

# Evidence Lower Bound

for model selection in high-dimensional Bayesian Inference

How does data challenge our models?

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PhD candidate  
Information field theory group  
Supervisor: Torsten Enßlin

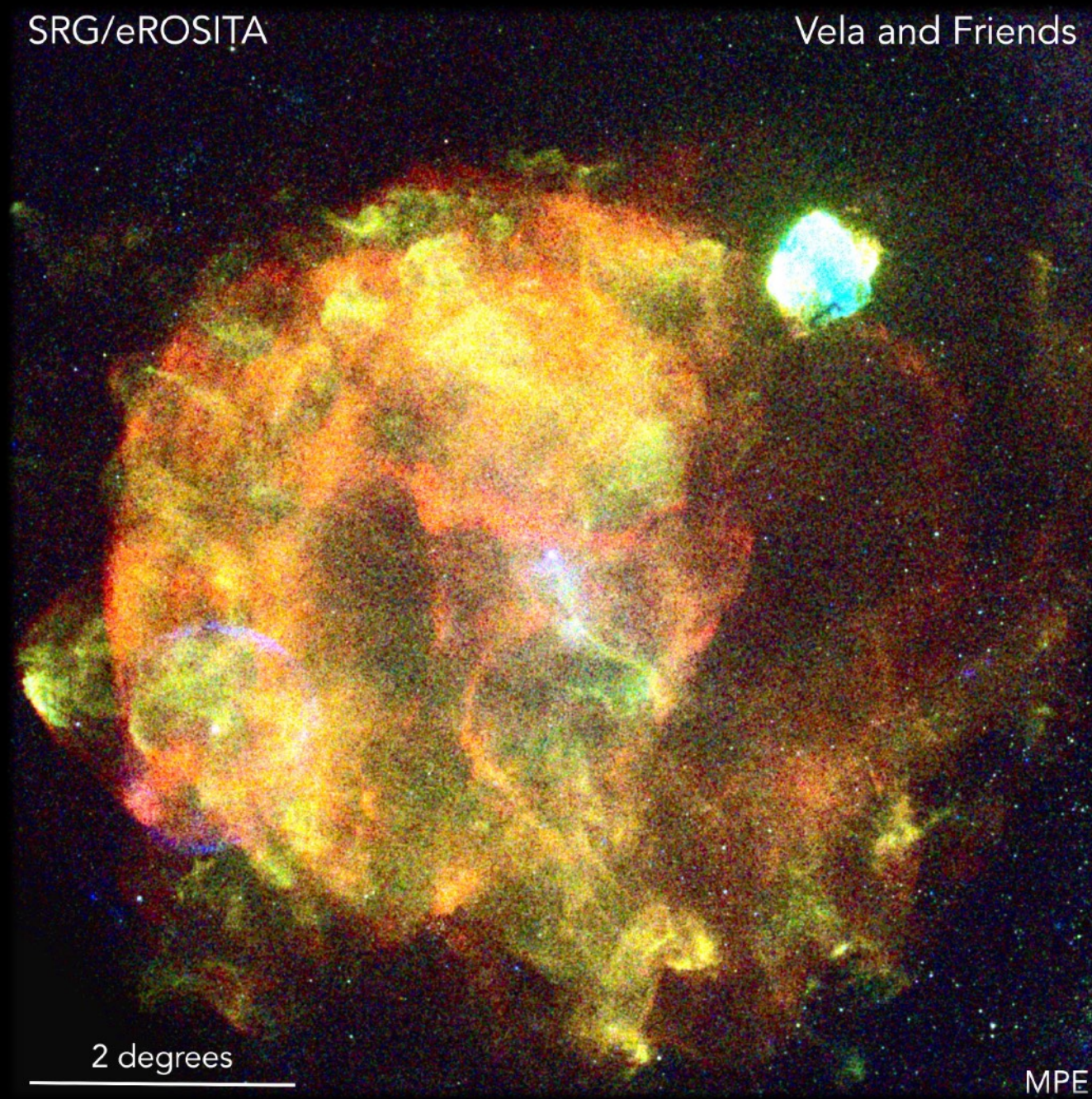
March 24<sup>th</sup> 2026  
Workshop on “Model Choice in Bayesian Inference”  
Center for Advanced Studies  
LMU Munich



MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE  
FOR ASTROPHYSICS

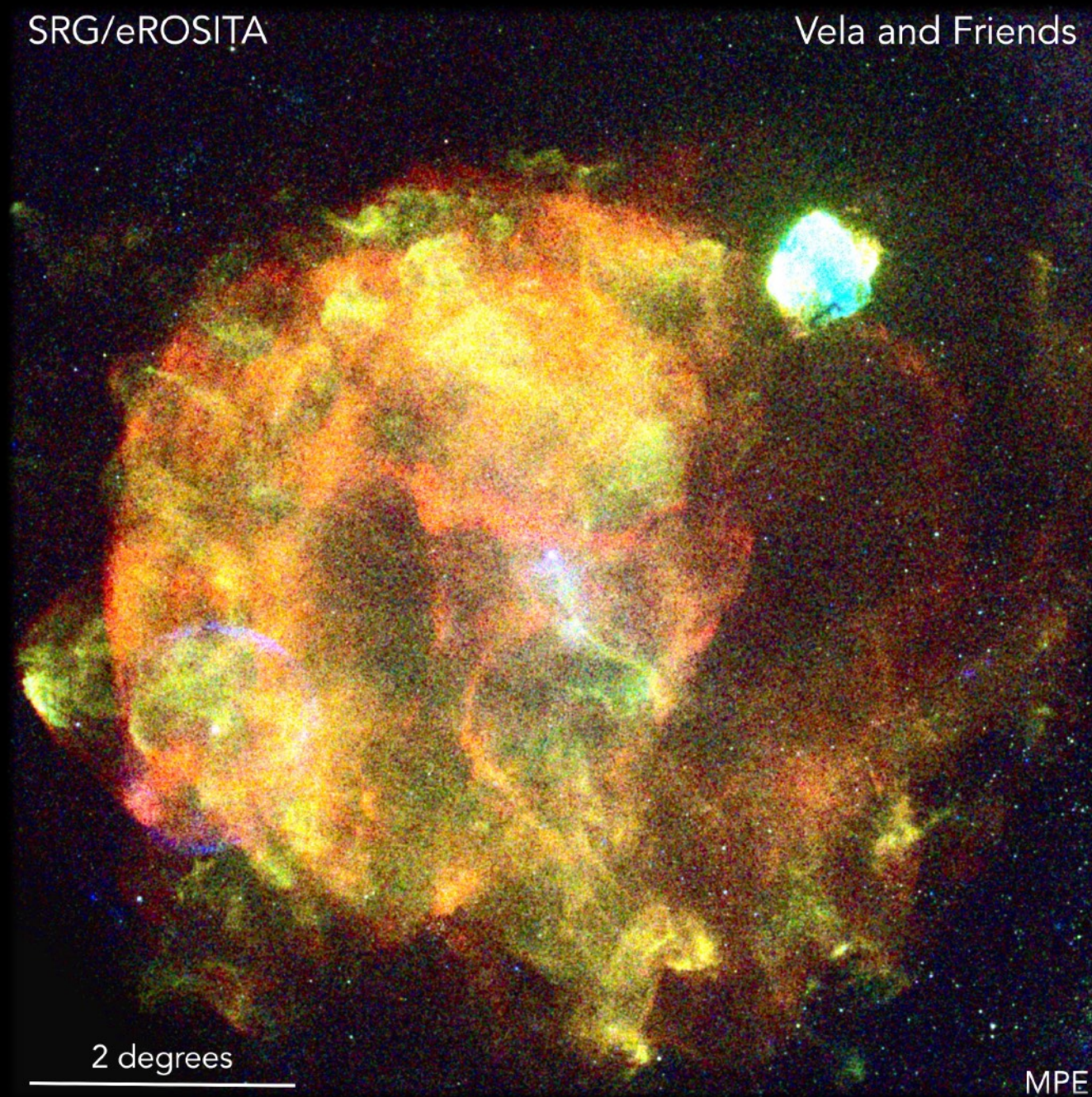


# The problem



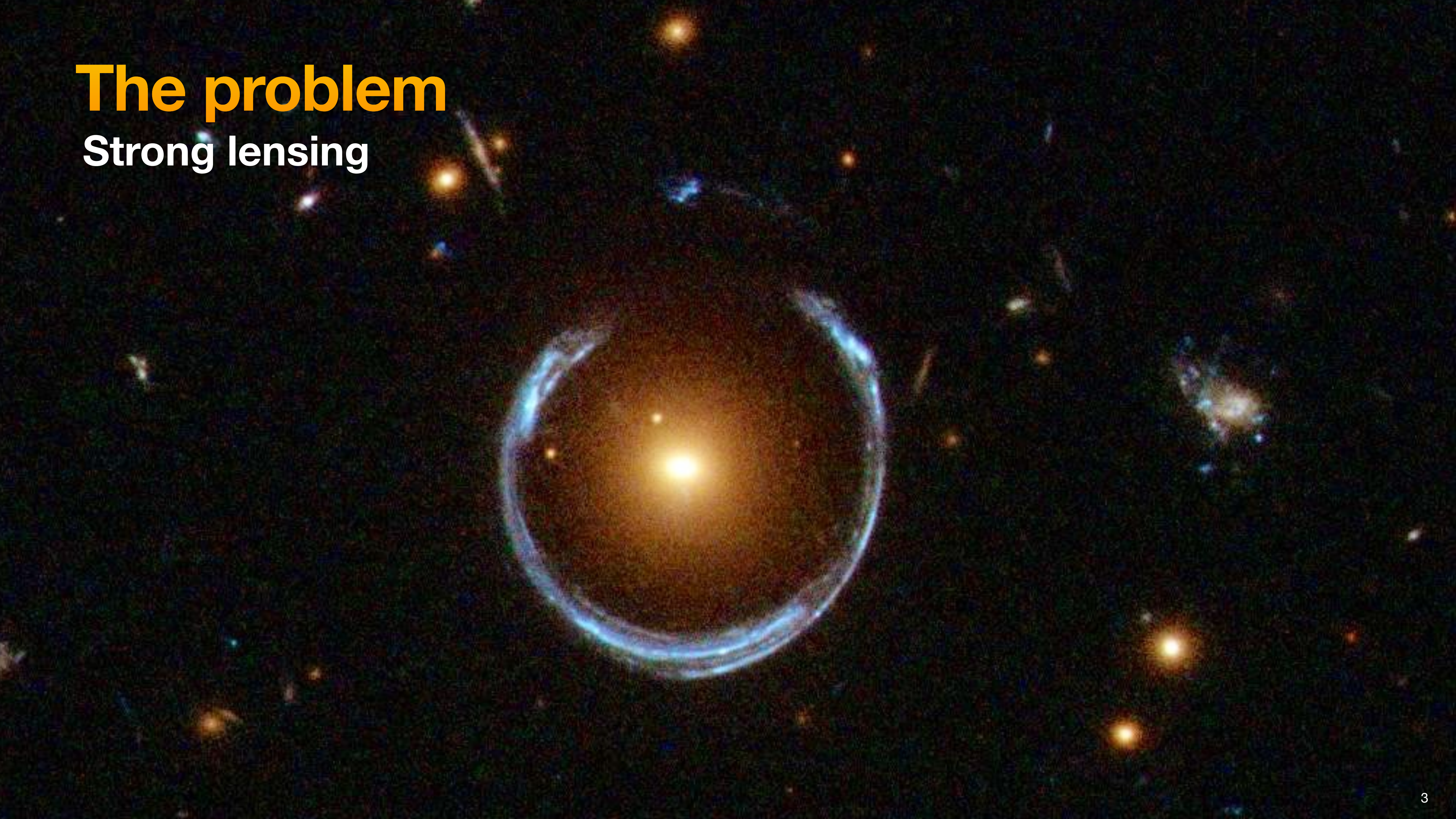
# The problem

From great data come great responsibility



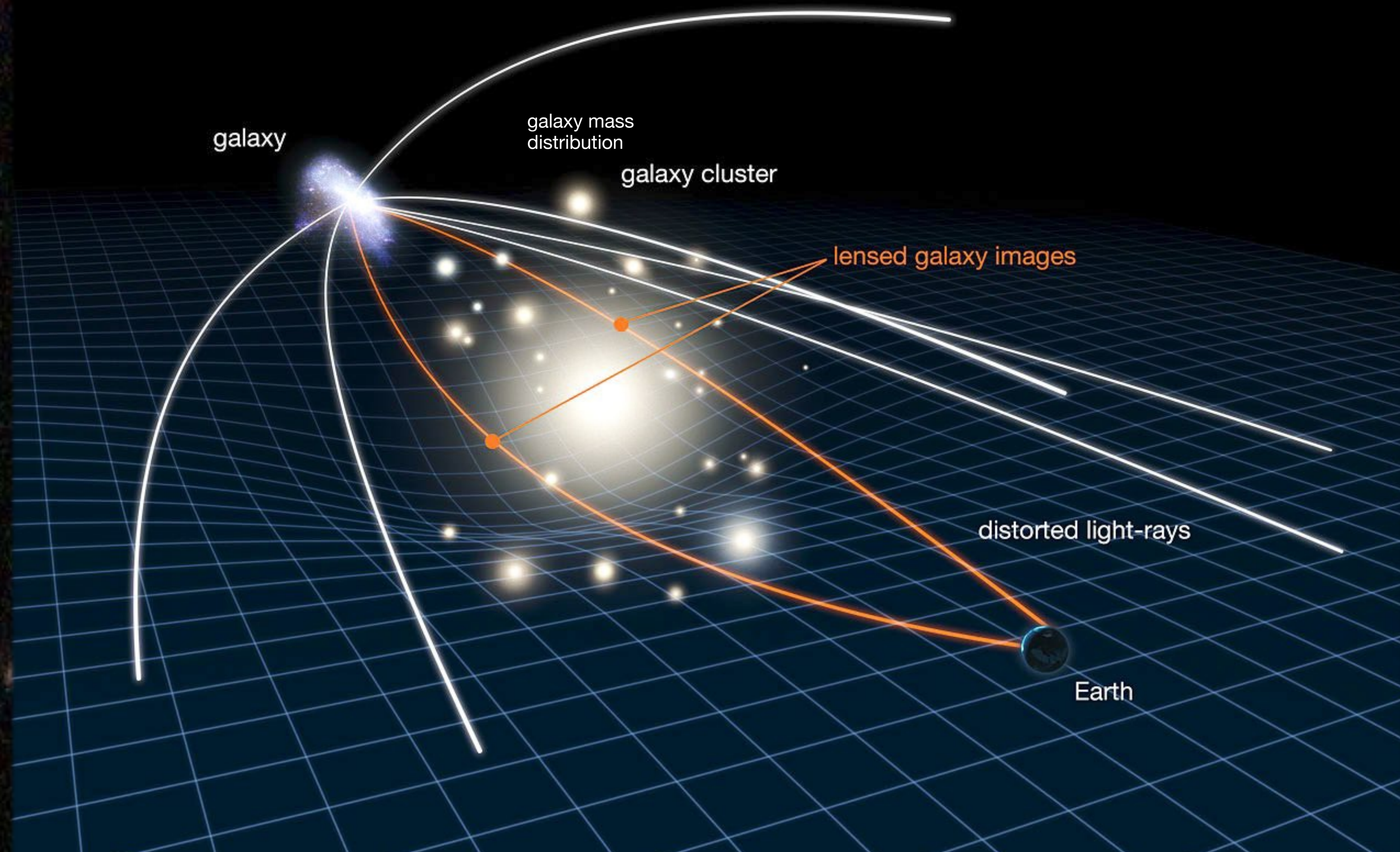
# The problem

Strong lensing



# The problem

## Strong lensing



# Modeling data with IFT

# Information field theory

## Bayes' Theorem

$$P(s | d) =$$

# Information field theory

## Bayes' Theorem

$$P(s | d) = \frac{P(s)}{P(d)}$$

# Information field theory

## Bayes' Theorem

$$P(s | d) = \frac{P(d | s) P(s)}{P(d)}$$

