

# Does Methodological Naturalism entail Ontological Naturalism?

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**Does Methodological Naturalism entail  
Ontological Naturalism?**

**Does Science Lead One to Atheism?**

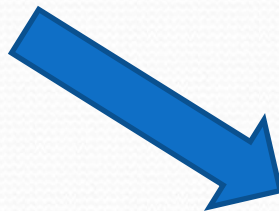
# Naturalism



## Methodological Naturalism

**MN**

We only allow natural explanations in **science**  
- but there could be a supernatural realm



## Ontological Naturalism

**ON**

The natural world is all there is

# History of MN

- **MN developed slowly**  
Supernatural explanations were abandoned and replaced by naturalistic ones (e.g. lightning/thunder)
  - **MN emerged during the Middle Ages**  
Triggered through Christian thinking  
God, the Creator, is distinct from His creation
- 
- **20th Century**  
1986 Paul de Vries (Wheaton College): "**MN**"

# Definition of Science

“Science is a way of knowing that attempts to explain the natural world using **natural** causes ....”

Eugene Scott, National Center for Science Education

“Science by **definition** only deals with the **natural**, the repeatable, that which is governed by law” Michael Ruse, 1982

“The **rigorous attachment to ‘natural’ explanations** is an essential attribute to science by **definition** and by **convention**” Judge Jones, Kitzmiller v. Dover case, 2005

# Today's Views of Naturalism in Science

There are three schools of thought:

1. **MN** is a presupposition in science

Supported by the majority of philosophers, scientists and theologians

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Science does have a bearing on supernatural hypotheses  
(verdict so far has been negative)

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Supported by the majority of philosophers, scientists and theologians

## 2. pMN - Provisional MN (Maarten Boudry):

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## 3. **ON** is a **necessary presupposition** in science

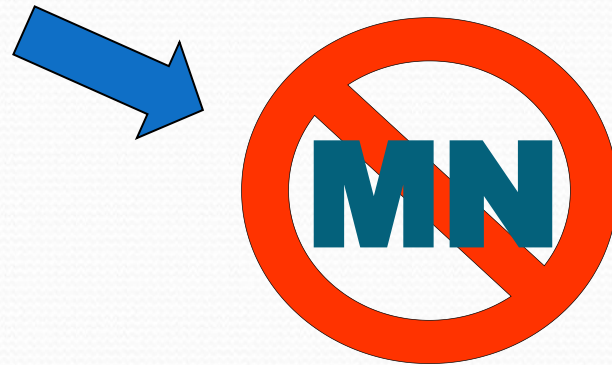
(mainly scientists: Jerry Coyne, Victor Stenger, ....)

"Scientists have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism .... we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door"  
(Richard Lewontin, 1997)



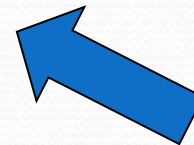
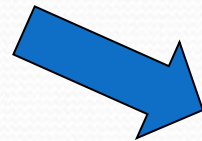
# MN under Attack

Atheist side



# MN under Attack

**Atheist side**



**Religious side**

# Criticisms of MN

MN is taken as a **a priori definition** of science

But science should follow the evidence, wherever it leads

Science is **too narrow** to describe reality (Alvin Plantinga)

➔ We should allow for supernatural explanations

# Answers to Criticisms of MN

MN is taken as a **a priori definition** of science

Science becomes **too narrow**

➔ We should allow for supernatural explanations

## - **Counter-argument: Science stopper**

Once we accept a supernatural explanation, then science comes to a standstill.

E.g.: dark matter, quantum entanglement, abiogenesis

- **'God-of-the-Gaps'**
- **'Functional Integrity'** of nature
- **Universality of science**

# Criticisms of MN → Solution?

→ **pMN** looks like a better solution than MN

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## Problem:

If we accept **pMN** (and therefore supernatural explanations) -  
at what stage do we give up looking for a natural  
explanation? (e.g. origin of life)

How do we distinguish between 'natural' and 'supernatural'?

