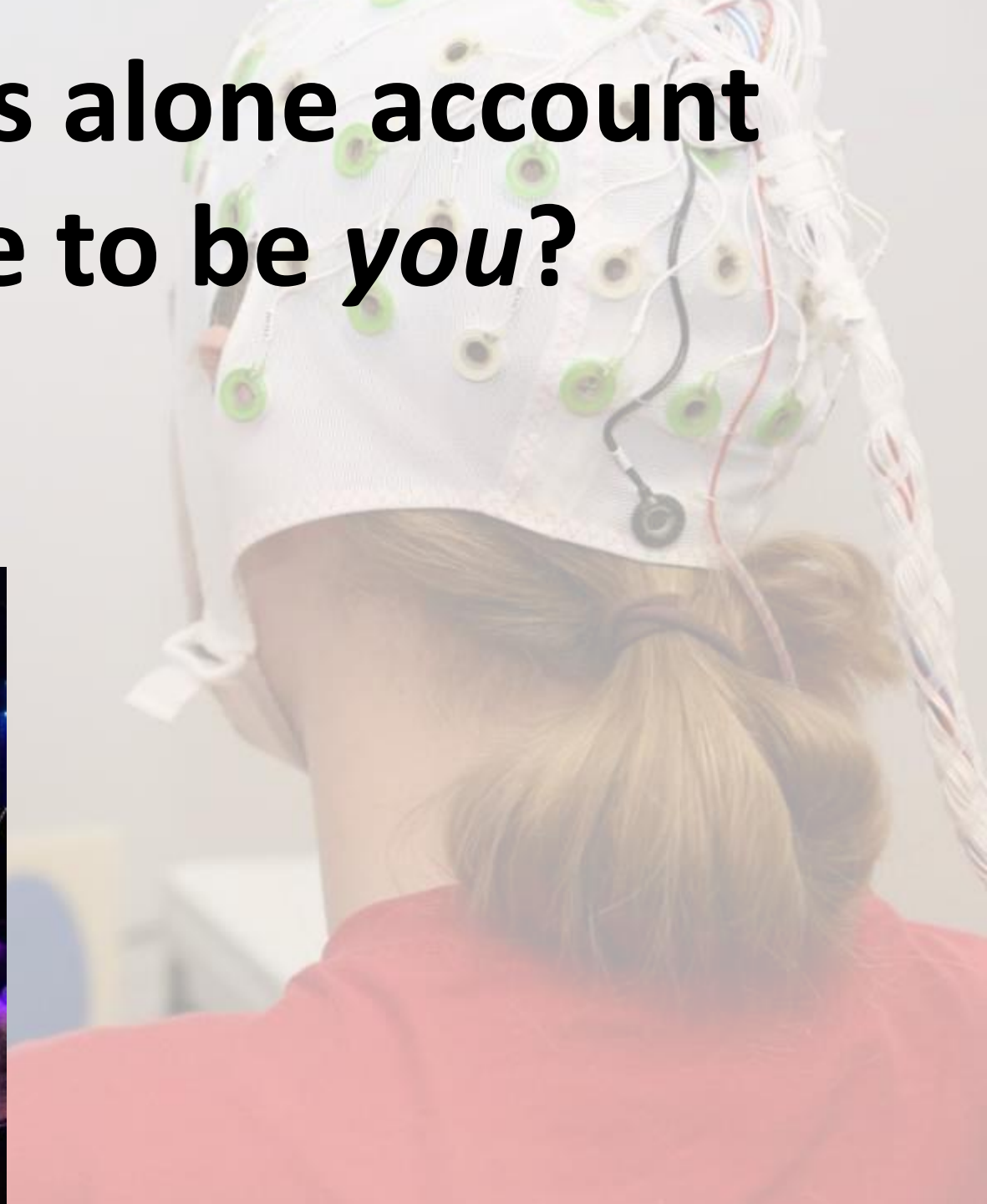


**Brain**



**Mind**

# Can brain processes alone account for what it's like to be *you*?



# Will neuroscience eventually solve human consciousness?

**Christof Koch (Neuroscientist) 1998**  
*'[within 25 years]..researchers would discover a 'clear' neural pattern underlying consciousness'*

