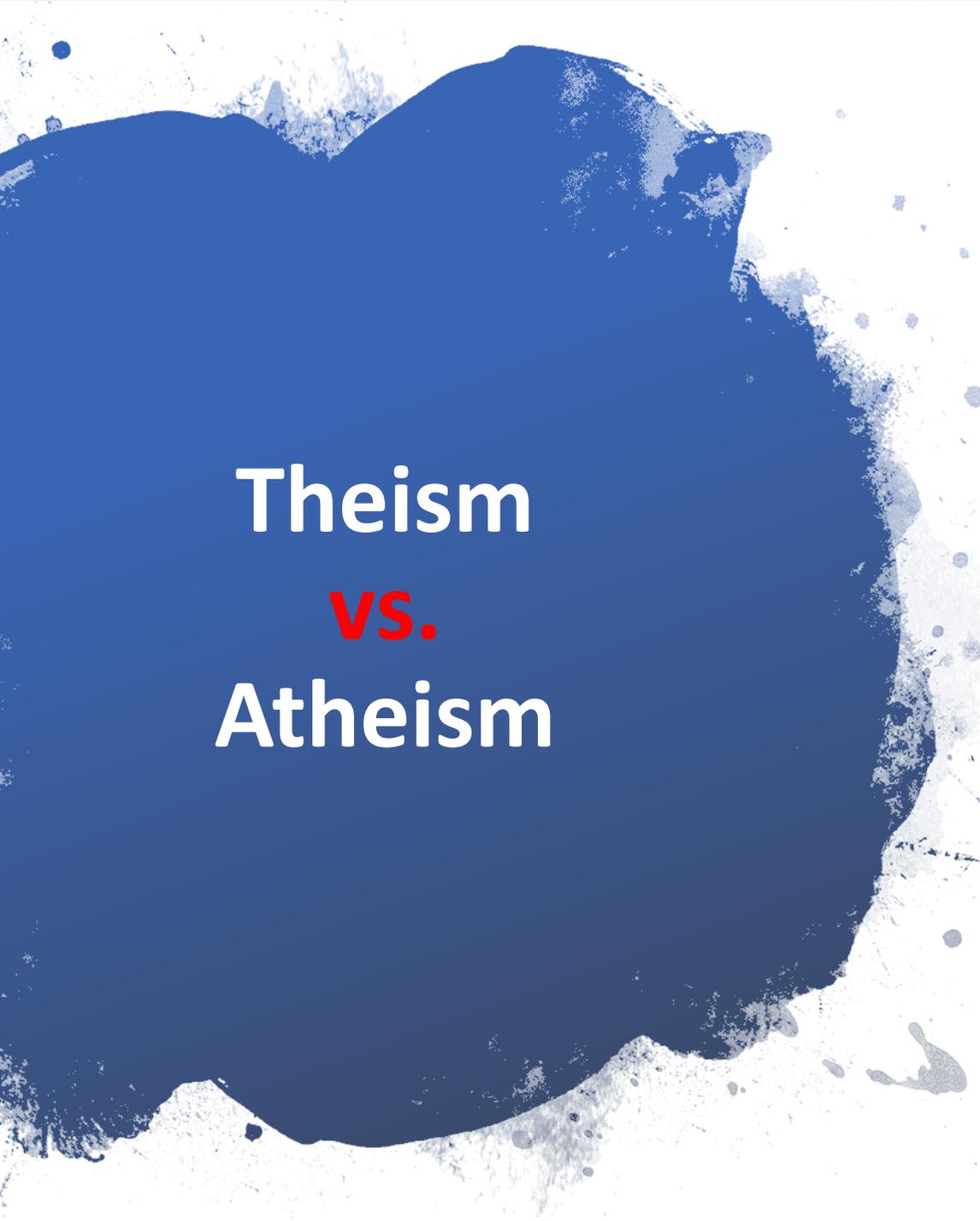


**Thinking Critically About:**

**“Is it Ever Reasonable to Believe  
Miracle Claims?”**



**Theism**  
**vs.**  
**Atheism**

**It might seem that the question of the possibility of reasonable belief in miracles hinges entirely on one's worldview or metaphysical beliefs; for THEISTS belief in miracles is reasonable, but for ATHEISTS belief in miracles is unreasonable.**

- **But the issue is NOT that simple.**



# **Theism** and Miracles

**For example, belief in the existence of God is compatible with DEISM, which asserts that, apart from the act of creation, God never interferes in nature, that God never performs miracles.**