# Information field theory

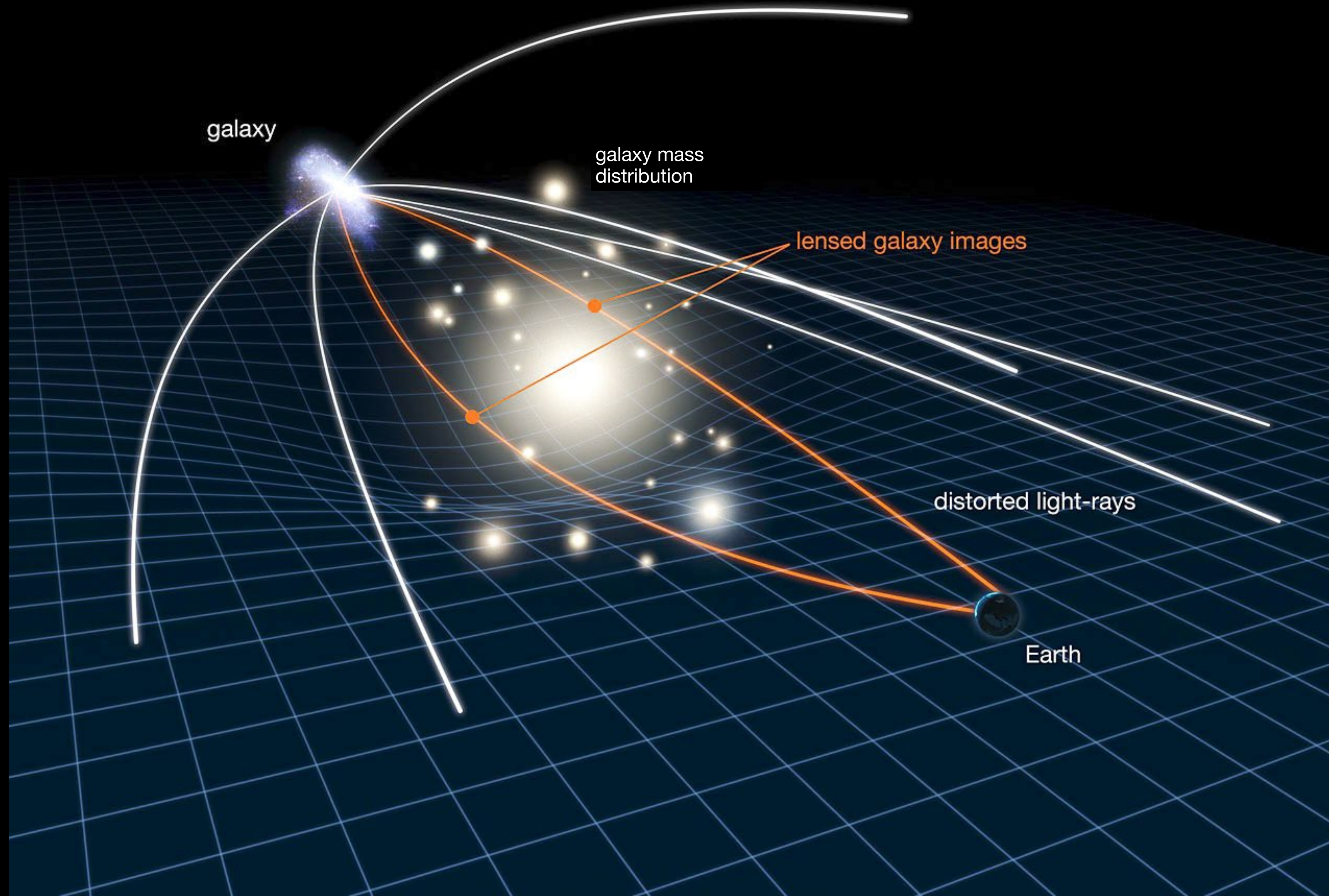
## Bayes' Theorem

$$P(s | d) = \frac{P(d | s) P(s)}{P(d)}$$

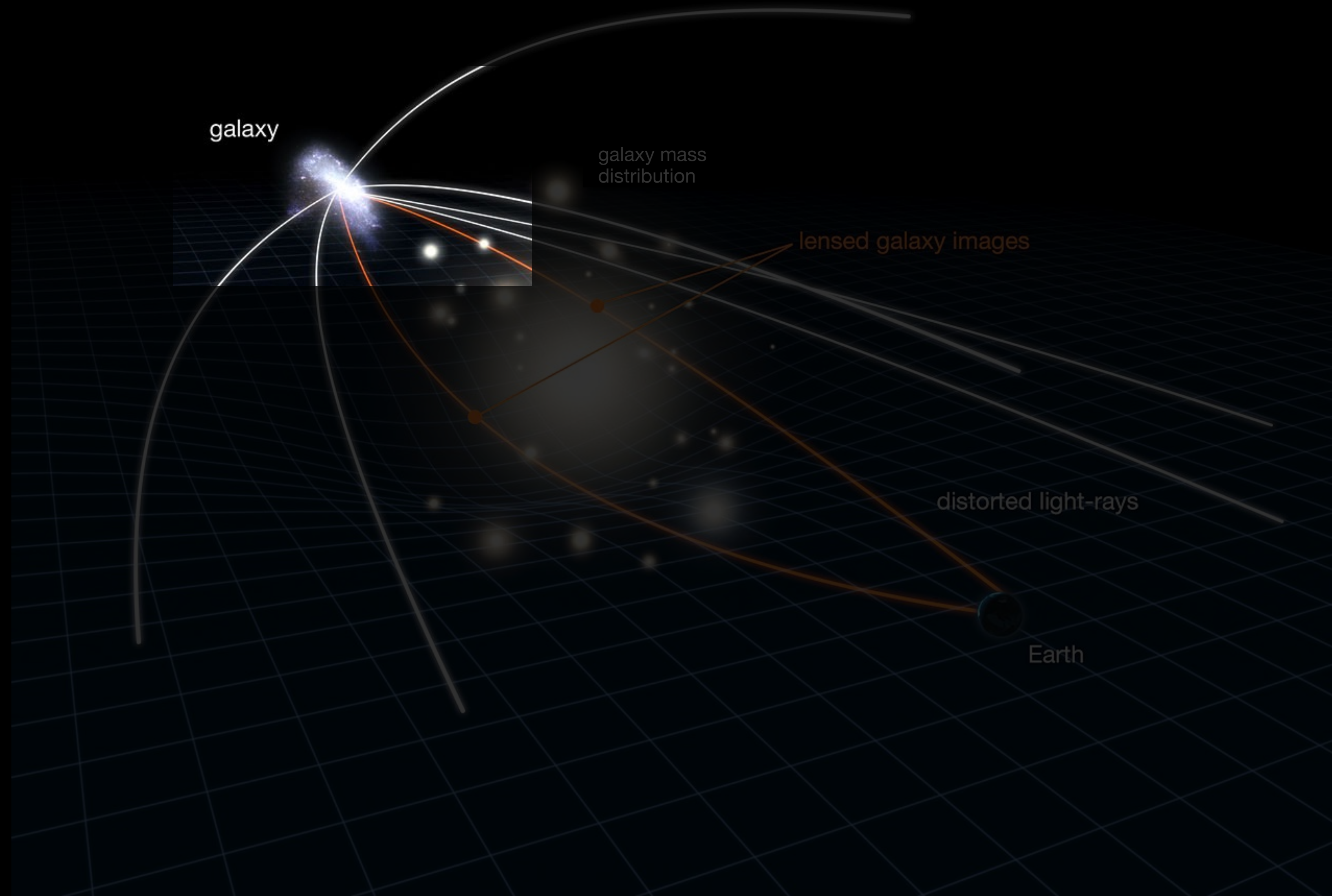
# The prior

$$P(s | d) = \frac{P(d | s) P(s)}{P(d)}$$

# The prior

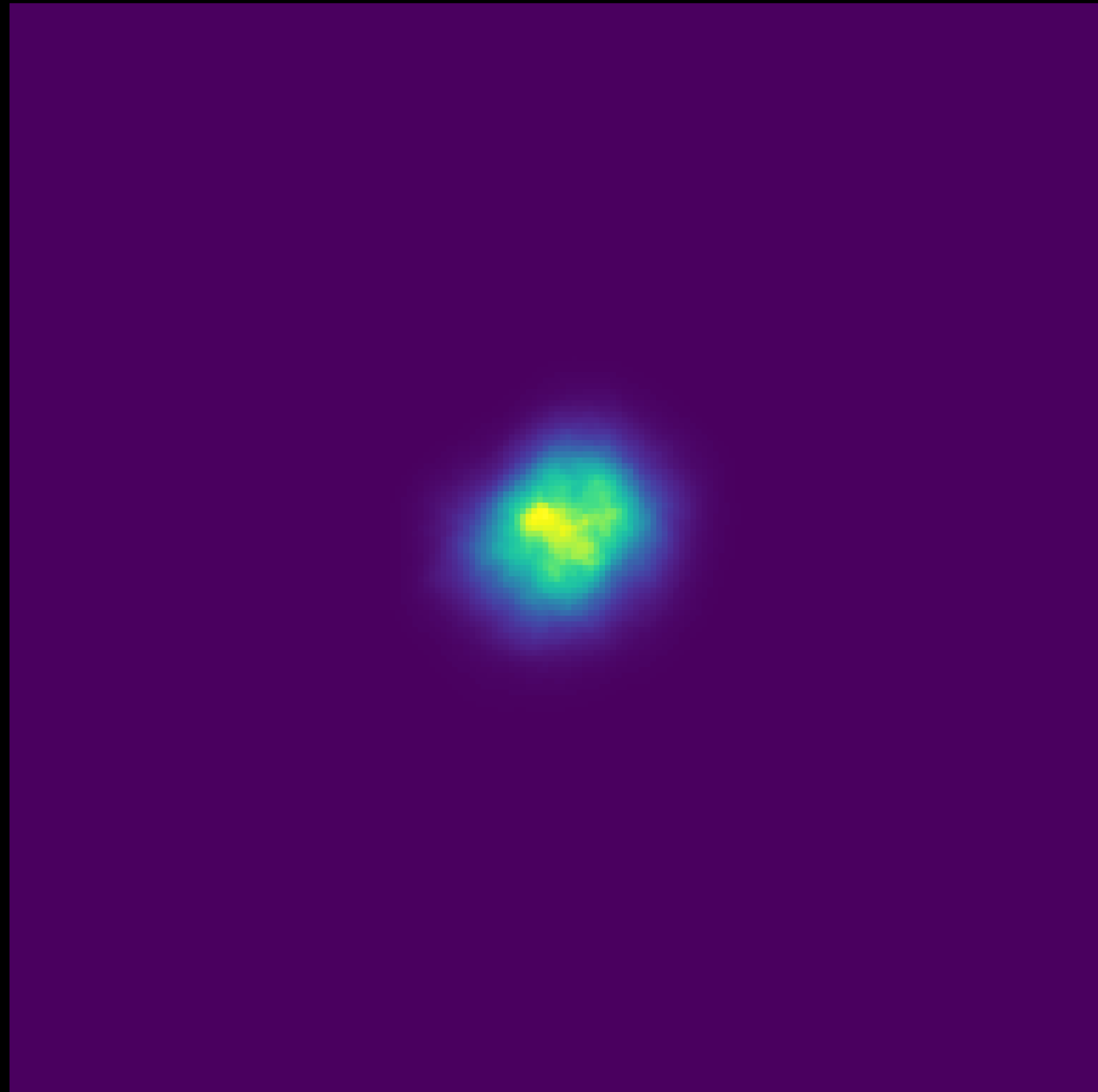


# The source



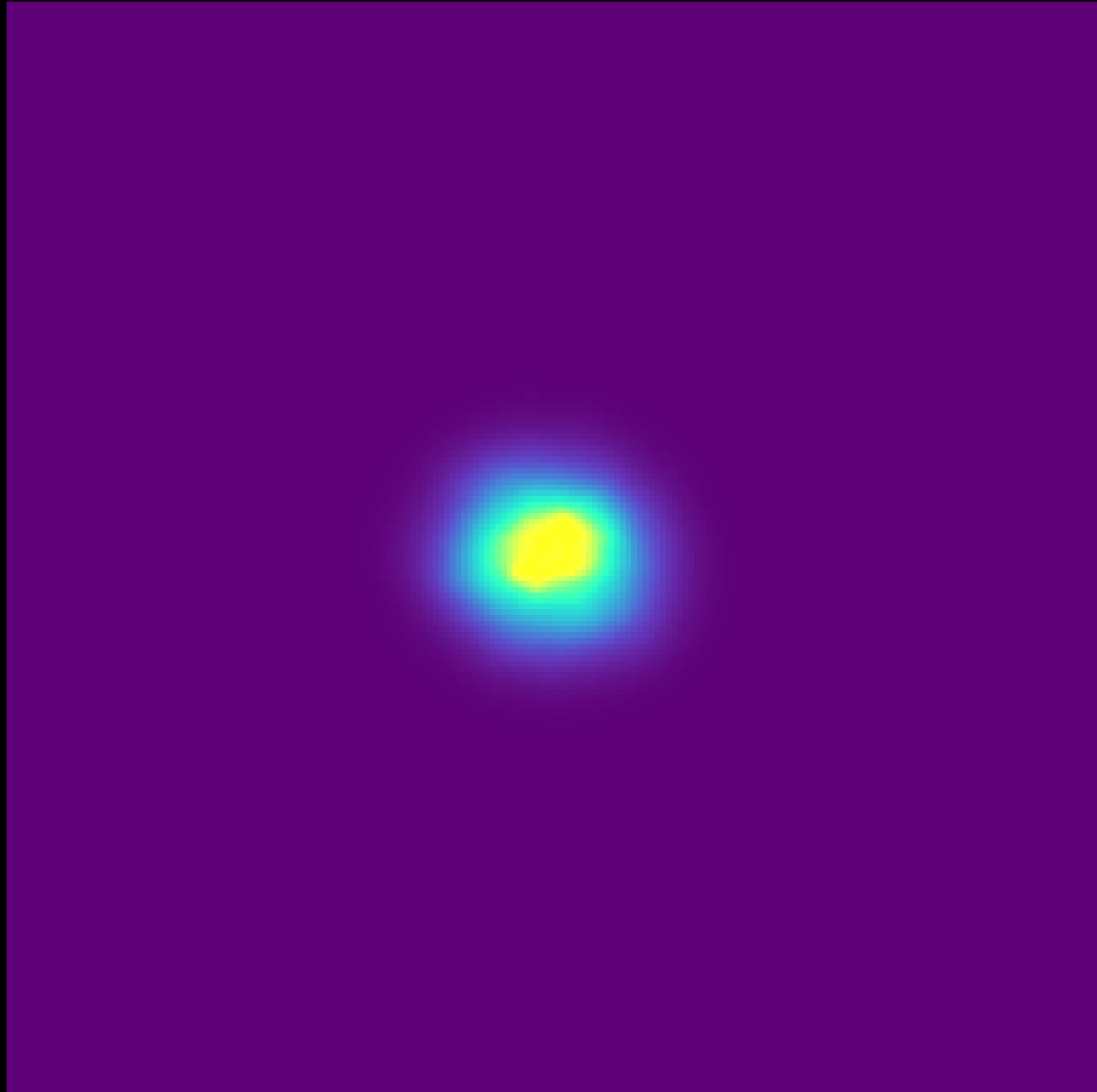
# The prior galaxy

$$P(s)$$



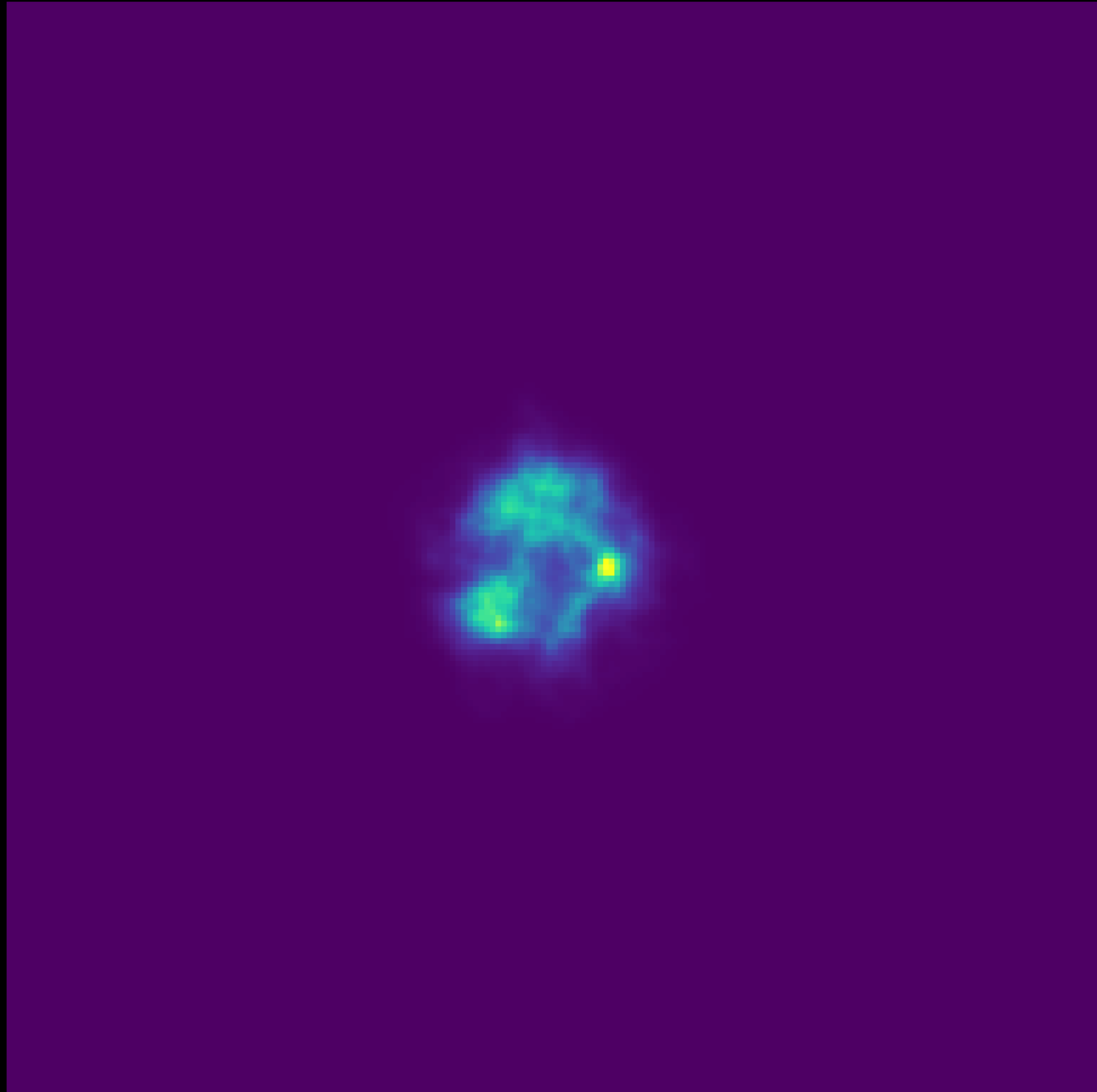
# The prior galaxy

$$P(s)$$



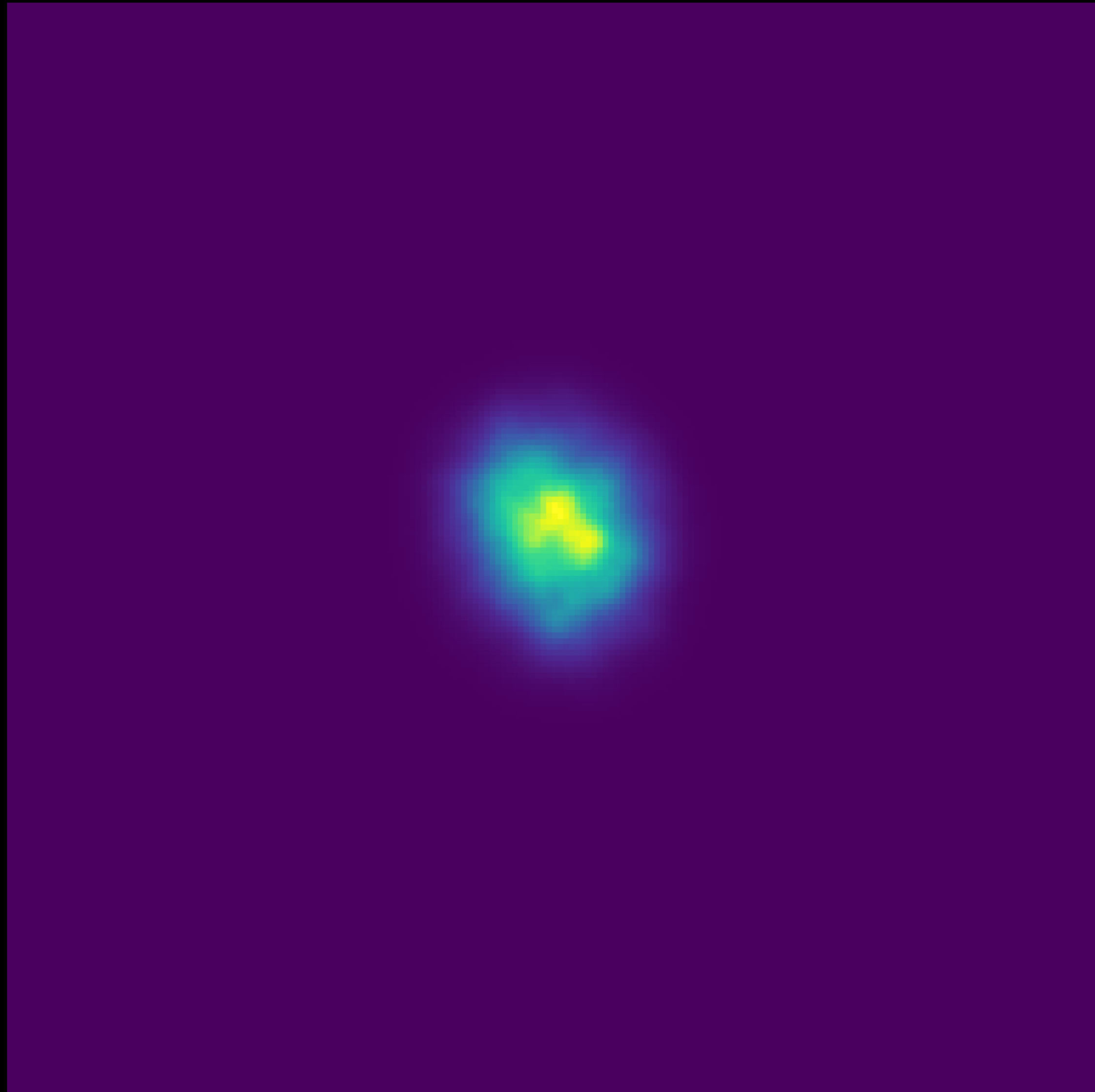
# The prior galaxy

$$P(s)$$



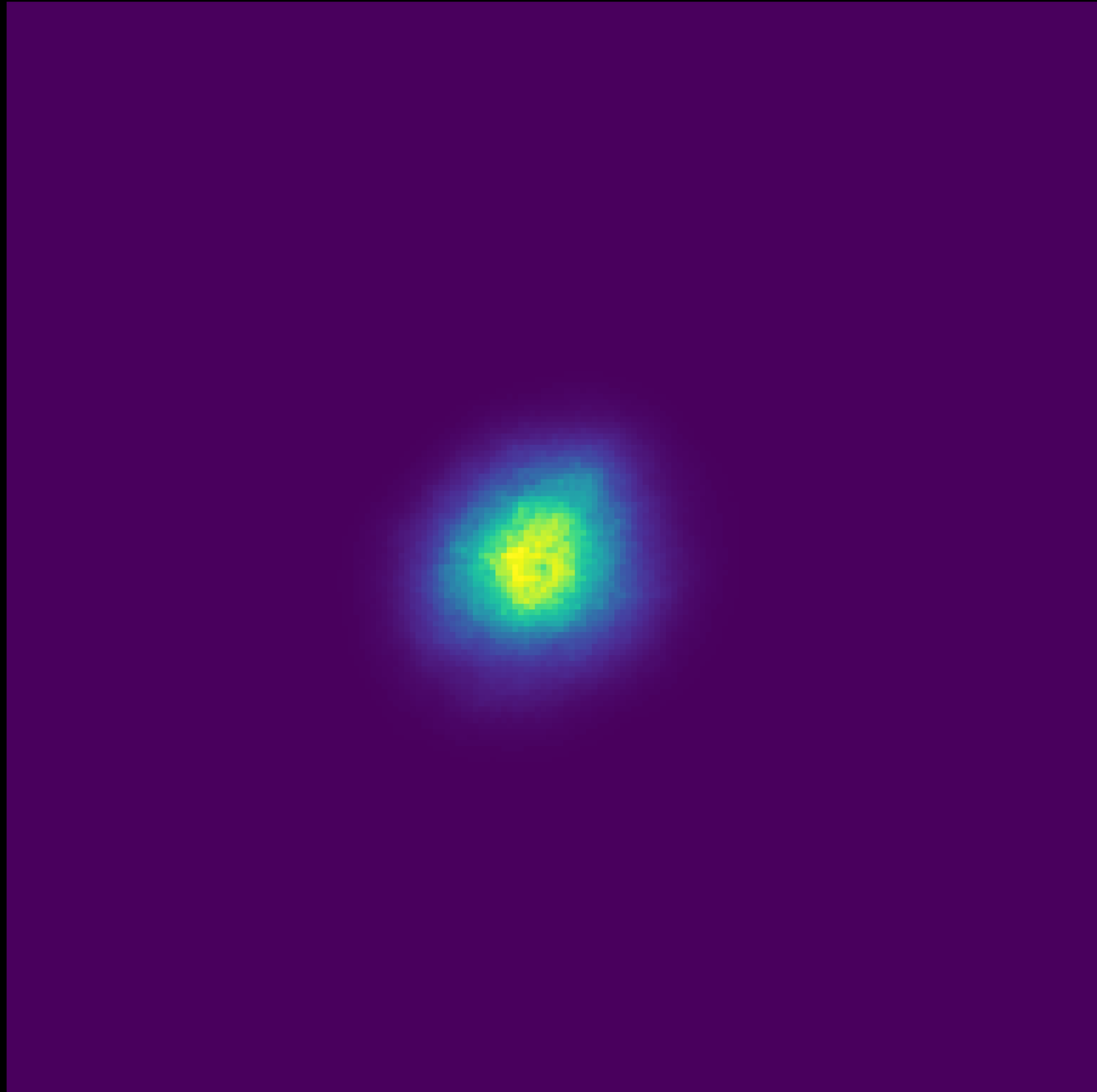
# The prior galaxy

$$P(s)$$