**David Chalmers (Philosopher) 2023**  
*'It is clear that things are not 'clear'.*

**25 YEARS OF CONSCIOUSNESS**

# New Scientist

WEEKLY September 3-9, 2016

**BIG CRUNCH**  
Quantum computer set to calculate the impossible

**MIND CONTROL**  
Drugs released by the power of thought

**WATERING HOLES**  
The strange things swimming in elephant footprints

**DO I EXIST?**

**THE METAPHYSICS ISSUE**

How science answers philosophy's deepest questions

**WHY DOES ANYTHING EXIST?**

**WHAT IS CONSCIOUSNESS?**

**WHERE DO GOOD AND EVIL COME FROM?**

**WHAT IS TIME?**

**WHAT IS REALITY?**

**DO I HAVE FREE WILL?**

**WHY AM I HERE?**

**CAN I KNOW IF GOD IS REAL?**

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Science and technology news [www.newscientist.com](http://www.newscientist.com) US jobs in science

# Science VS Scientism

Can the sciences answer life's deepest questions?

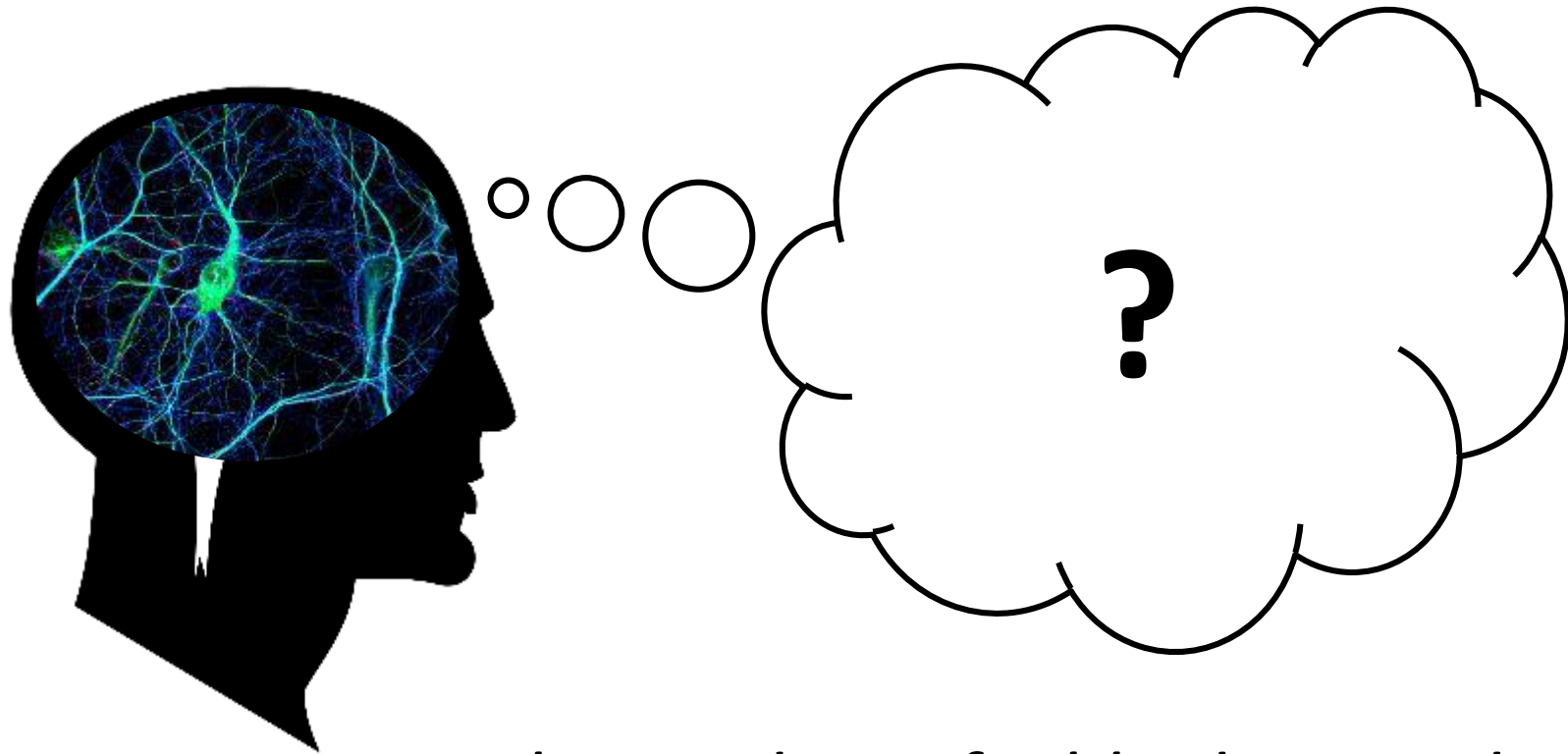


# Philosophy often 'leaks' into science

*'Statements made by scientists are not necessarily statements of science.'*

**Professor John Lennox  
Veritas Forum 2021**

# Materialism undermines the integrity of the very mind used in science



*If I knew my computer was the product of a blind, unguided process,  
would I trust it?*