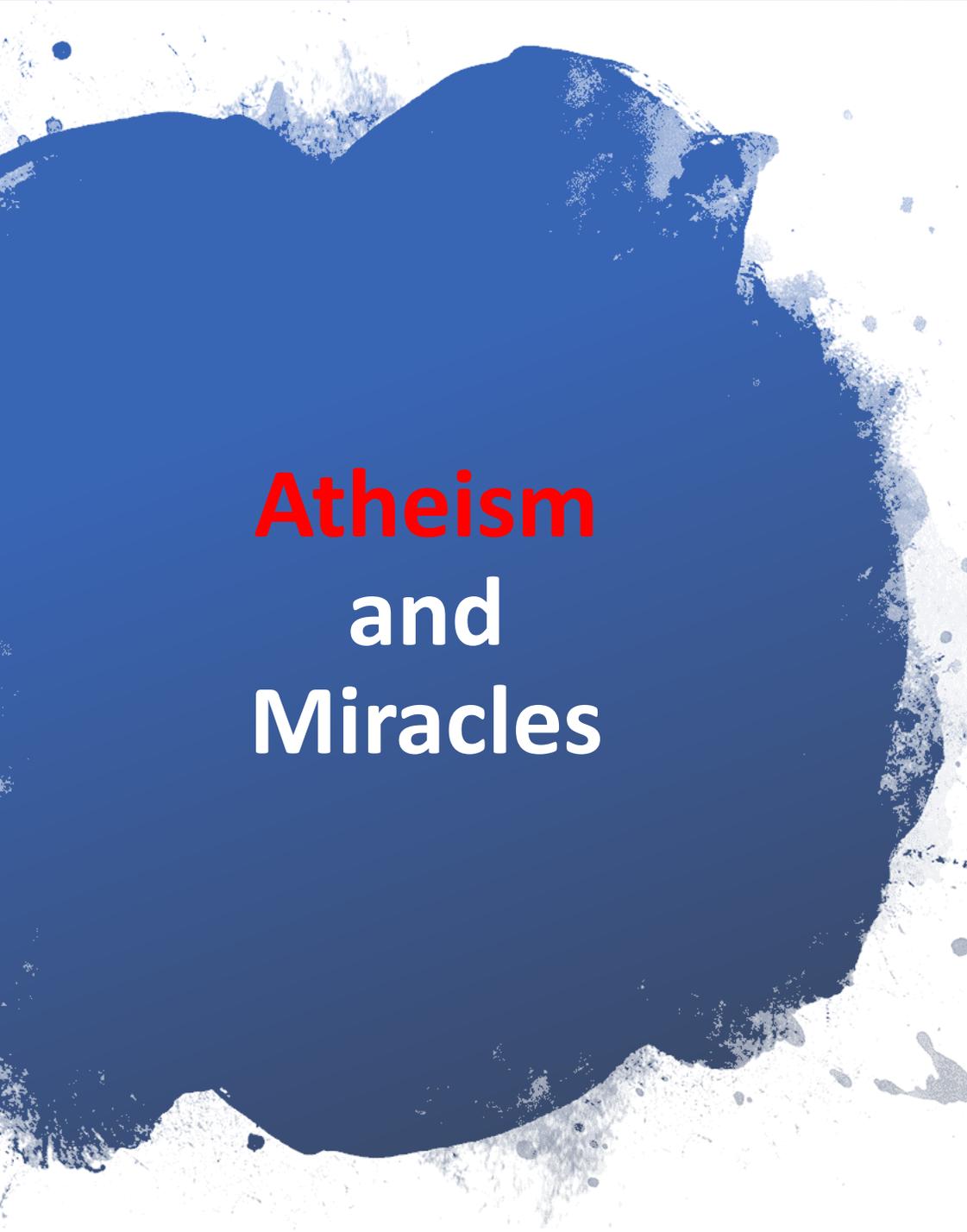
- Furthermore, some Christians and Jews believe that God performed miracles in Biblical times, but that**
- **God has ceased to perform miracles in modern times.**



**A Jewish defense** of the  
view that miracles  
ceased in modern times:

**“In the early days, G-d was like a loving parent, very apparent and obviously looking after us. He spoke to us to give us directions; He intervened by doing miracles to save His children from harm. The wicked were punished immediately, and the righteous rewarded. That was the era of humanity's infancy. ...**

**As humanity developed spiritually, so G-d withdrew His open manifestations in our lives. As a parent allows his child more and more freedom, so G-d removed His open interference in world affairs. ... as time has moved on, G-d is just as present as before, pulling the strings of history and human destiny this way and that, but not in such an obvious and obtrusive way as through a miracle.”**



# **Atheism** and Miracles

Although ATHEISM rules out the possibility of “miracles” understood as *events caused by God*, it does NOT rule out events that are *supernatural* or that involve violations of the laws of nature.