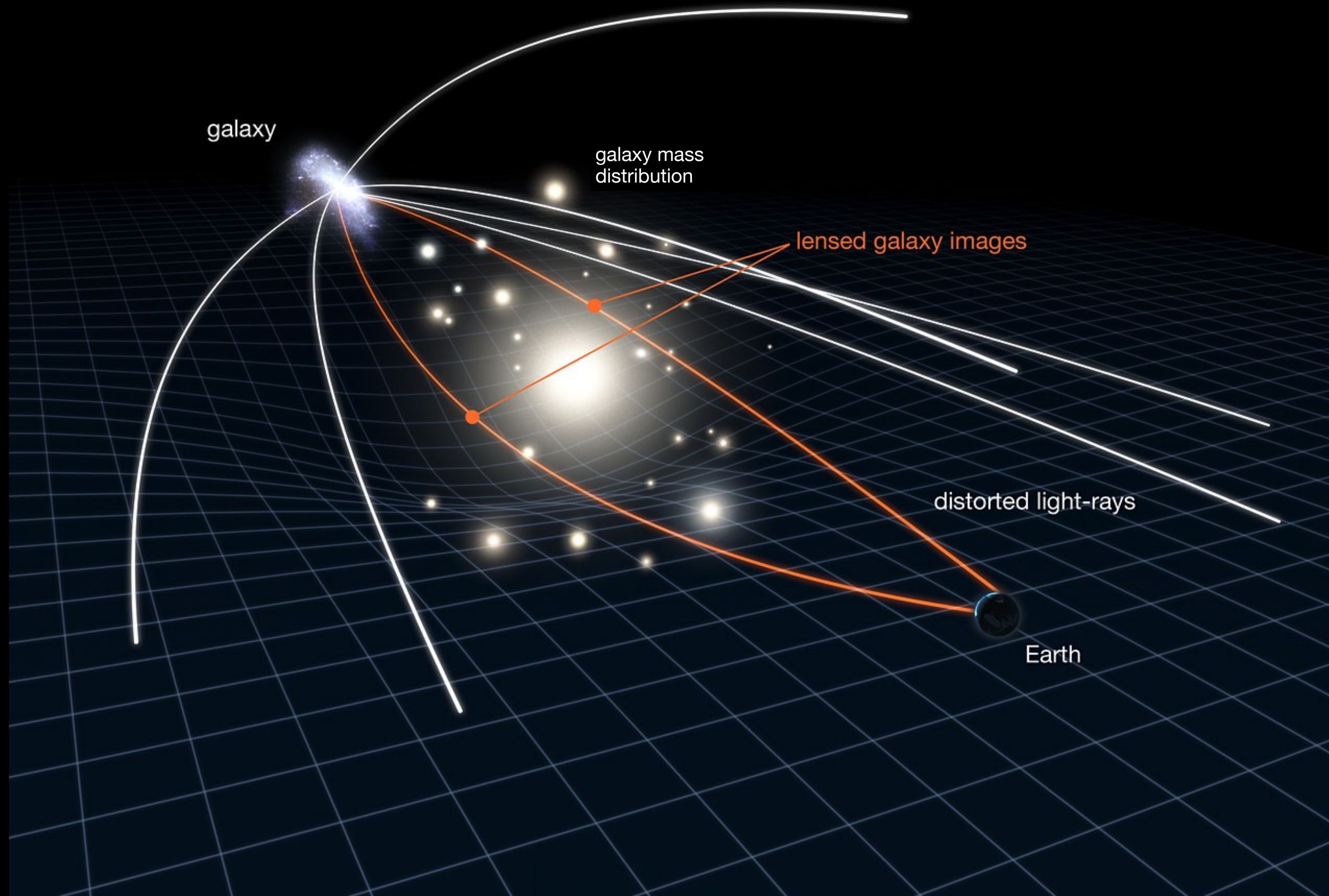


# The prior galaxy

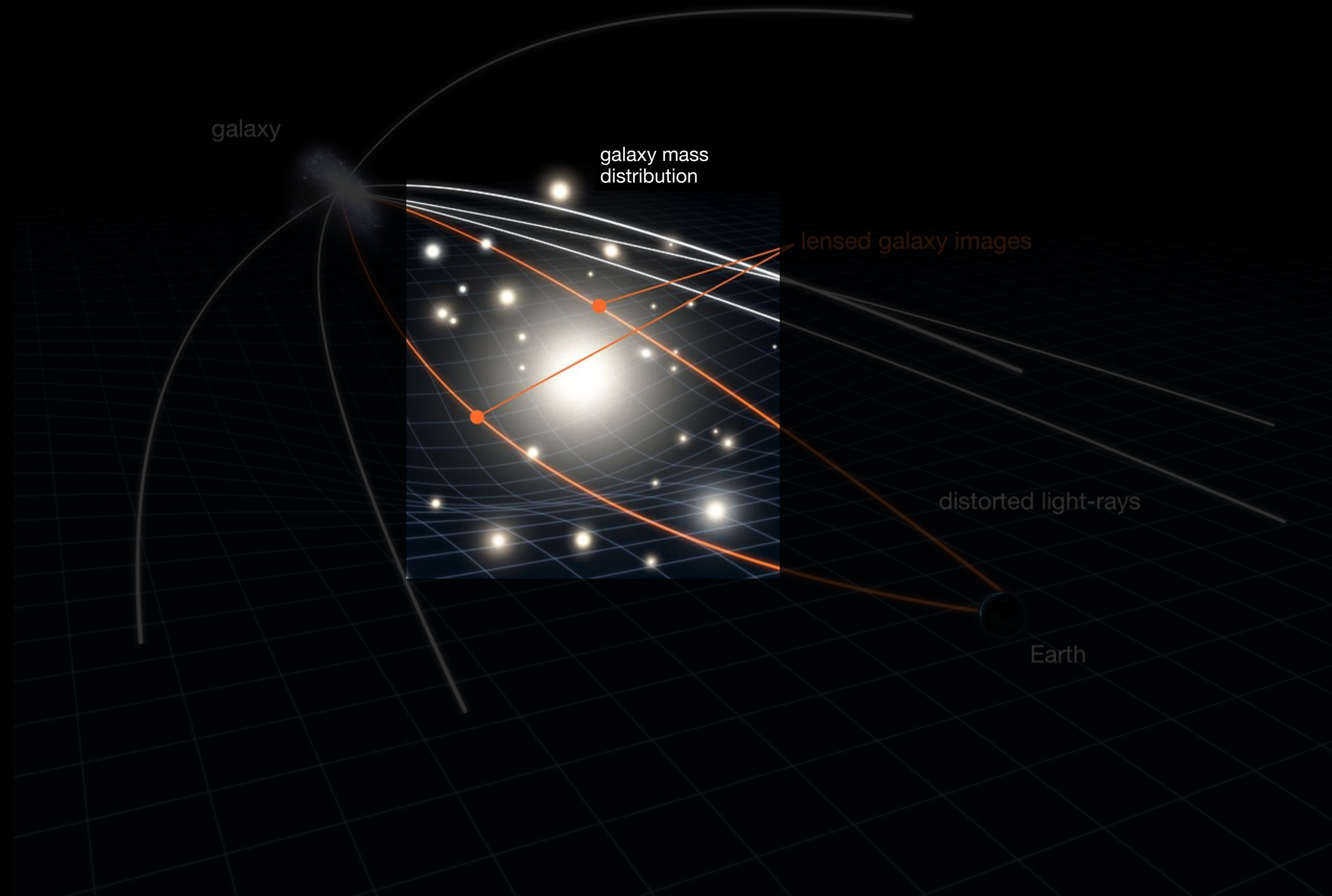
$$P(s)$$



# The convergence



# The convergence



# The prior

## Convergence

$P(s)$



# The prior

## Convergence

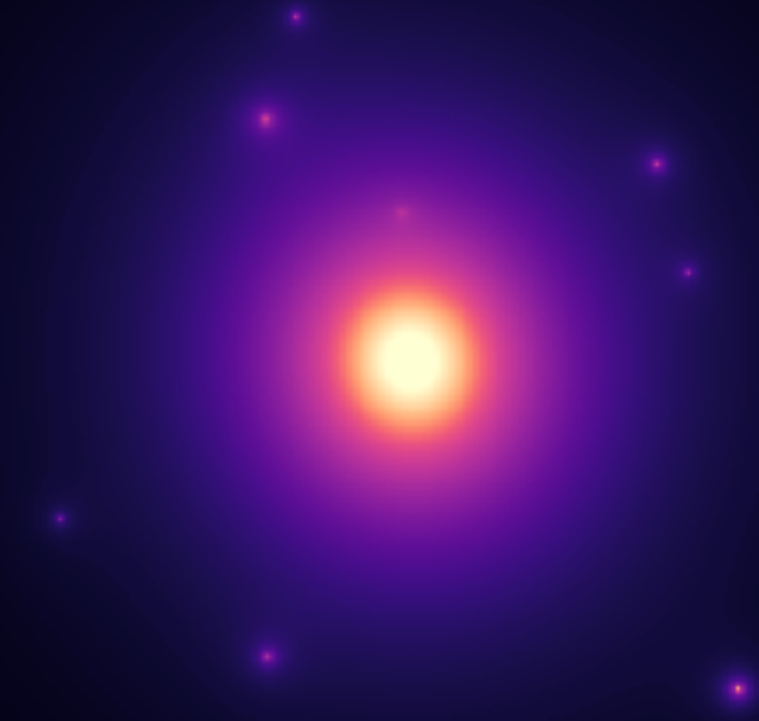
$$P(s)$$



# The prior

## Convergence

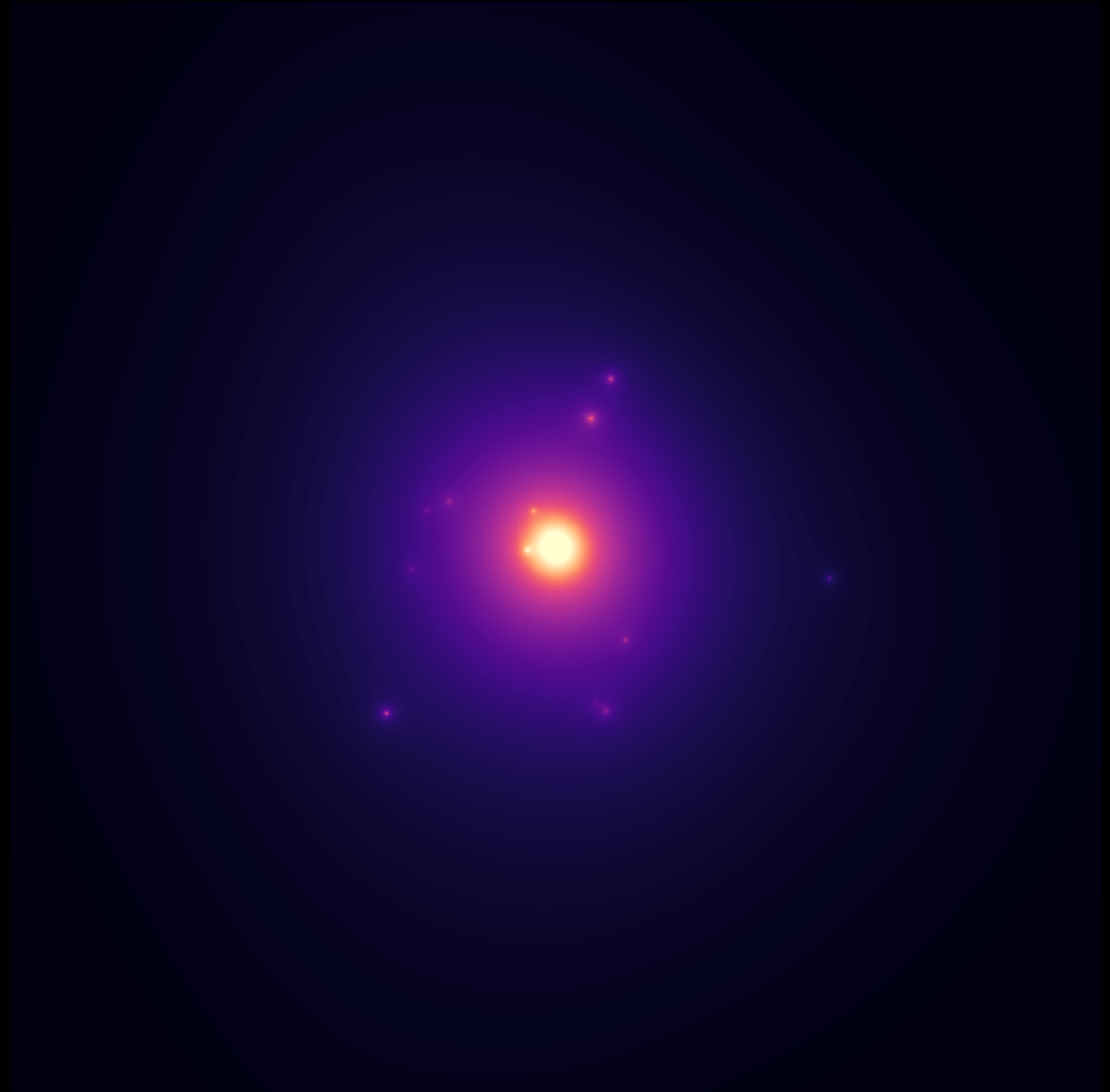
$$P(s)$$



# The prior

## Convergence

$$P(s)$$



# The prior

## Convergence

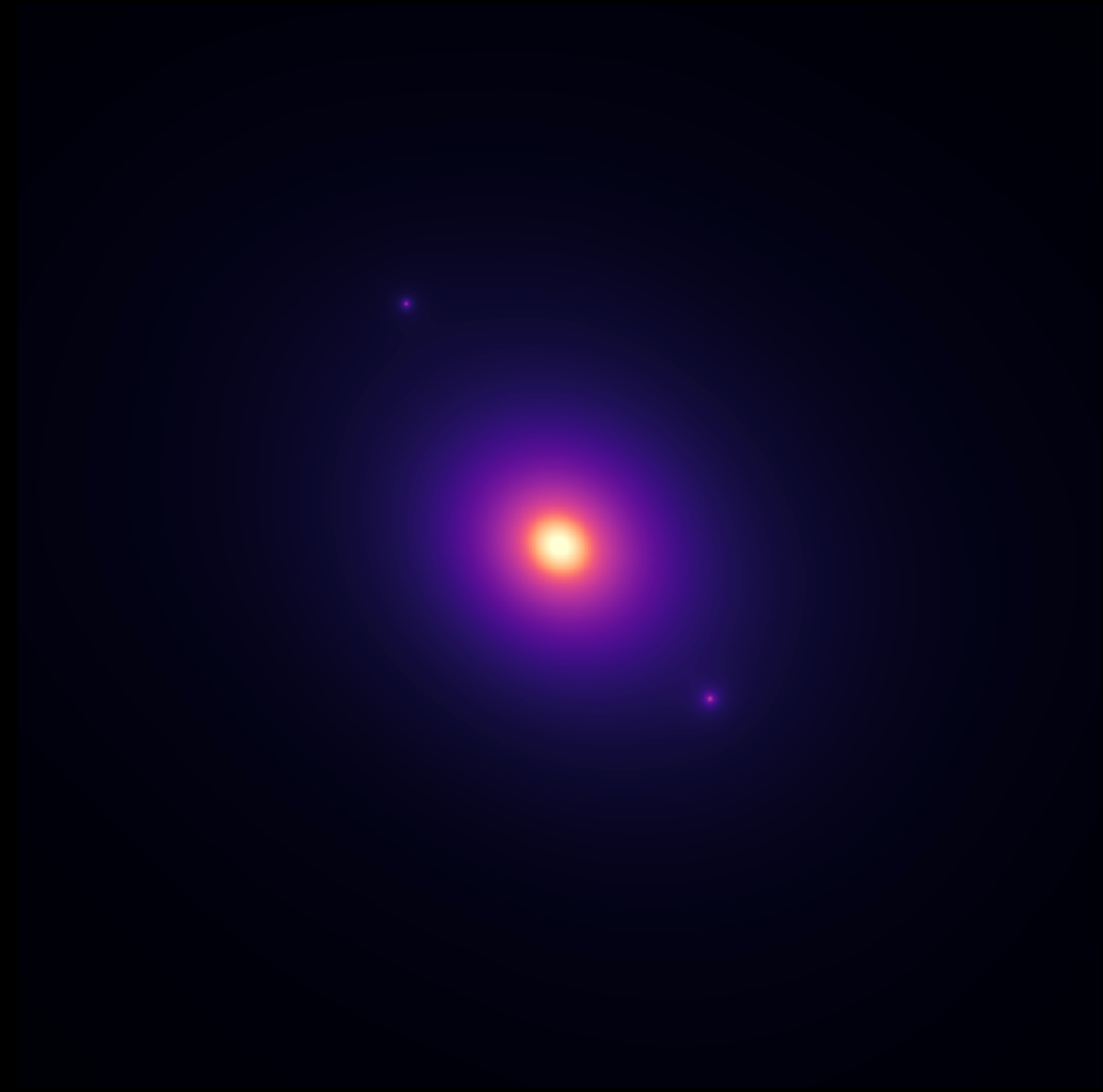
$$P(s)$$



# The prior

## Convergence

$$P(s)$$



# The likelihood

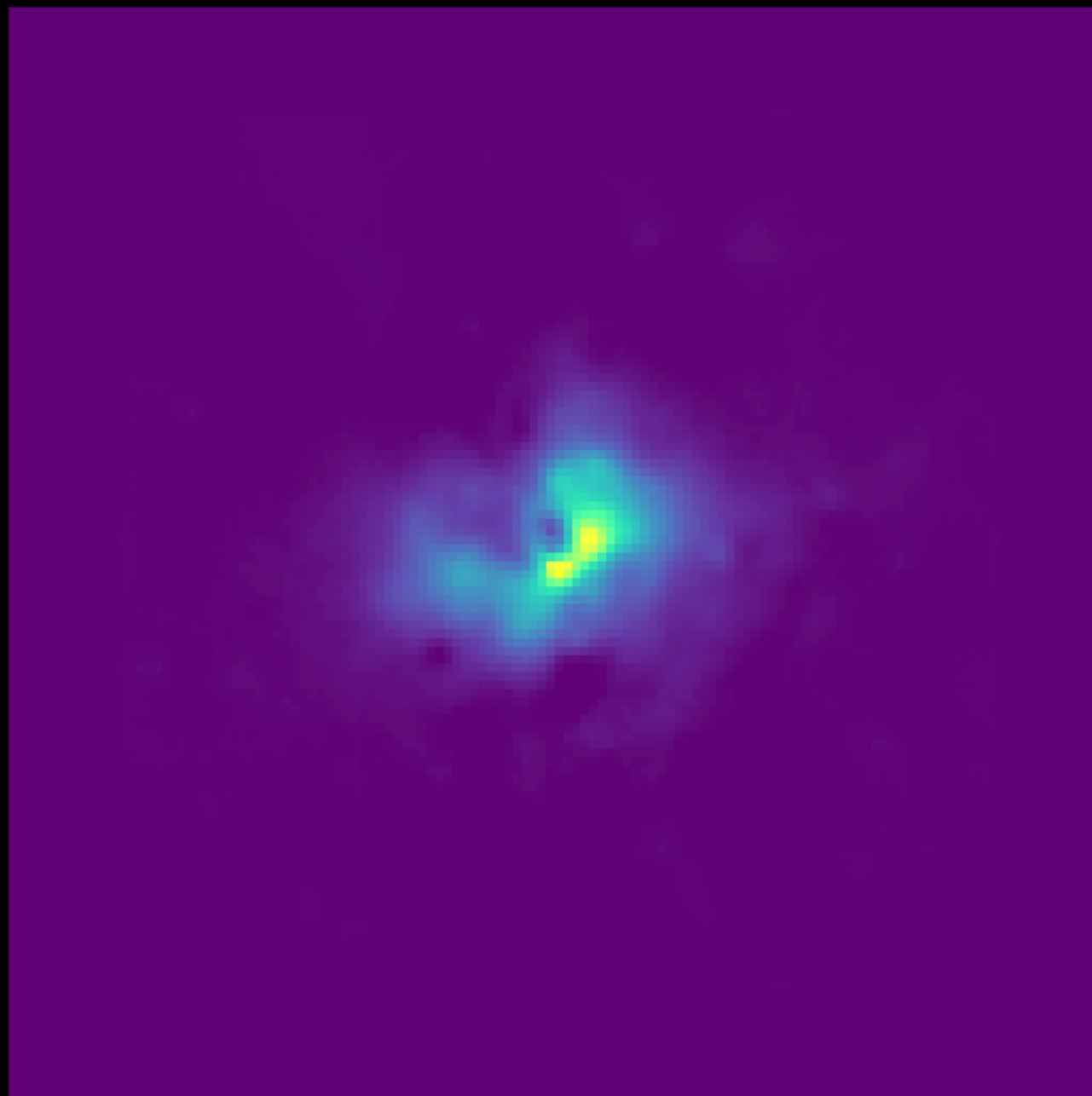
$$P(s | d) = \frac{P(d | s) P(s)}{P(d)}$$