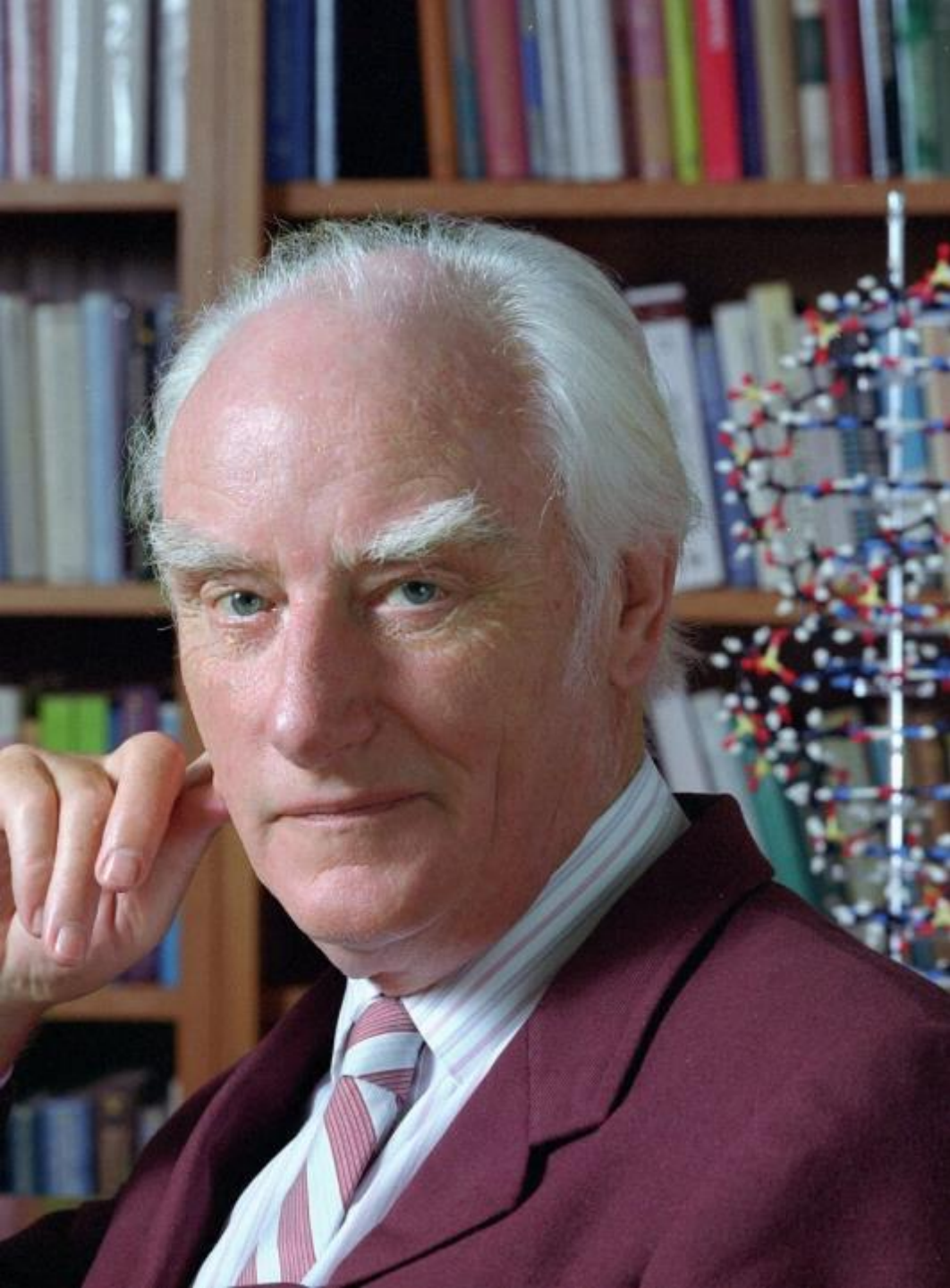
**Professor John Lennox**



# **Why do we have a mind *at all*?**

## **Where do the most persuasive explanations come from?**

- Materialism – Conscious humans from a non-conscious universe?
- Christianity – Conscious community (Trinity) created the universe & human beings?