Even if there is no God, there could still be *supernatural healings* or *supernatural rescues* by angels, or by finite and imperfect gods, or by wizards or witches, or by humans with supernatural powers.



# Naturalism and Miracles

Although ATHEISM does NOT rule out *supernatural healings* and *supernatural rescues*, NATURALISM does rule out such events.

If NATURALISM is true, then not only is there no God, but there are no angels, no demons, no spirits, no ghosts, no finite gods, no magical powers, and no supernatural forces or powers of any sort.

- Because miracles imply the existence of *supernatural beings* or *supernatural forces*, NATURALISM rules out miracles.

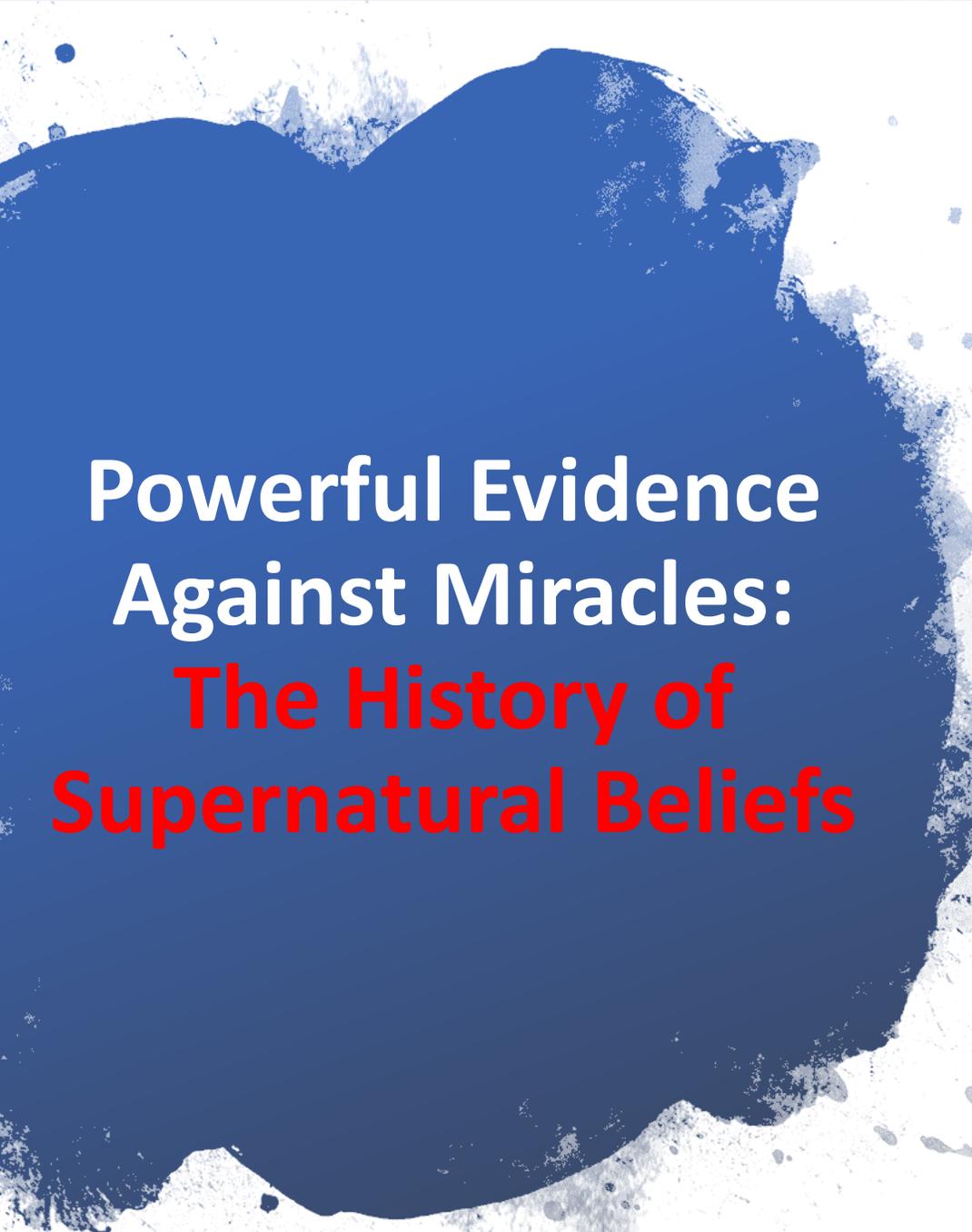


# Powerful Evidence Against Miracles: Science + History

Hume's main point about miracle claims is that because they involve a supposed violation of a law of nature, they always face *strong contrary evidence*, namely the powerful **SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE** supporting the relevant law of nature. But there is a second kind of evidence that bolsters this primary evidence against miracle claims.

**HISTORICALLY**, people have made and believed countless **SUPERNATURAL** claims, in virtually every culture and nation for thousands of years, yet such claims are inevitably either shown to be false or fail to be established on solid factual evidence (setting aside *Christian* supernatural beliefs).

**The combination of these two different kinds of evidence provides us with a very powerful general reason to reject miracle claims.**



**Powerful Evidence  
Against Miracles:  
The History of  
Supernatural Beliefs**

### **ALCHEMY**

- Chrysopoeia (turning lead into gold)
- Panaceas (cure-all that heals all diseases)
- Elixir of immortality (a potion that grants the drinker eternal life and/or eternal youth)