# **“Definition” of the Supernatural**

- Maarten Boudry’s definition of supernatural:

**“We propose to define ‘supernatural’ as referring to any phenomenon which has its basis in entities and processes that transcend the spatiotemporal realm of impersonal matter and energy described by modern science”**

# “Definition” of the Supernatural

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- **Circular argument!**
- **What do we mean by “modern science”?**



# Natural ↔ Supernatural

- Limited by **space/time**
- Described by the basic **natural sciences**
- Follows **Regularities** (Laws of Nature)
- No **Genuine Design & Purposefulness** (Teleology)

## MN - Attack from Religious Corner

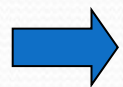
William Dembski:

"We need to realise that MN is the functional equivalent of a full-blown ON .... MN asks us for the sake of science to pretend that nature is self-sufficient ..."

Dembski's solution:

**"Dump MN"**

Only two Alternatives:



**Theistic Science or Atheistic Science**

## MN - Attack from Atheist Side

Richard Dawkins, Steven Weinberg, Jerry Coyne, ....  
Daniel Dennett, Barbara Forrest, Maarten Boudry, ....

"In the past all supernatural explanations have been replaced by natural ones, and we can expect that pattern to continue into the future" (inductive reasoning)

"Science will eventually answer any questions and resolve every problem, given enough time and resources"

 **"Scientism"**

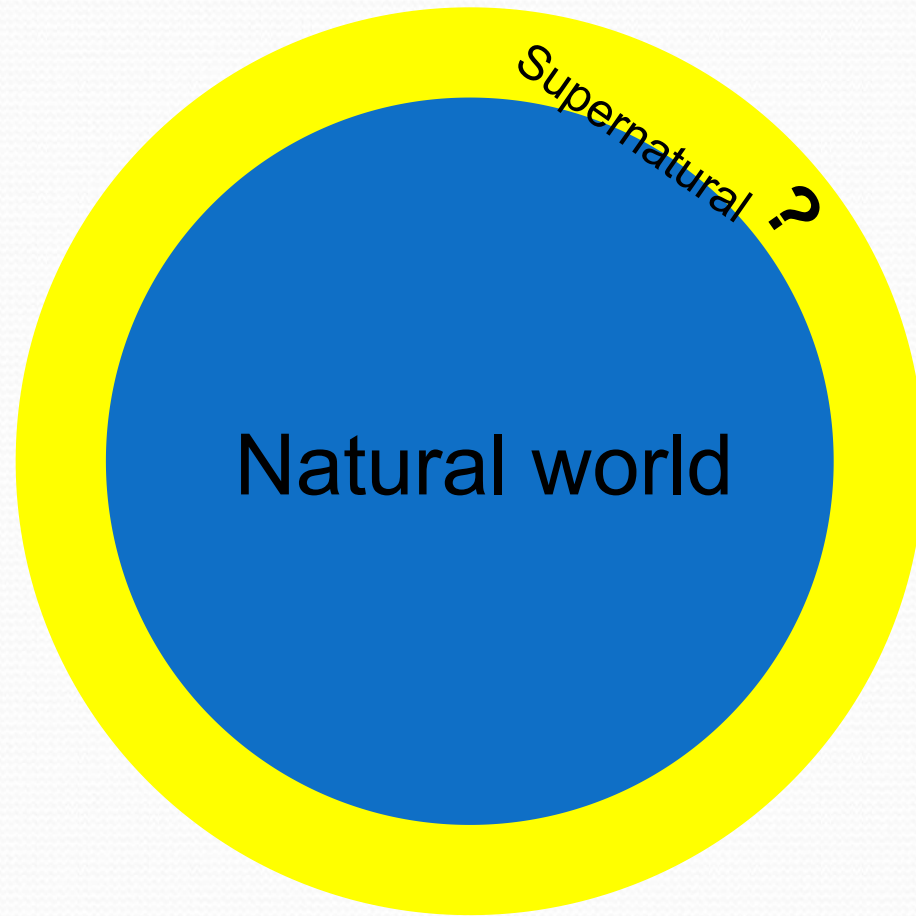
## **MN - Attack from Atheist Side**

**Richard Dawkins:**

“I am attacking God, all gods, anything and everything supernatural, wherever and whenever they have been or will be invented”

The God Delusion (2006), p 36

# MN vs ON



**MN**



**ON**

# Non-Overlapping Magisteria (NOMA)

Stephen Jay Gould, 1997



**Science**

empirical realm

**Religion**

ultimate meaning & value