# The likelihood

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# The likelihood

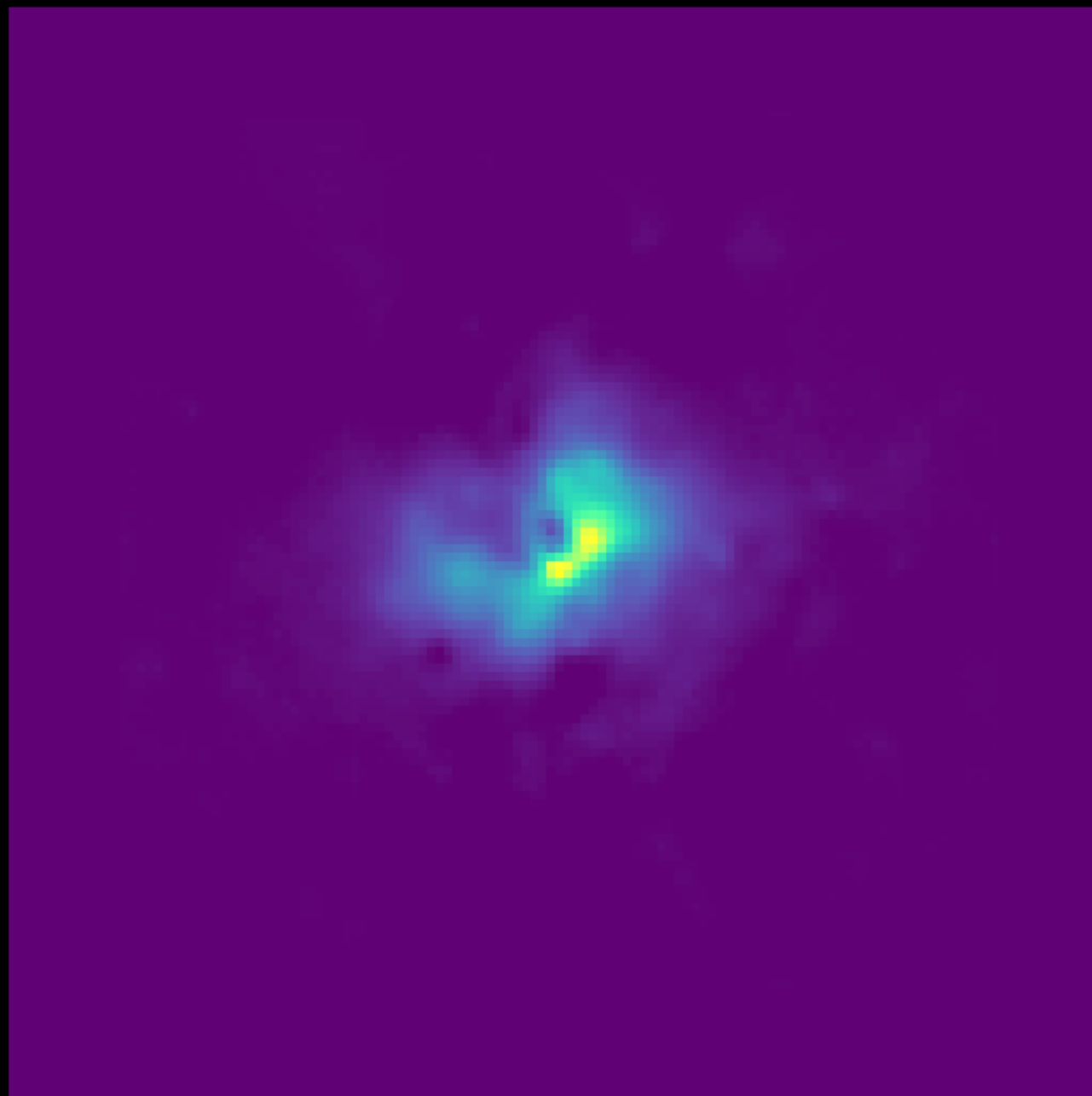
Strong lensing response



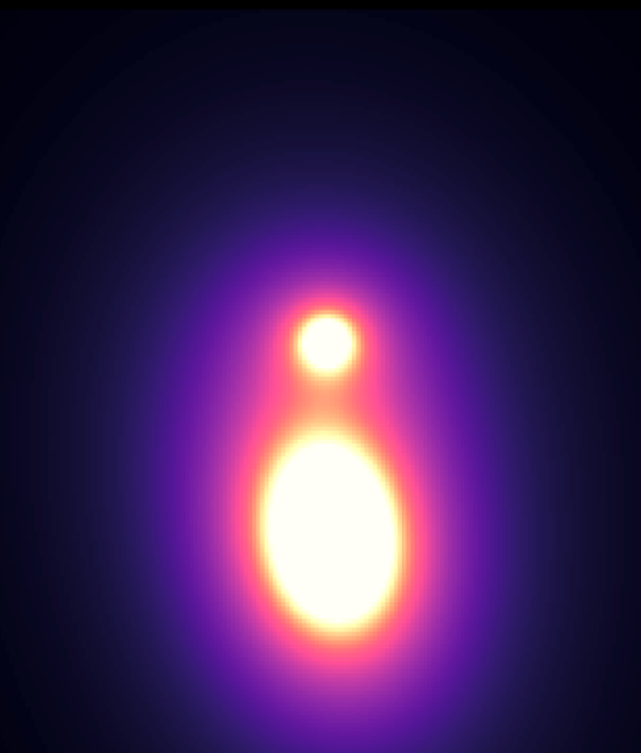
Source galaxy

# The likelihood

## Strong lensing response



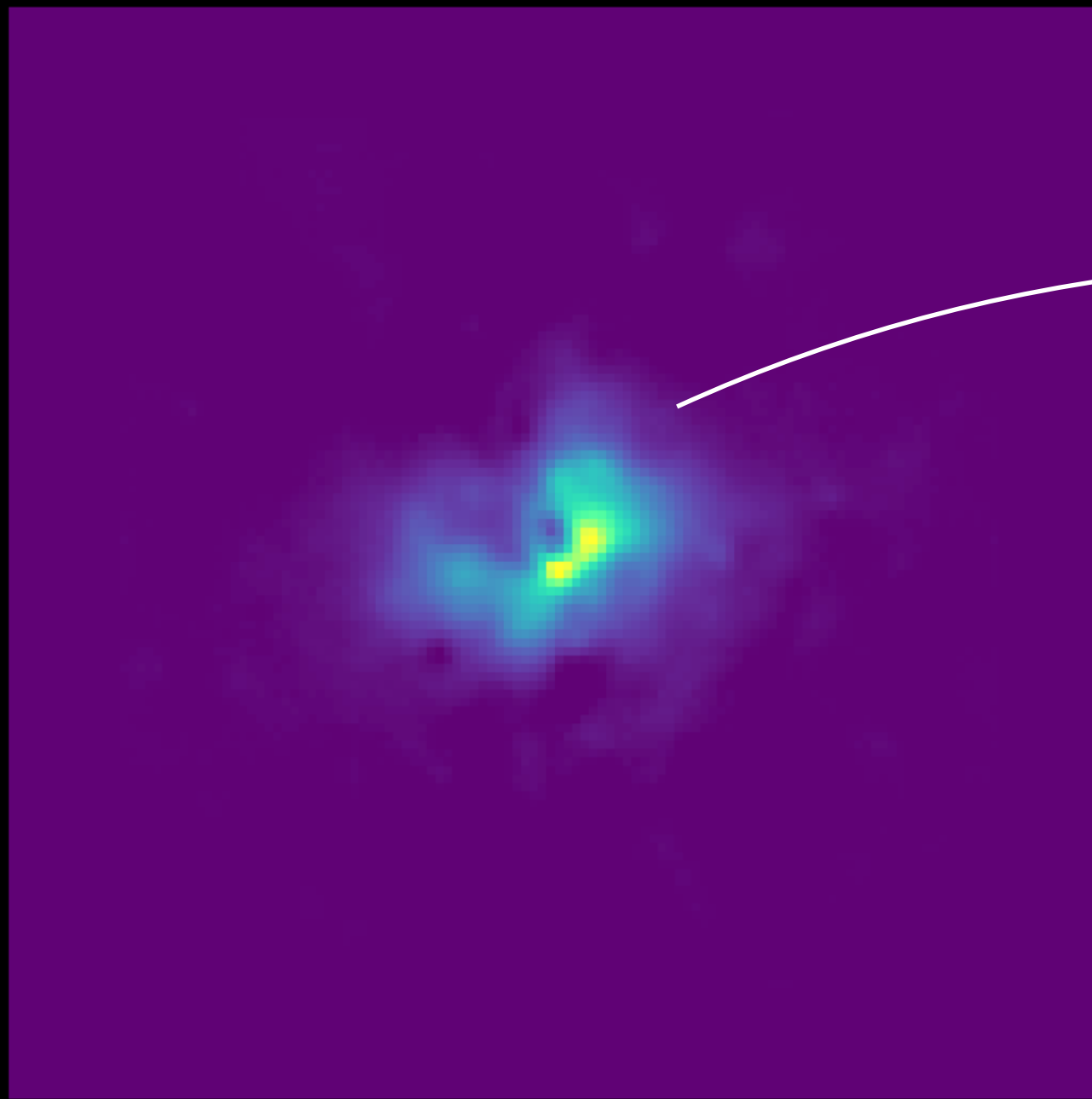
Source galaxy



DM halo mass profile

# The likelihood

## Strong lensing response



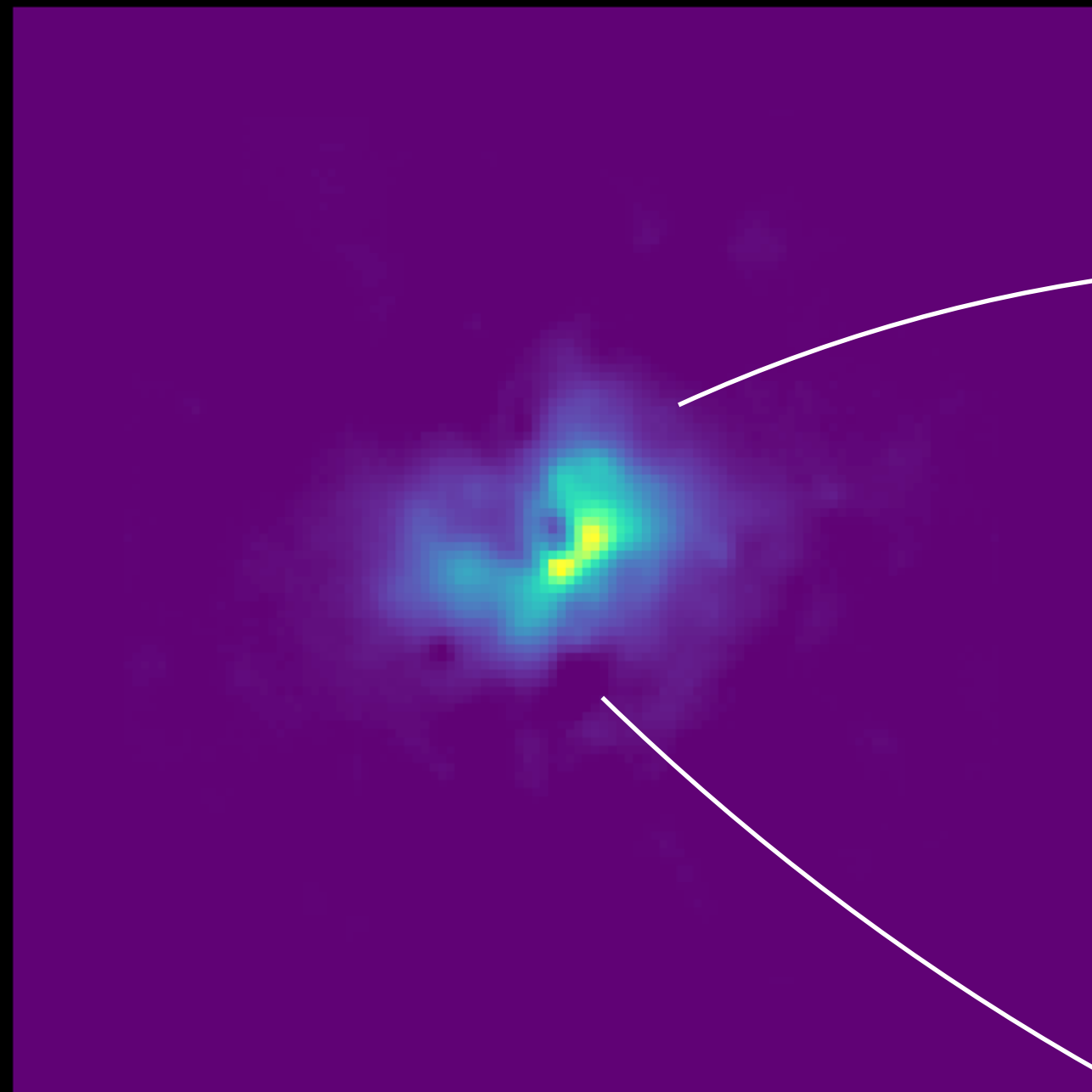
Source galaxy



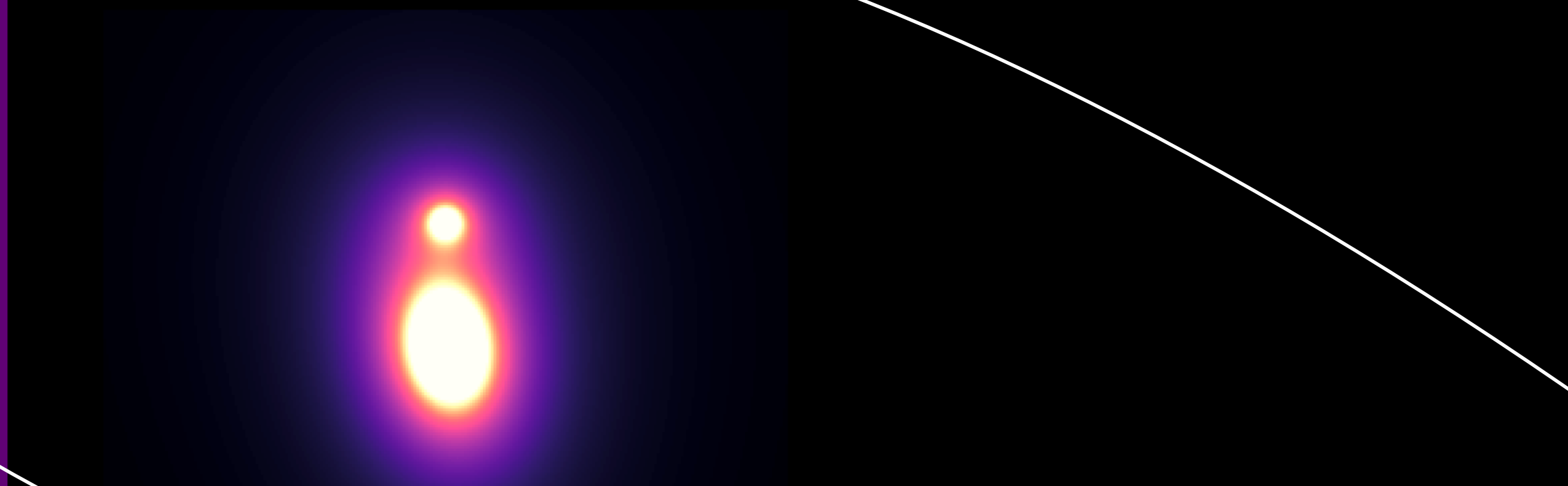
DM halo mass profile

# The likelihood

## Strong lensing response



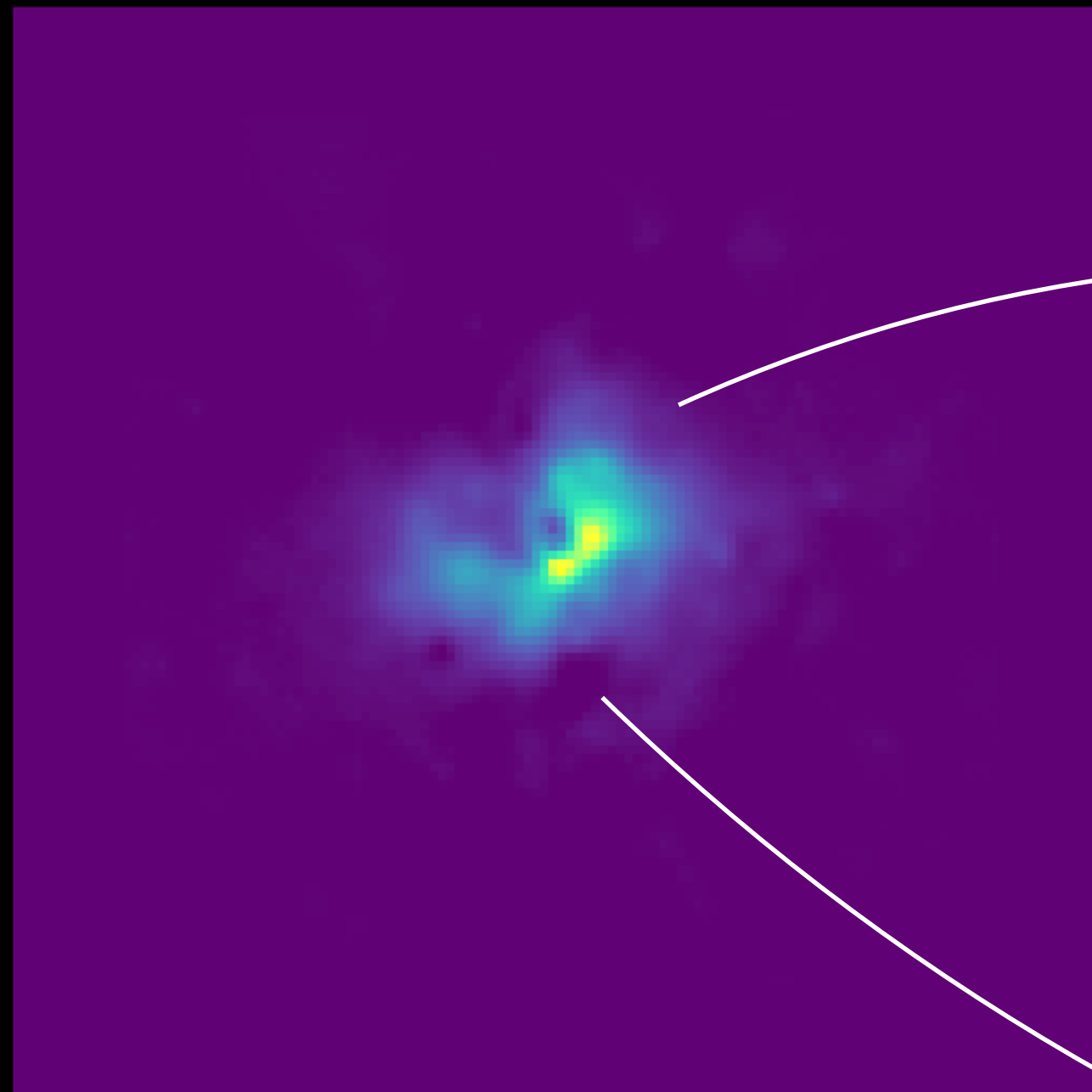
Source galaxy



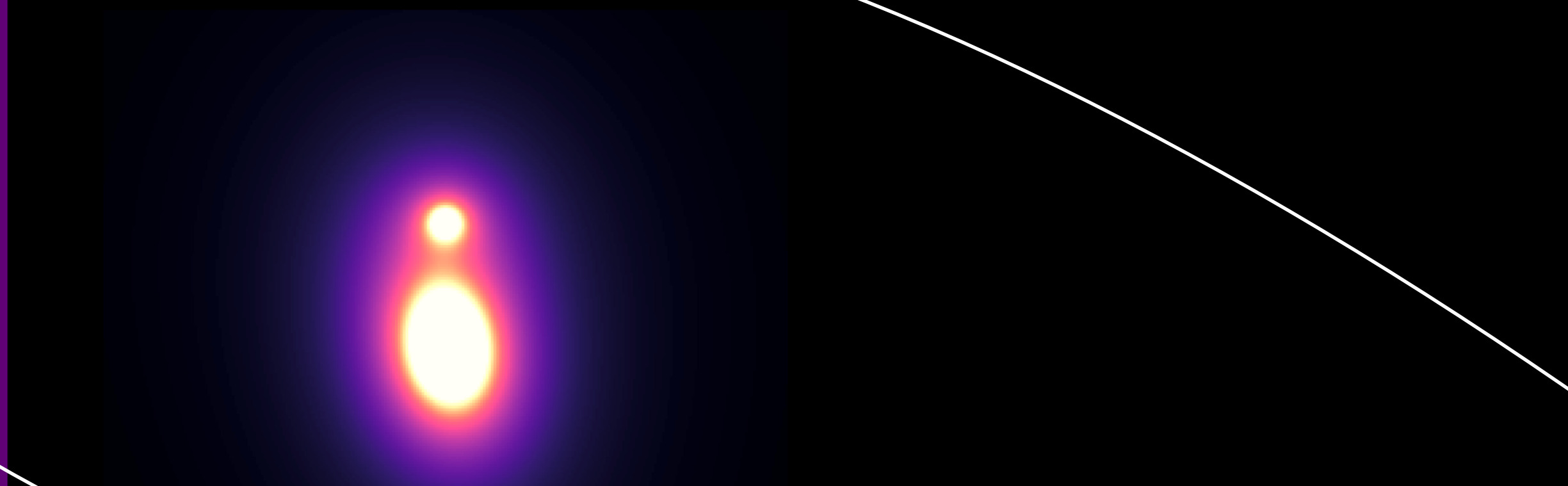
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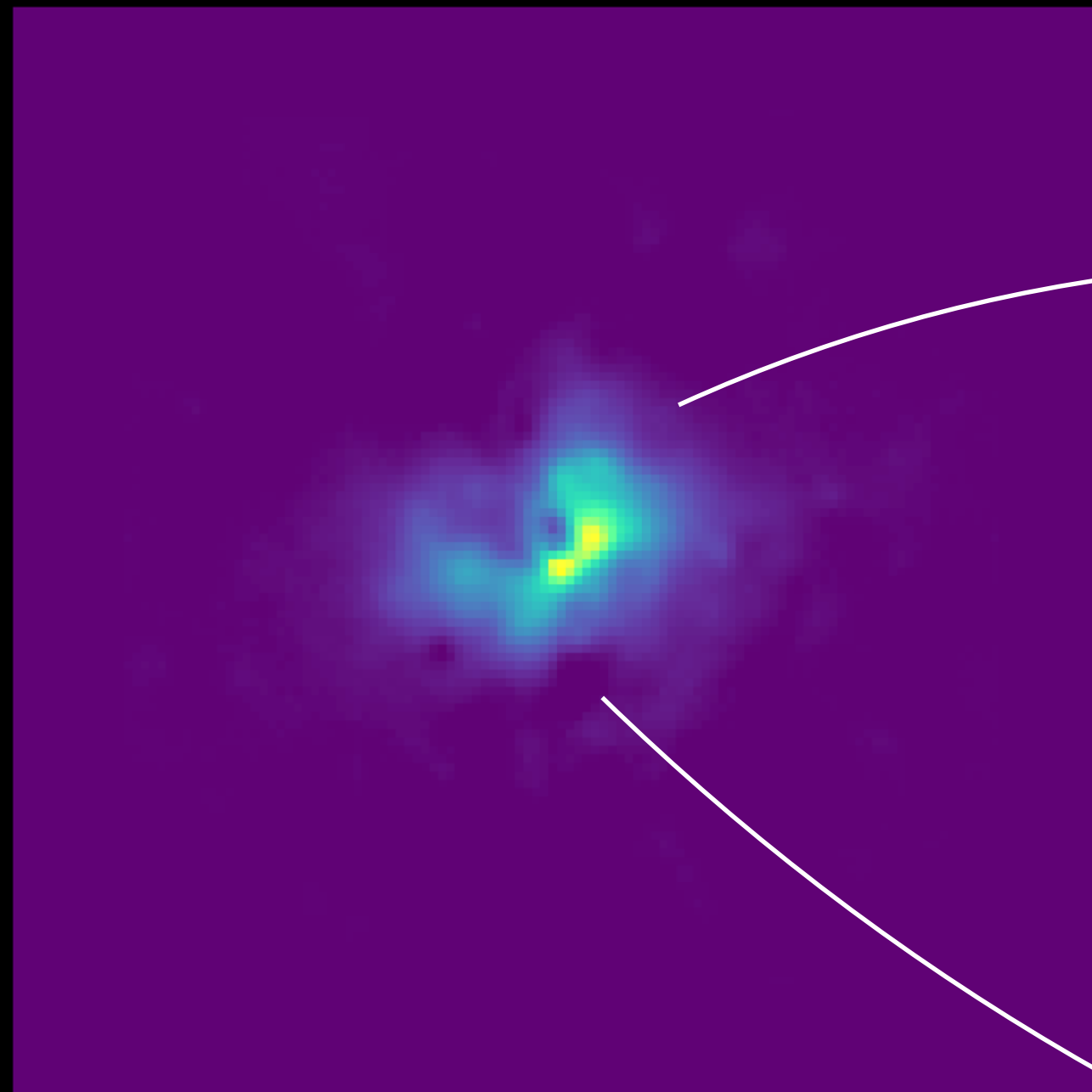
Source galaxy