**If the mind *is* just  
matter....**

**Far-reaching  
implications**



# Erosion of Meaning

Do our thoughts, words and actions come from *us* or from forces beyond our control?

“...if my mental processes are determined wholly by the motions of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose that my beliefs are true. They may be sound chemically, but that does not make them sound logically.”

**Professor J.B.S. Haldane  
(1892-1964) Possible Worlds**



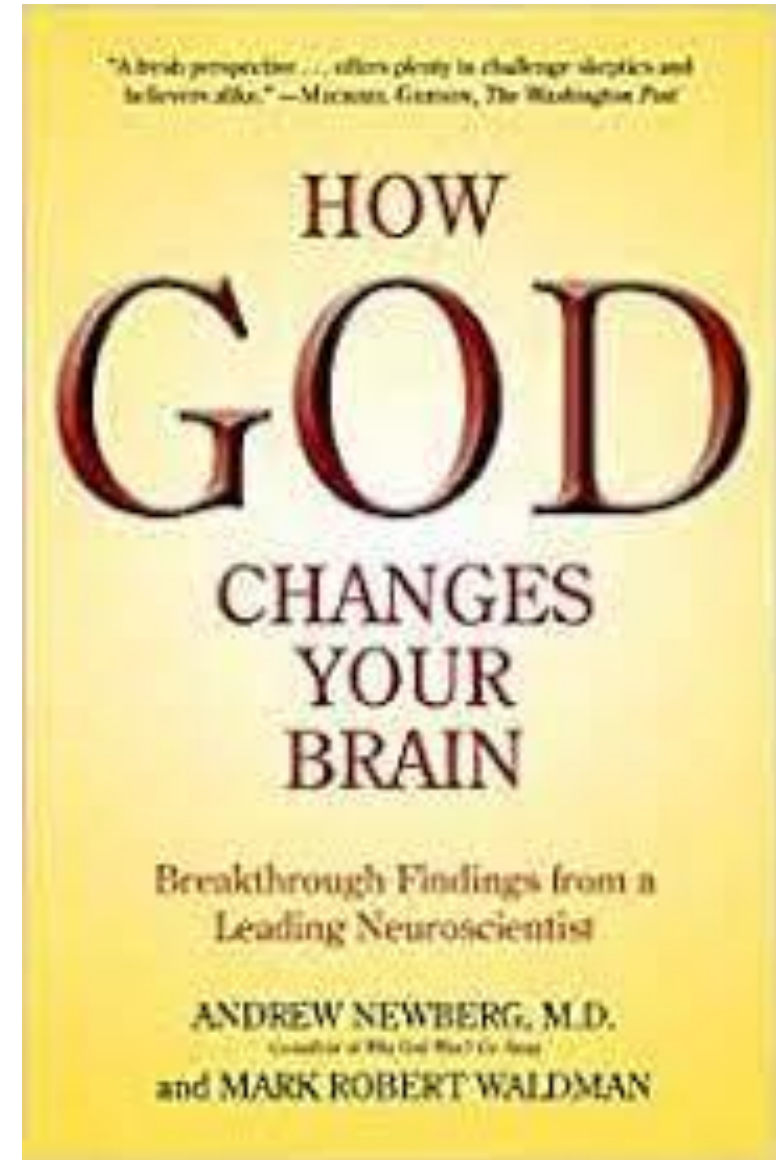
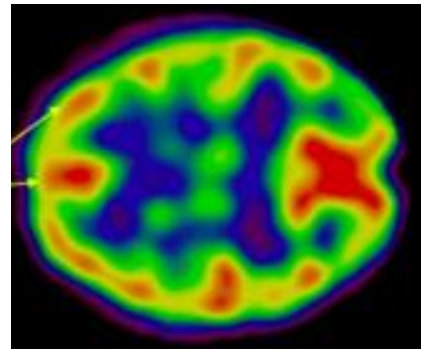
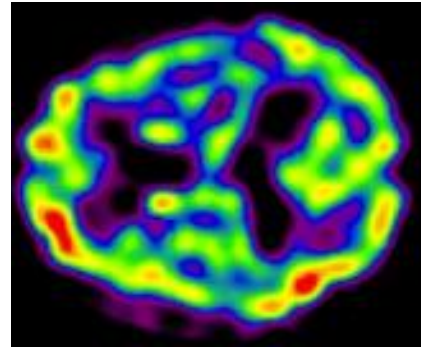
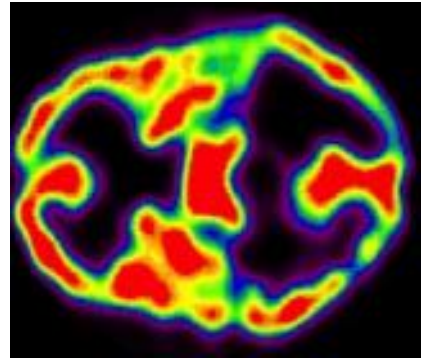
# Undermining of moral responsibility