### **ASTROLOGY**

- Personality determined by position of stars
- Prediction of events based on position of stars

### **SPIRITUALISM**

- Ghosts/haunted houses
- Mediums/Seances

### **ESP**

- Telepathy/mind readers
- Clairvoyance/remote viewing
- Precognition/psychics
- Psychokinesis/spoon bending/levitation



# Powerful Evidence Against Miracles: **ASTROLOGY**

"**Astrology** is the study of the movements and relative positions of celestial objects as a means for divining information about human affairs and terrestrial events. Astrology has been dated to at least the 2nd millennium BCE,.... Many cultures have attached importance to astronomical events, and some – such as the Indians, Chinese, and Maya – developed elaborate systems for predicting terrestrial events from celestial observations. Western astrology ... can trace its roots to 19th–17th century BCE Mesopotamia, from which it spread to Ancient Greece, Rome, the Arab world and eventually Central and Western Europe."

Astrology - Wikipedia

# Powerful Evidence Against Miracles: **ASTROLOGY**

"During the 20th century and following the wide-scale adoption of the scientific method, astrology has been challenged successfully on both theoretical and experimental grounds, and has been shown to have no scientific validity or explanatory power. Astrology thus lost its academic and theoretical standing, and common belief in it has largely declined. ... astrology is now recognized as pseudoscience."

Astrology - Wikipedia

# Supernaturalism Dilemma

Is there GOOD REASON to believe in supernatural beings or powers other than God and God's powers?

YES

## ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

There is GOOD REASON to believe that supernatural events can be caused by supernatural beings (other than God) or by humans with supernatural powers.

We should be SKEPTICAL about belief in GOD and MIRACLES.