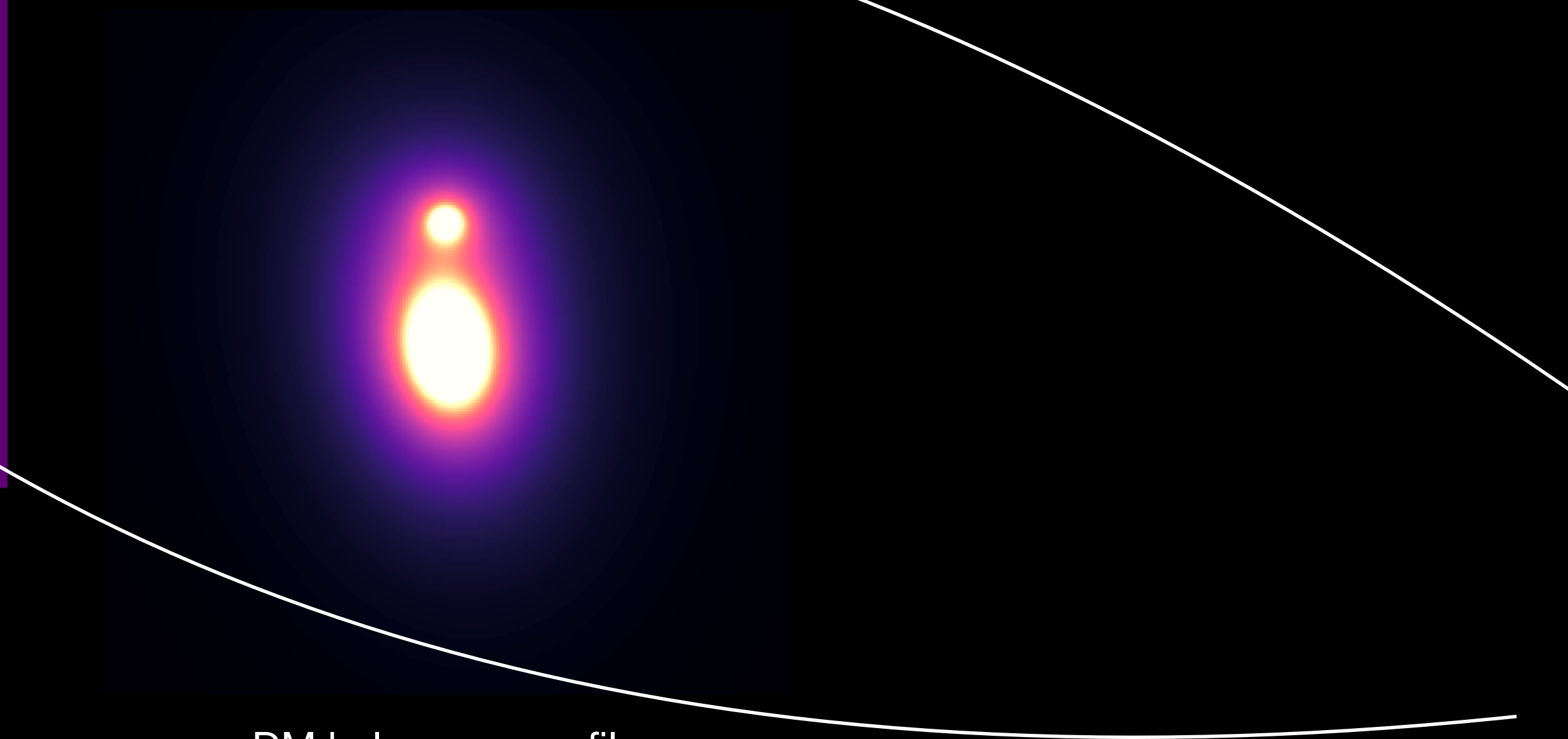
DM halo mass profile

# The likelihood

## Strong lensing response



Source galaxy

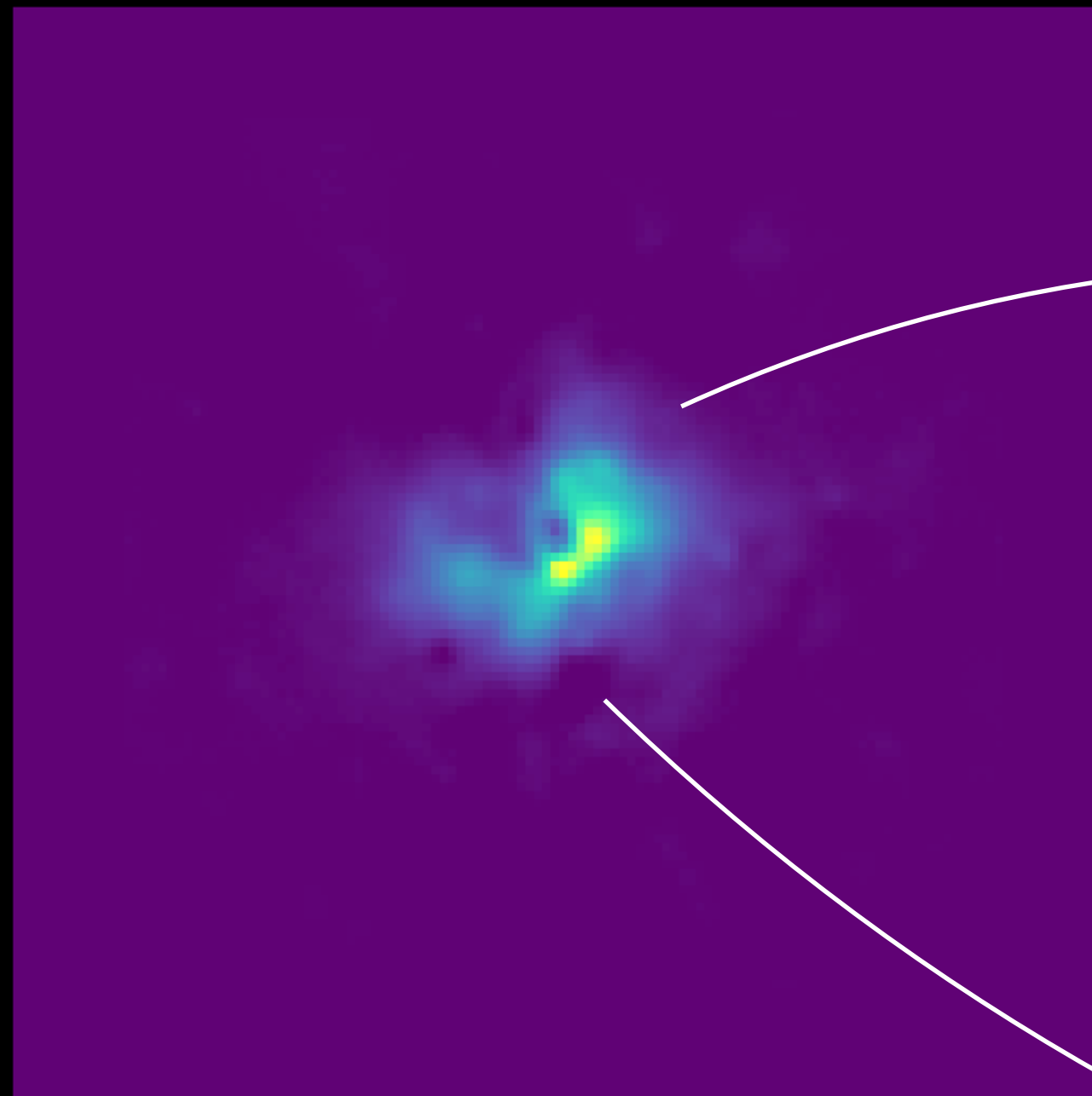


DM halo mass profile

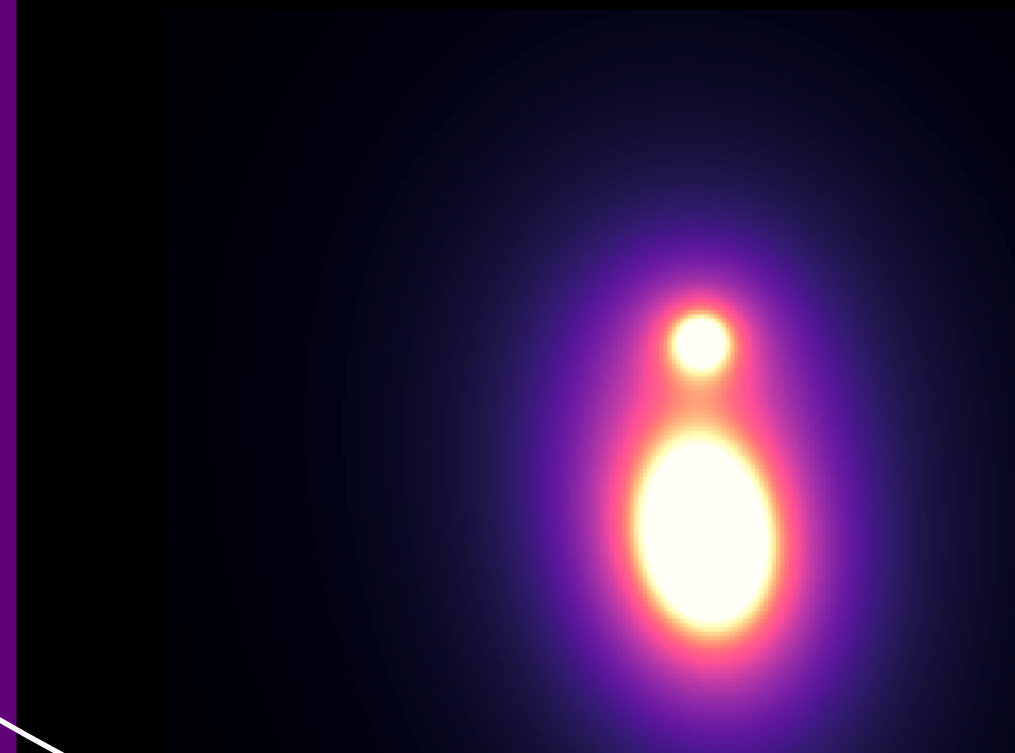
$$\nabla \cdot \alpha = 2 \kappa$$

# The likelihood

## Strong lensing response

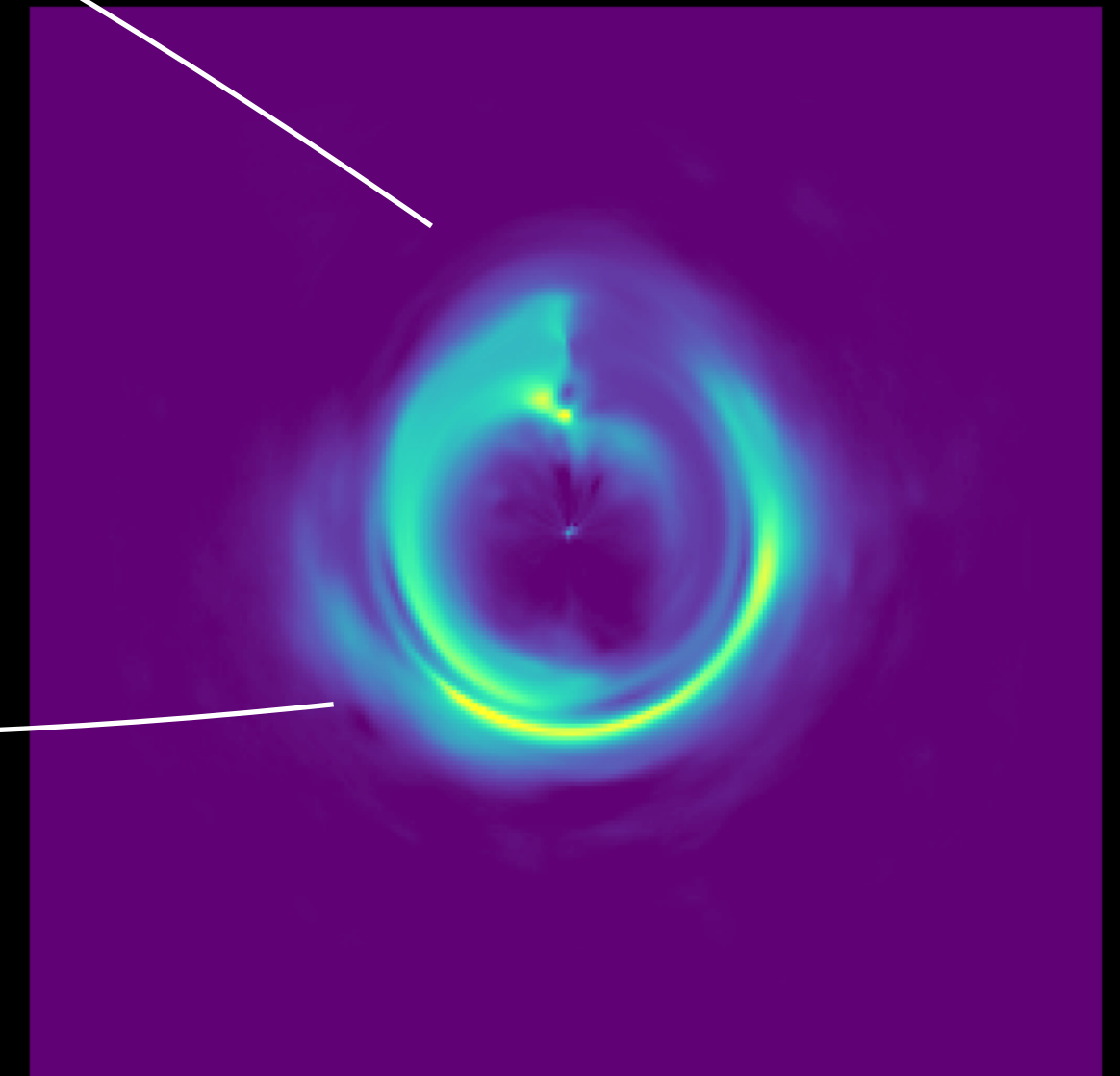


Source galaxy



DM halo mass profile

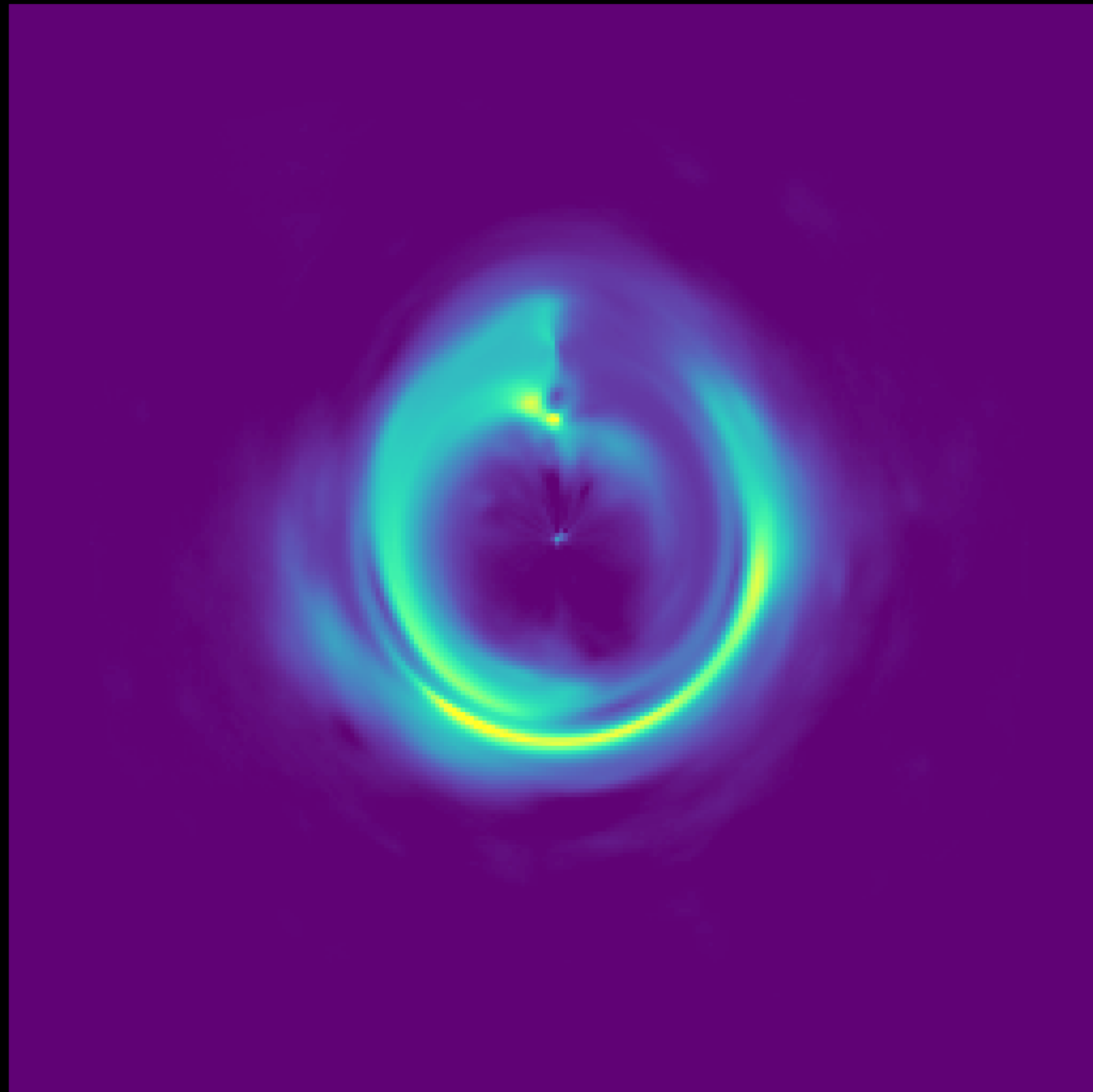
$$\nabla \cdot \alpha = 2 \kappa$$



$$y = x - \alpha(\mathbf{x})$$

# The likelihood

## Instrument response



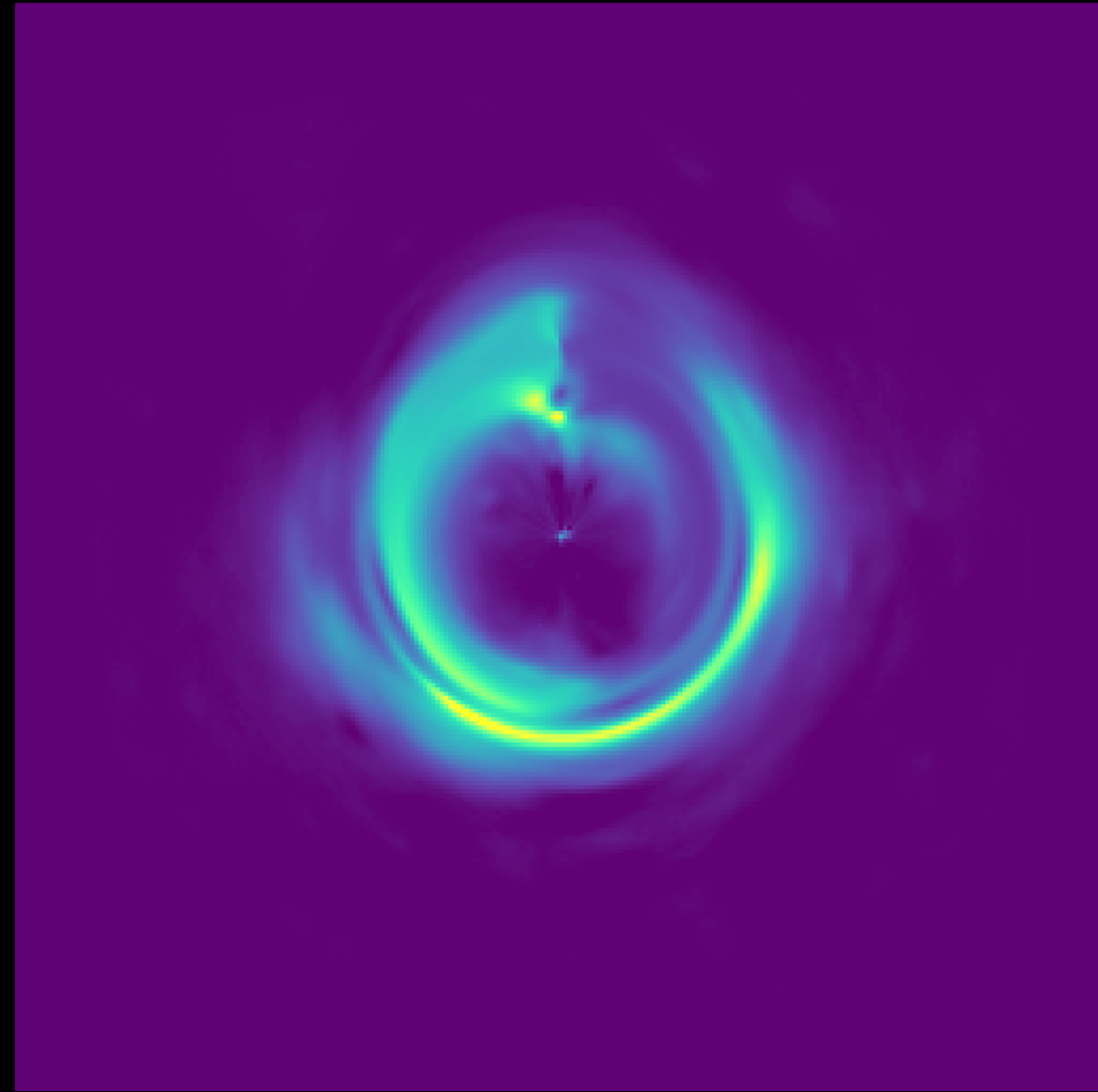
Lensed galaxy signal



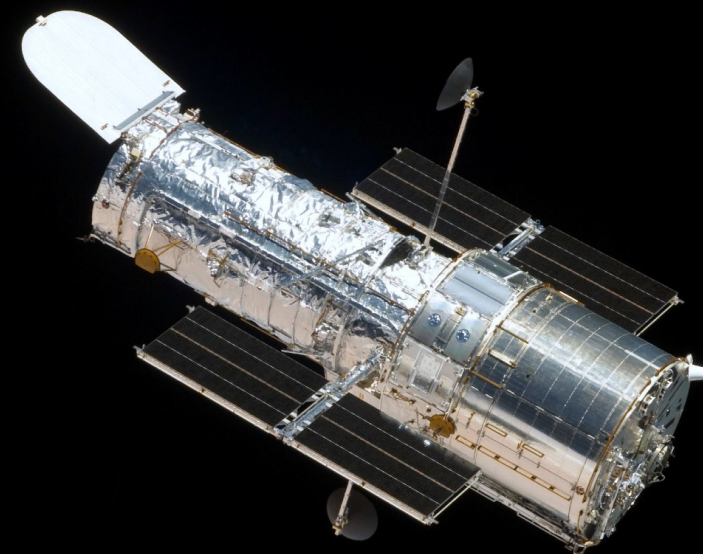