**Will human  
consciousness one  
day be generated  
artificially?**

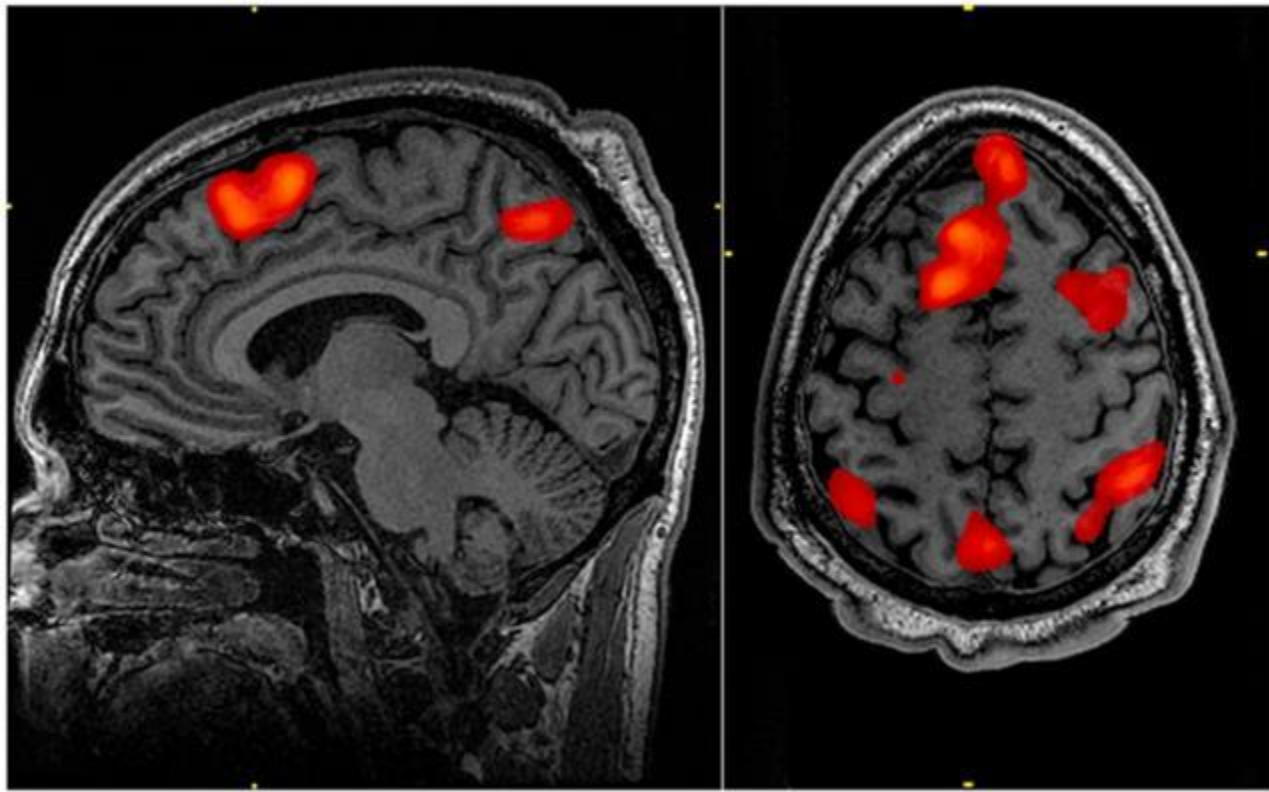


# What happens in the brain when people pray?



*Eg. A. Newberg et al*

# What Goes On in Our Brains When We Are in Love?



*‘Romantic love involves a series of complex changes in the brain’s reward system that make us crave the object of our affection’*

**Scientific American 2017**



# Materialism - segmentation Christianity – holism

## Reality is both physical and spiritual

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.*

**Genesis 1:1-2**

*Then the Lord formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*

**Genesis 2:7**



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# Engage with the scientific world - don't retreat from it

- Some – part of the scientific community
- Some – speaking into the debate
- All – courageous conversations

*Great are the works of the Lord – they are pondered by all who delight in them. Psalm 111:2*