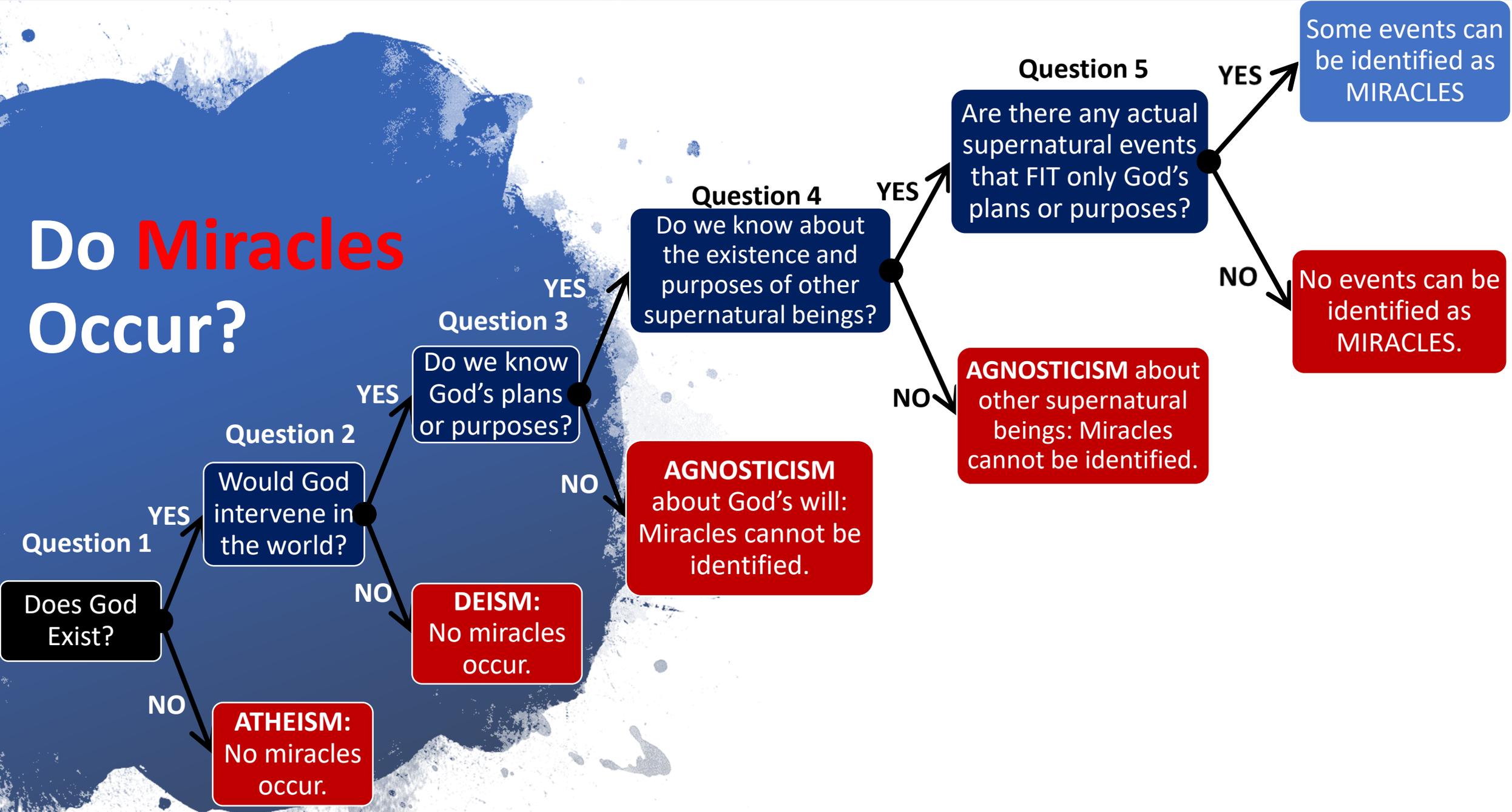
NO

## CYNICISM IS TRUE

Millions of people have believed in supernatural beings or powers for many centuries even though there is NO GOOD REASON for such beliefs.

We should be SKEPTICAL about belief in GOD and MIRACLES.

# Do Miracles Occur?



# Circularity Problem

We know the **Bible was inspired** by God because we can **identify miracles** that prove the inspiration of the Bible.

We can **identify miracles** because we know about **God's plans or purposes**.

We know about **God's plans or purposes** because we know the **Bible was inspired** by God.

Do **miracles**  
occur?

## Atheist Argument Against Miracles

1. Miracles occur only if God exists.
2. It is NOT the case that God exists.

**THEREFORE:**

3. It is NOT the case that miracles occur.

Do **miracles**  
occur?

## Naturalist Argument Against Miracles

1. Miracles occur only if beings with *supernatural powers* exist.
2. It is NOT the case that beings with *supernatural powers* exist.

**THEREFORE:**

3. It is NOT the case that miracles occur.

# Summary of Key Points

- My metaphysical beliefs (atheism & naturalism) are based in part on my philosophical approach (cynicism & skepticism).
- Human beings are generally gullible, superstitious, dishonest, and self-deceived (cynicism).
- If atheism or deism is true, then there are no miracles.
- If we don't know God's purposes or we don't know about the existence and purposes of other supernatural beings, then we cannot identify any events as miracles.
- The scientific evidence for natural laws combined with the historical evidence of the dubious character of supernatural claims provides a powerful reason to reject miracle claims.
- If there is good evidence for supernatural phenomena, then we ought to be skeptical about miracle claims (alternative explanations available). If there is NOT good evidence for supernatural phenomena, then we ought to be skeptical about miracle claims (cynicism is true).
- The occurrence of miracles is the main evidence for the divine inspiration of the Bible, but belief in the divine inspiration of the Bible is needed in order to establish that any miracle has occurred, so showing that a miracle has occurred involves Circular Reasoning, which is illogical and unreasonable.