Hubble Space Telescope

# The likelihood

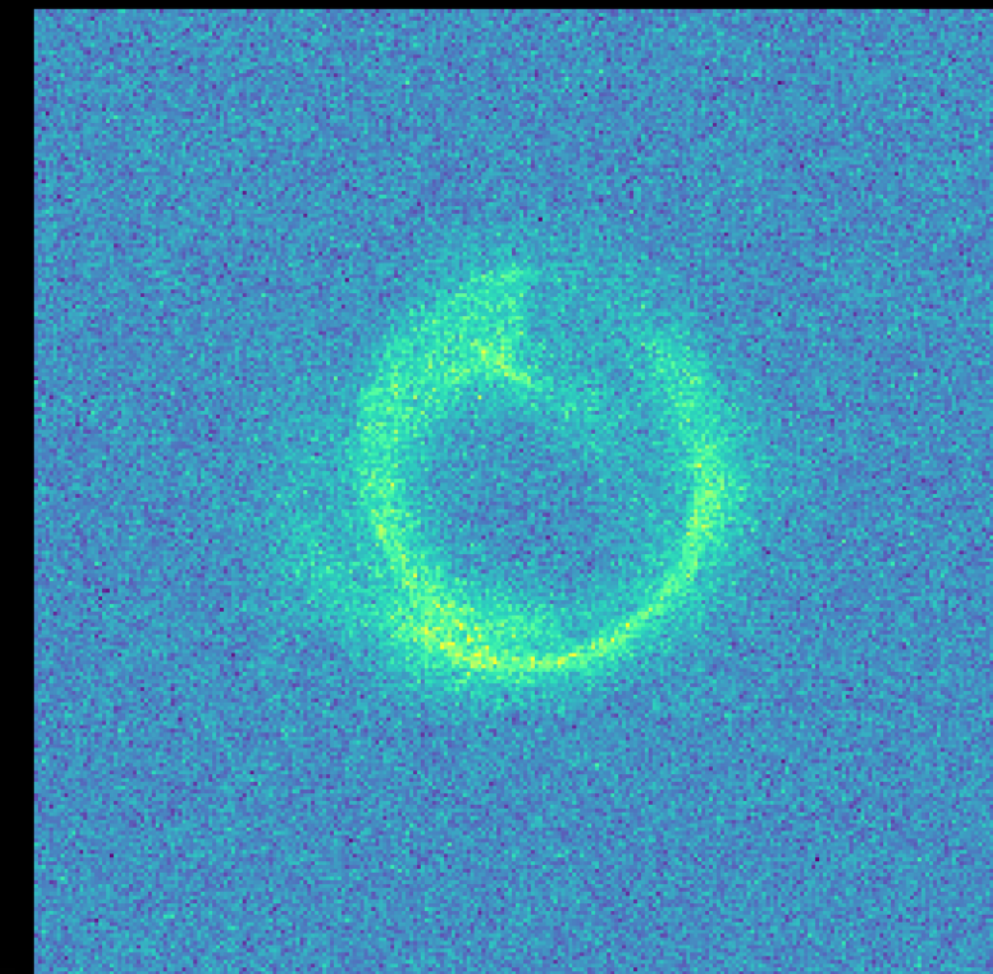
## Instrument response



Lensed galaxy signal



Hubble Space Telescope

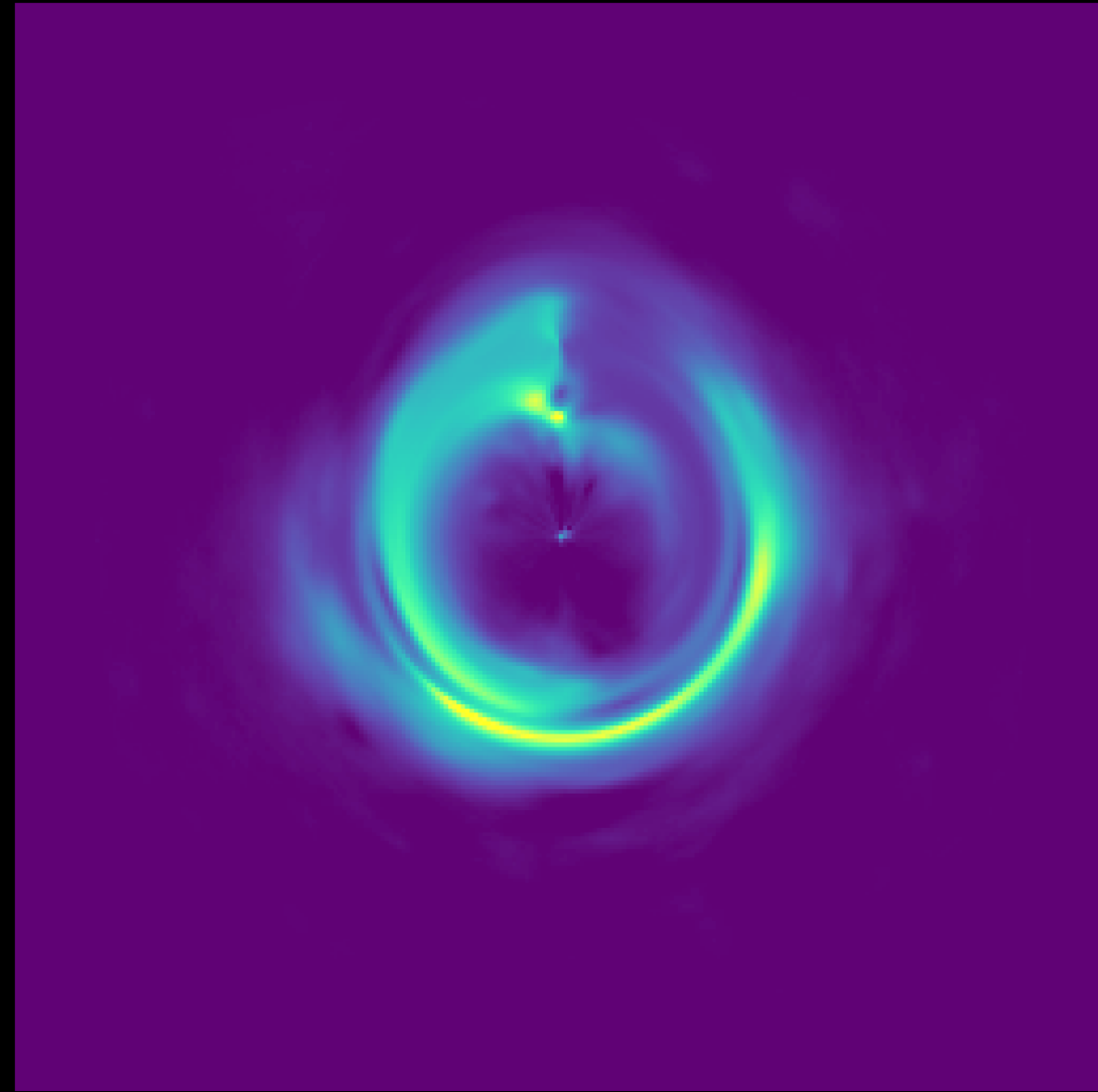


Data on Earth



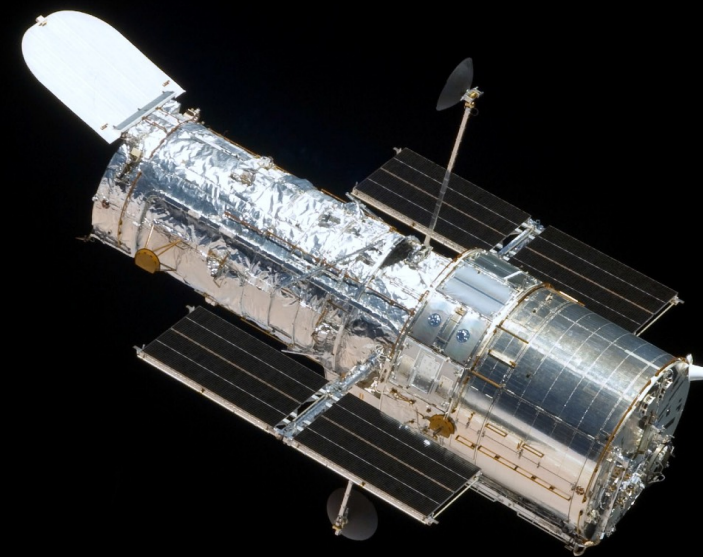
# The likelihood

## Instrument response



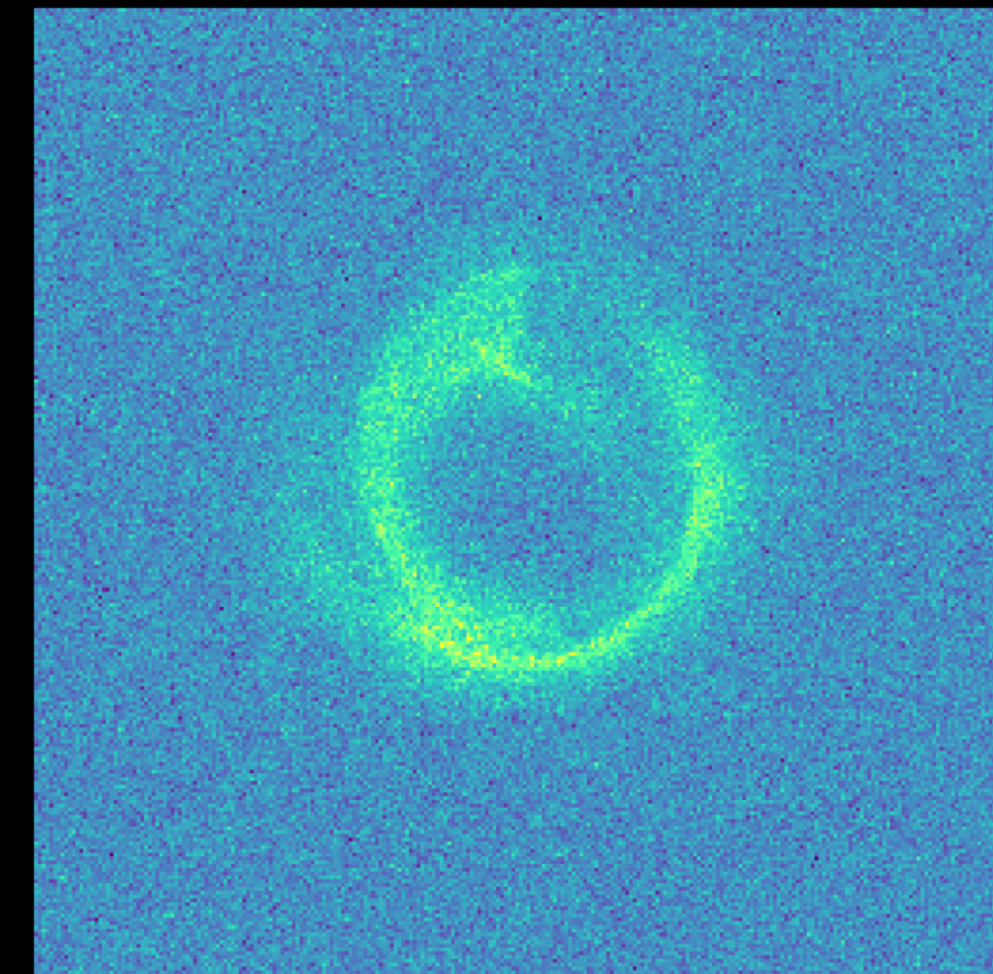
Lensed galaxy signal

$$L(s)$$



Hubble Space Telescope

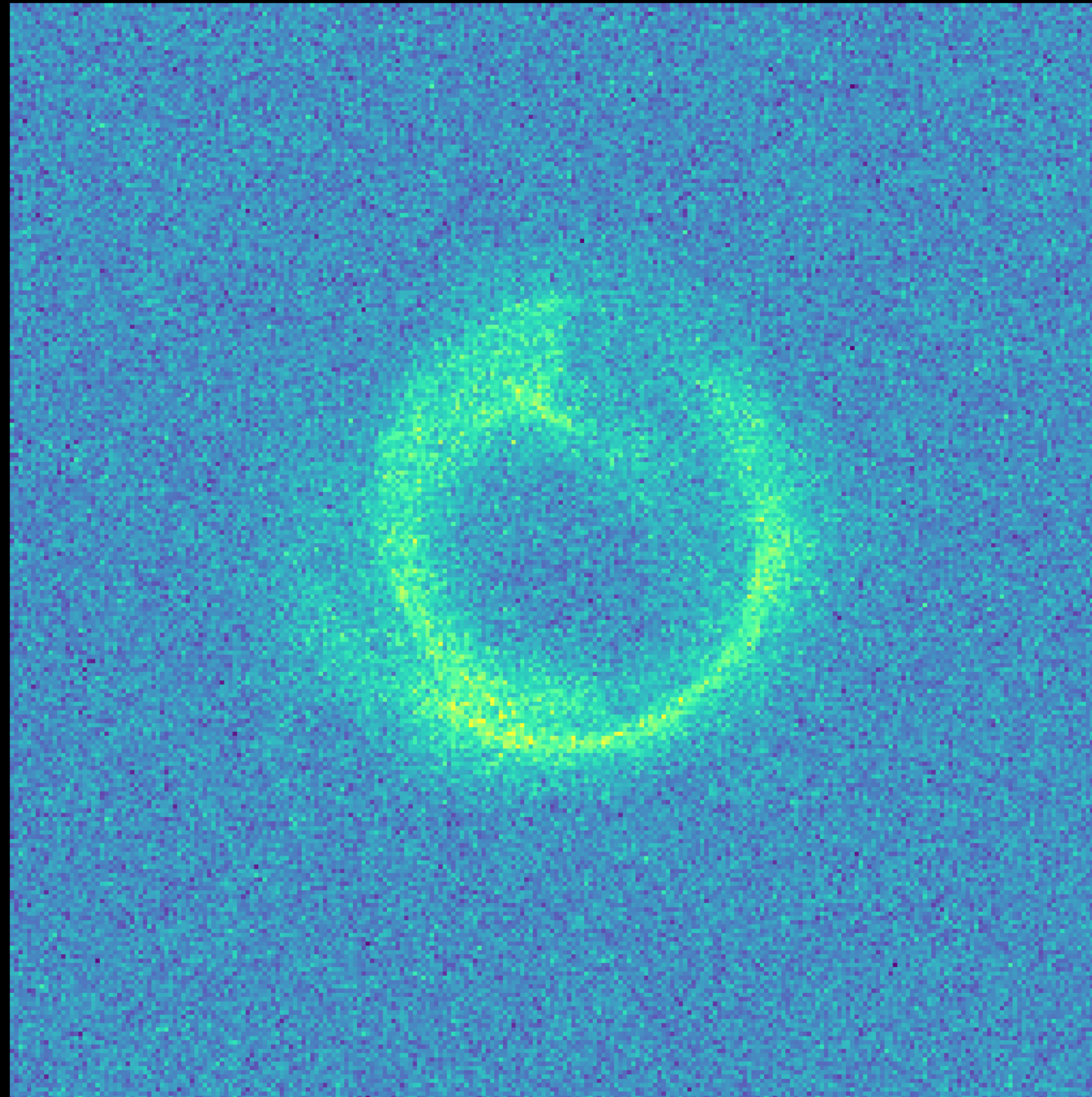
$$RL(s)$$



Data on Earth

$$P(d | s) = \mathcal{G}(RL(s) - d, \sigma_h)$$

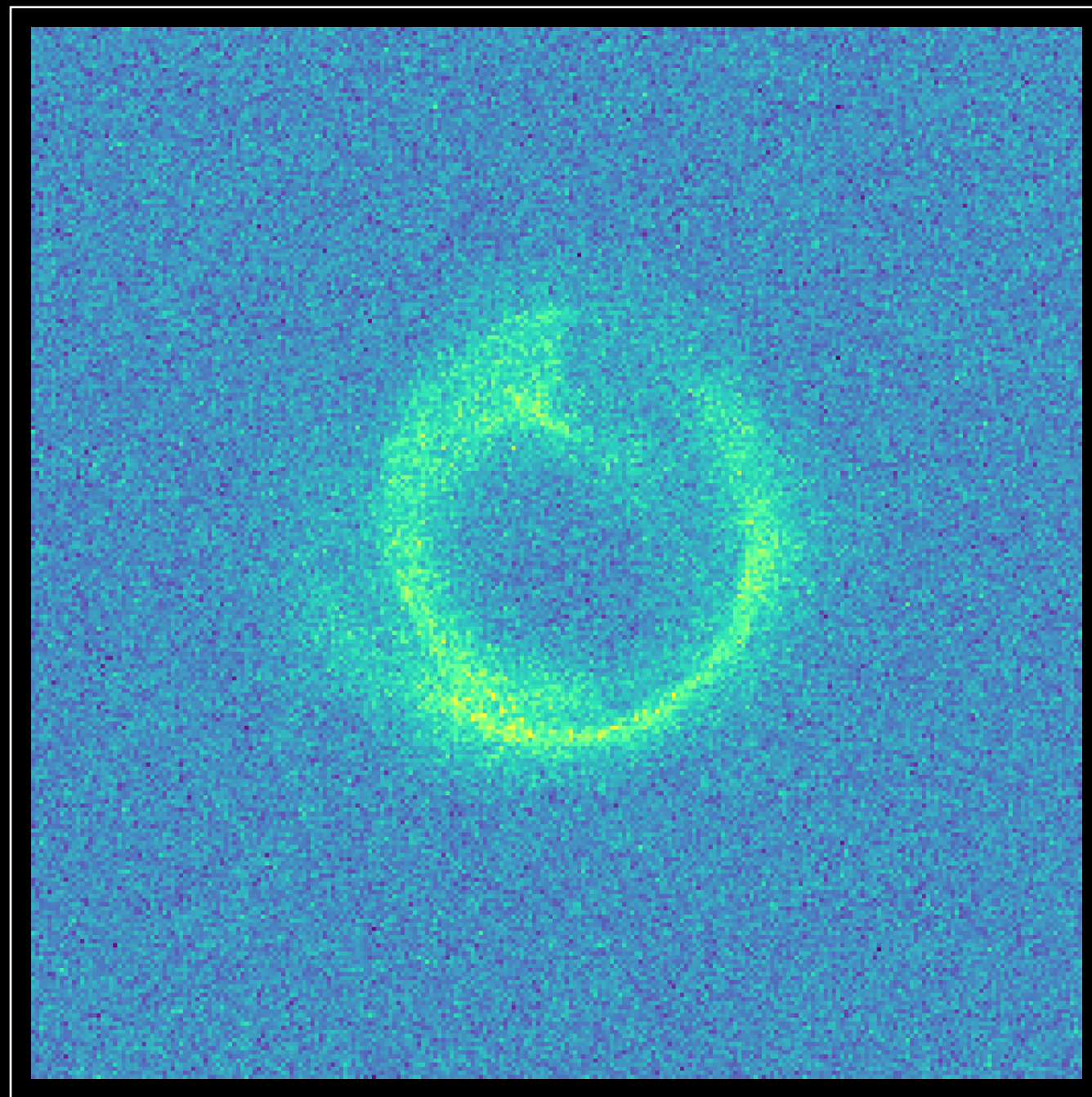
# The data



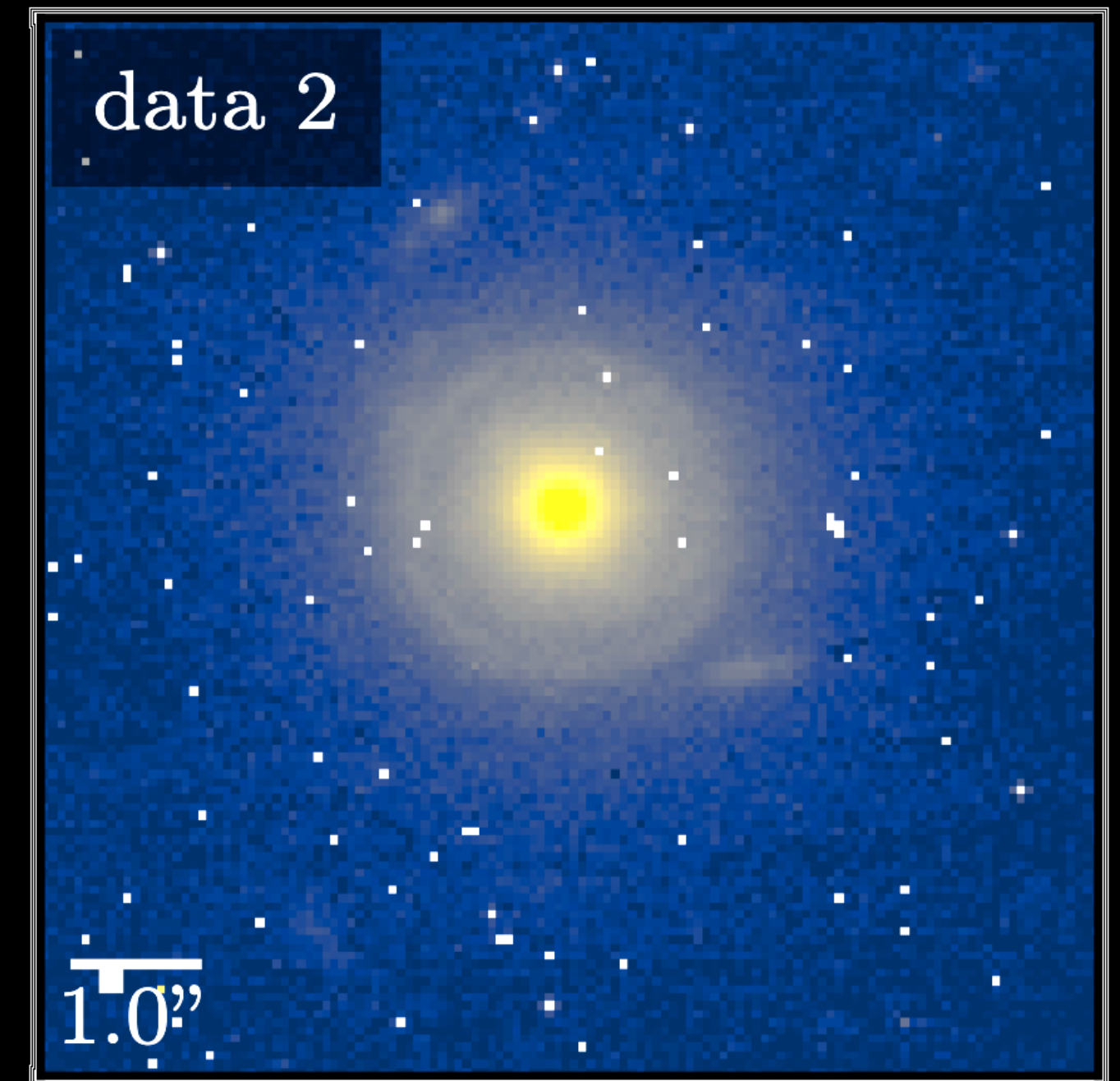
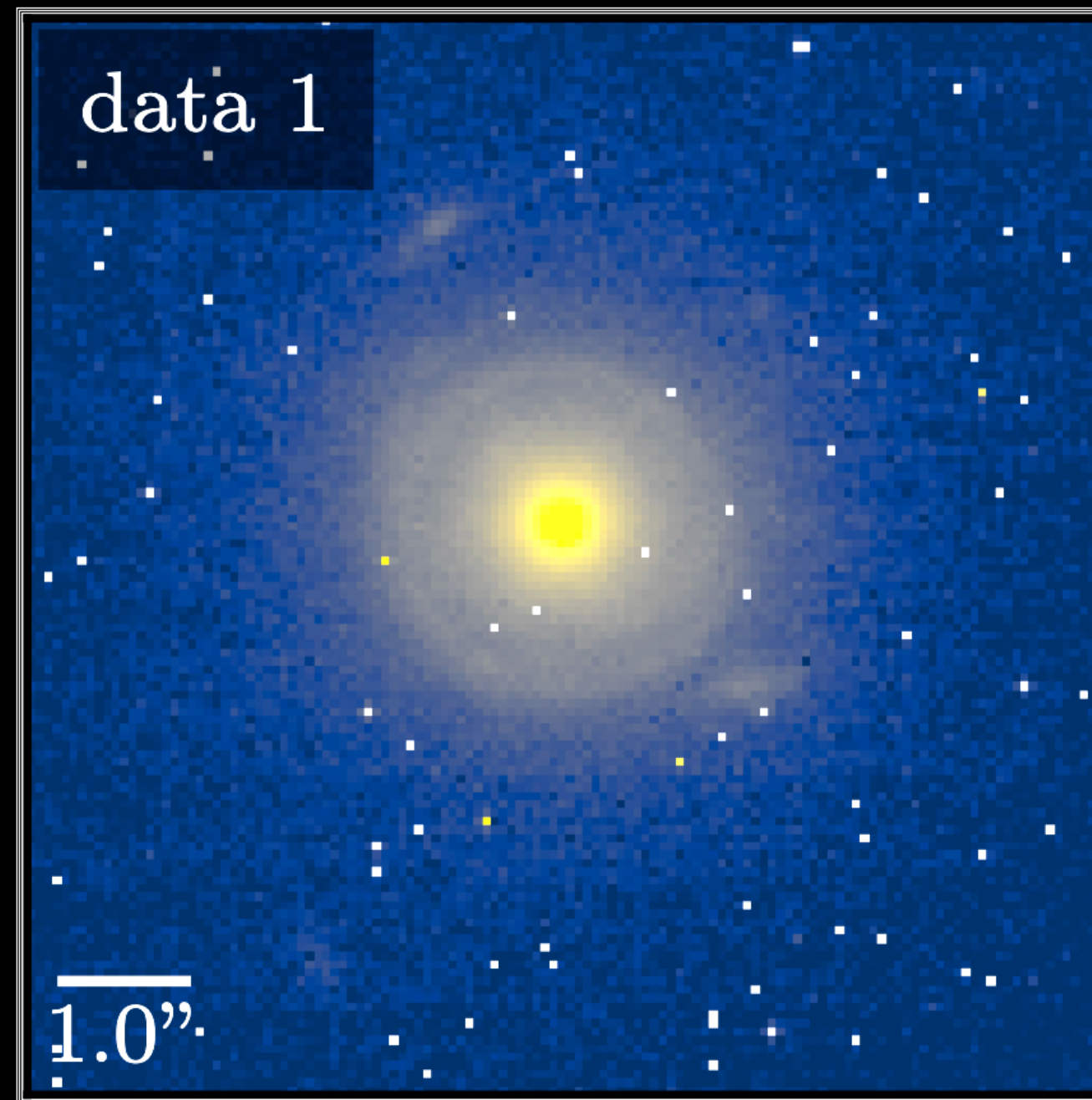
Simulated HST data

# The likelihood

## Instrument response



HST synthetic data

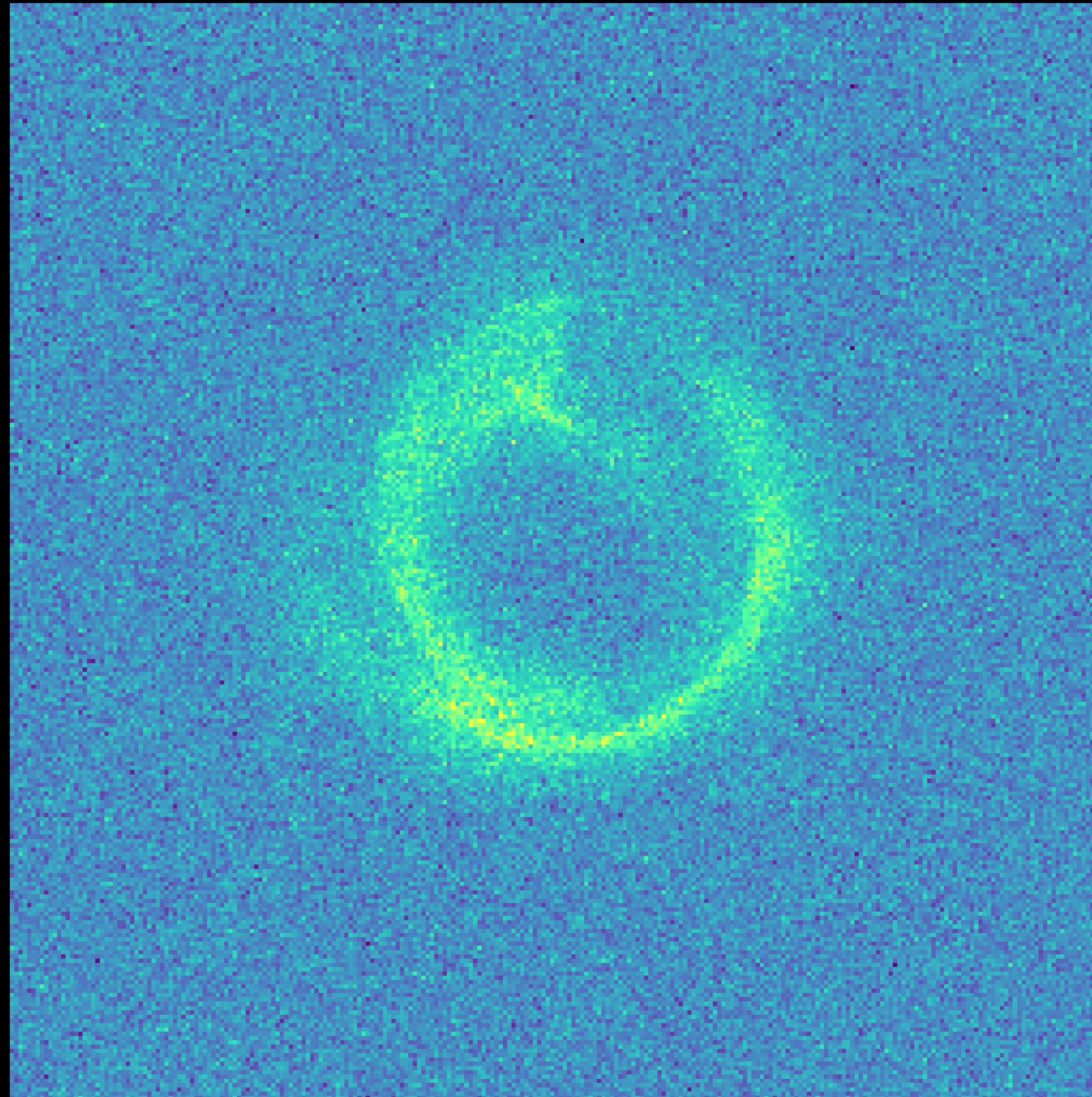


Real JWST lensing data

# The Posterior

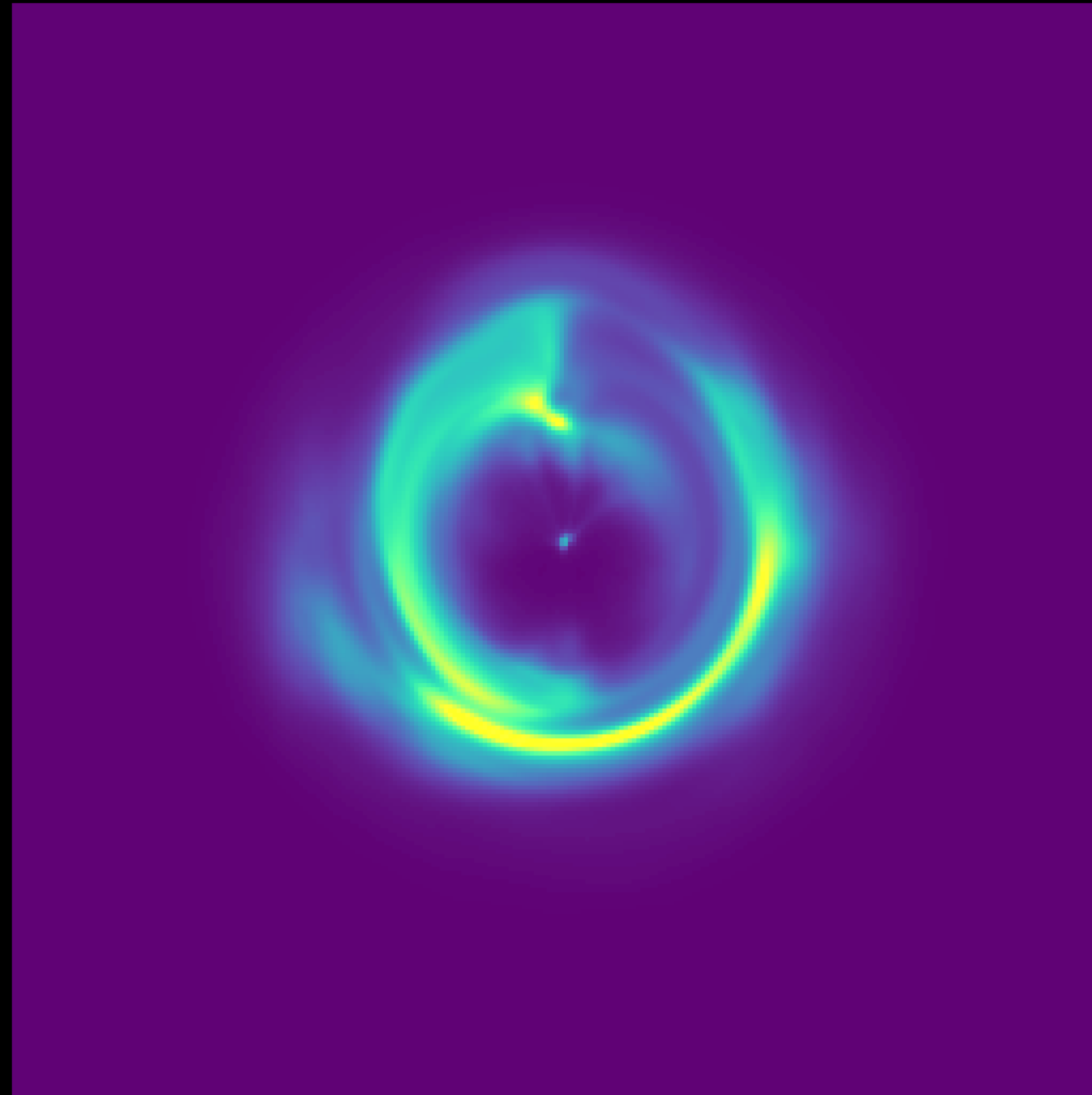
$$P(s | d) = \frac{P(d | s) P(s)}{P(d)}$$

# The data



Simulated HST data

# The reconstruction

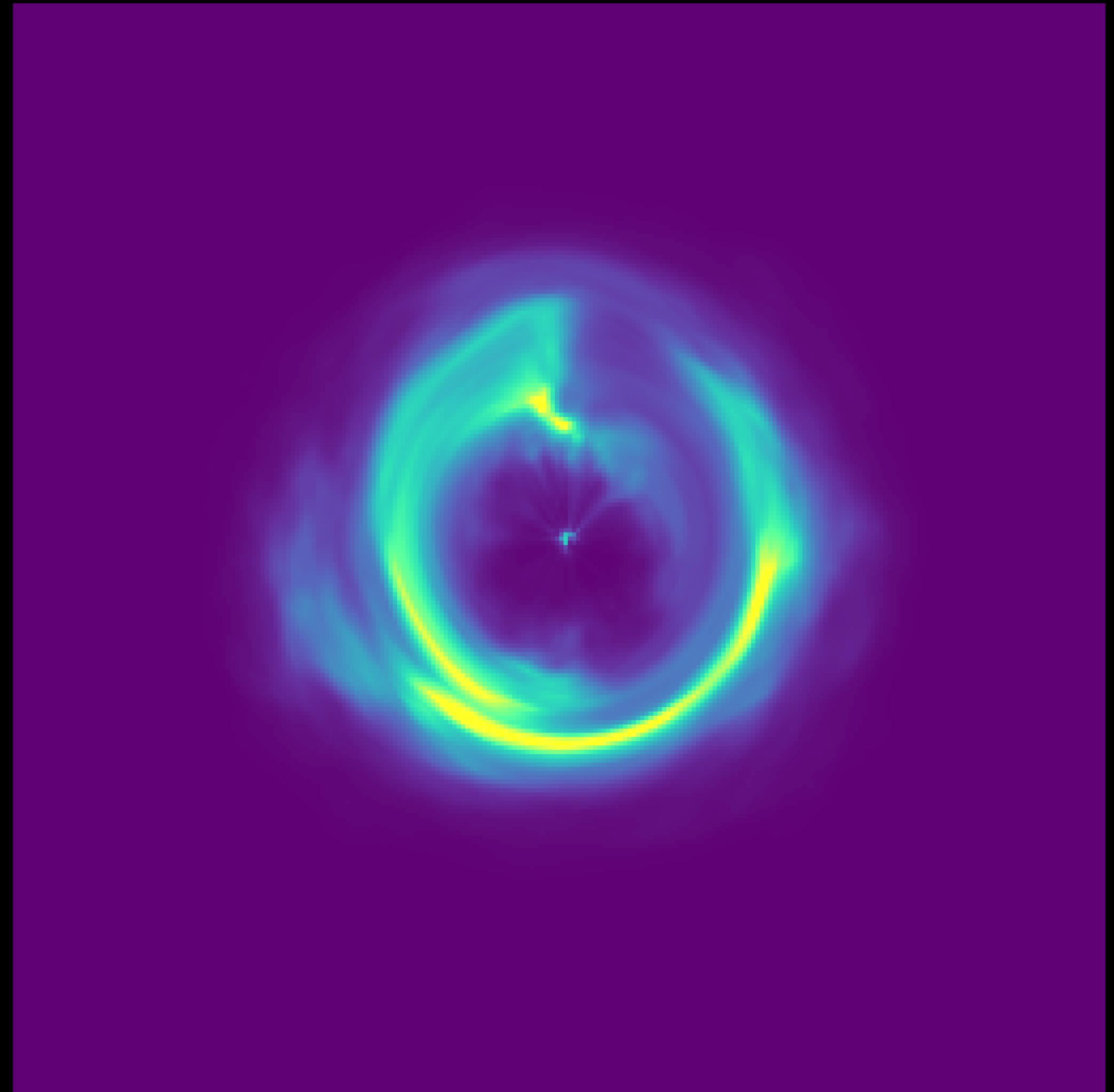


Lensed source light

# Inference

Posterior ( $L_s$ )

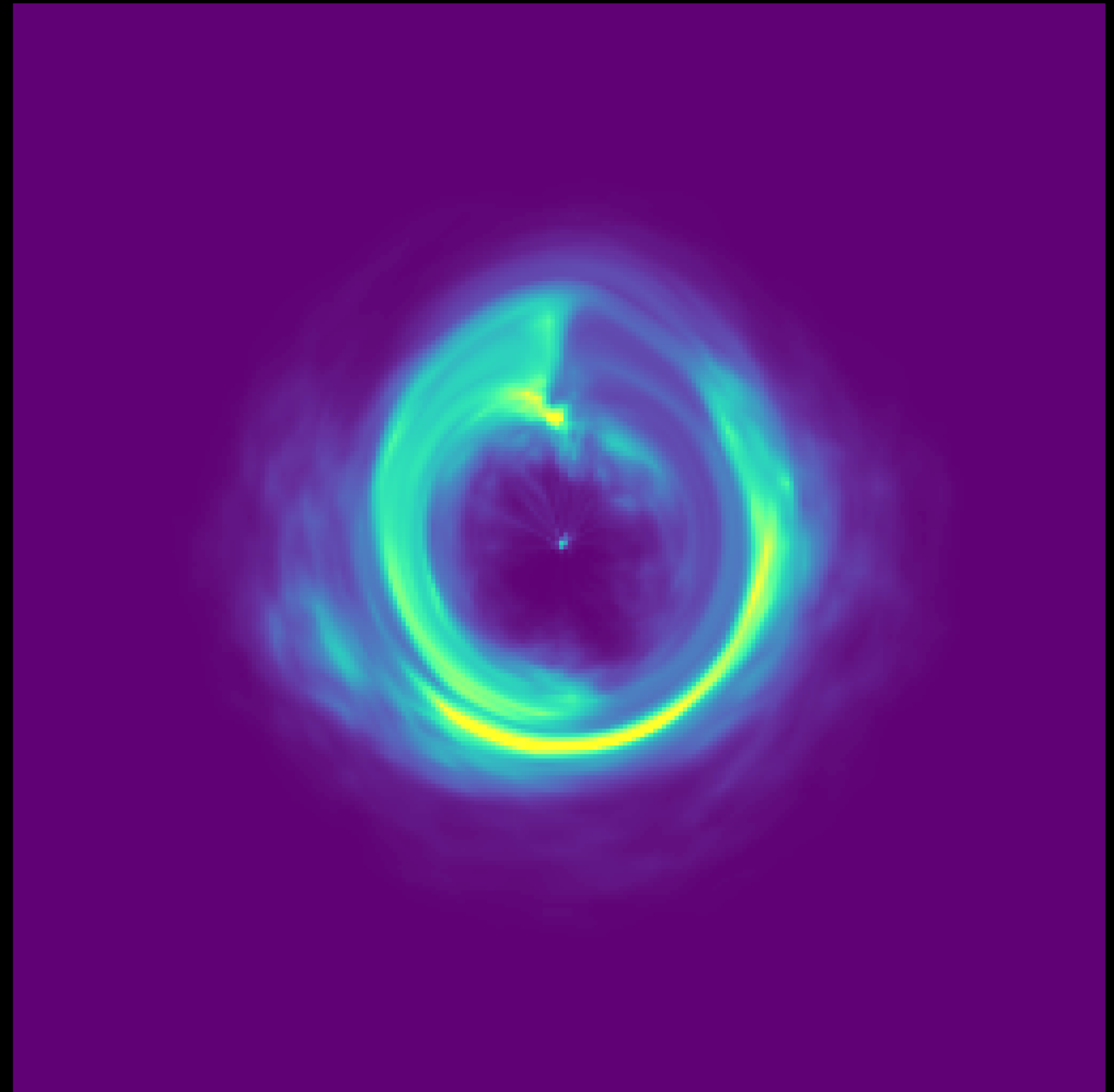
$$P(s | d)$$



# Inference

Posterior ( $L_s$ )

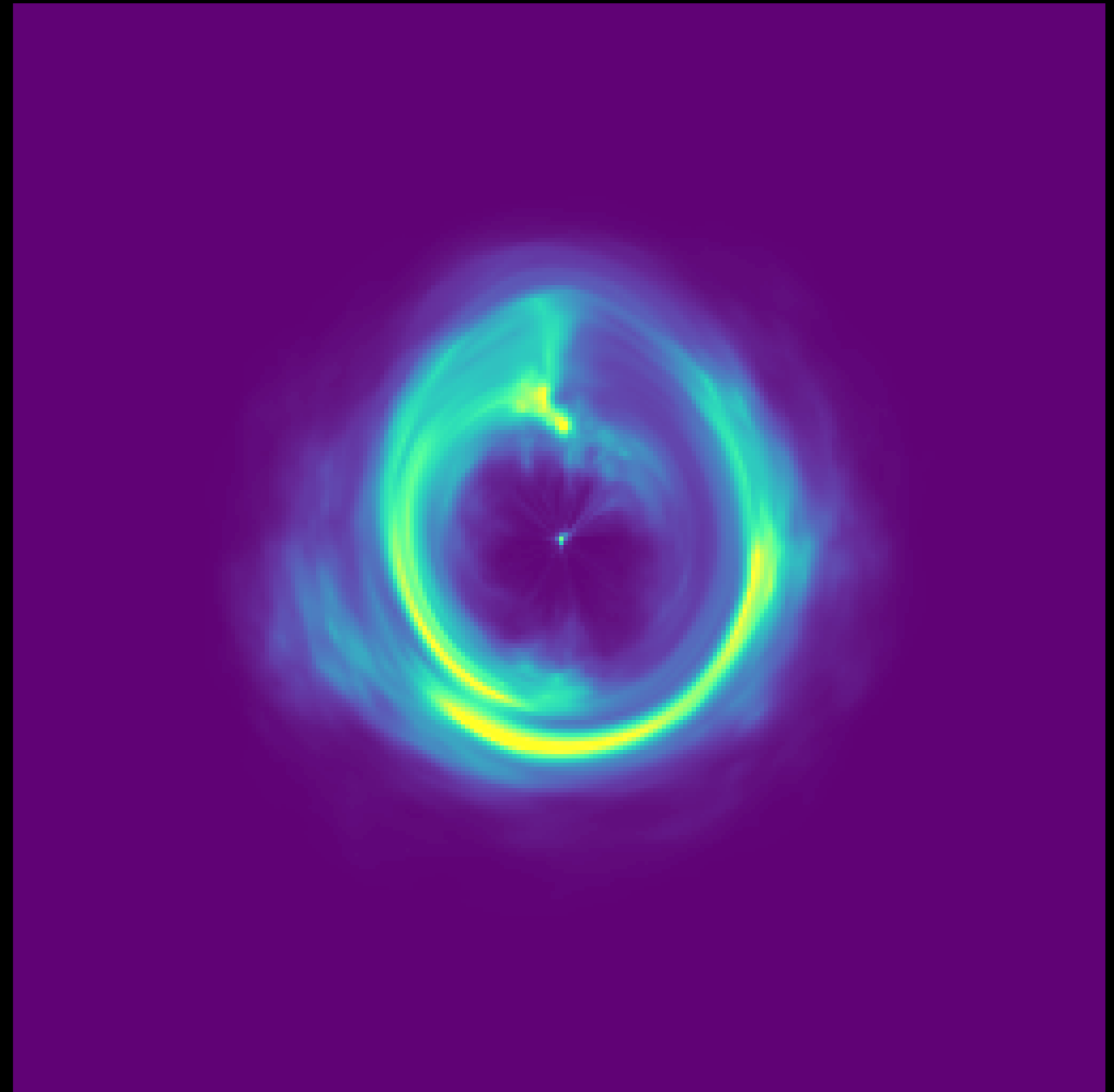
$$P(s | d)$$



# Inference

Posterior ( $L_s$ )

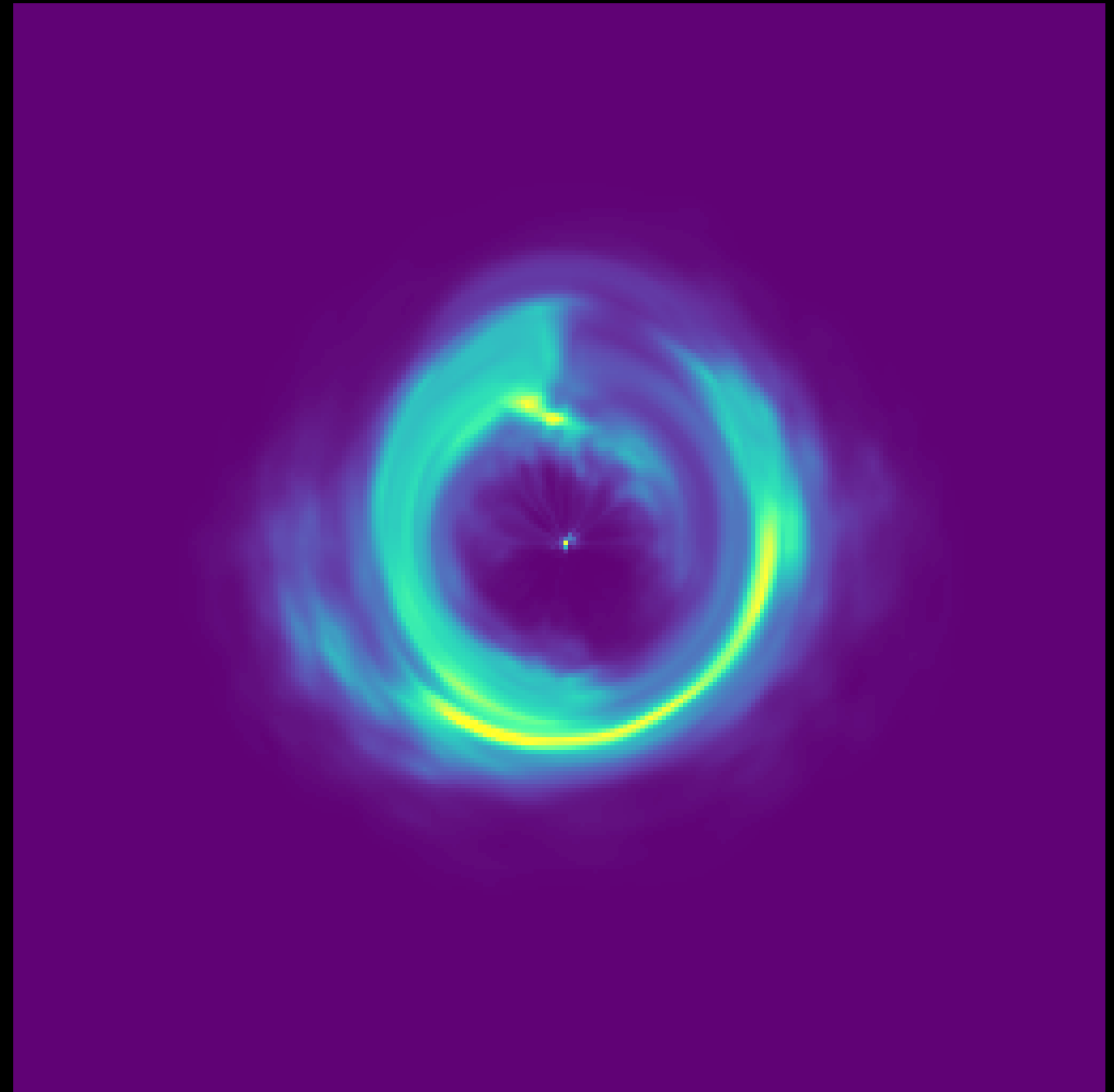
$$P(s | d)$$



# Inference

Posterior ( $L_s$ )

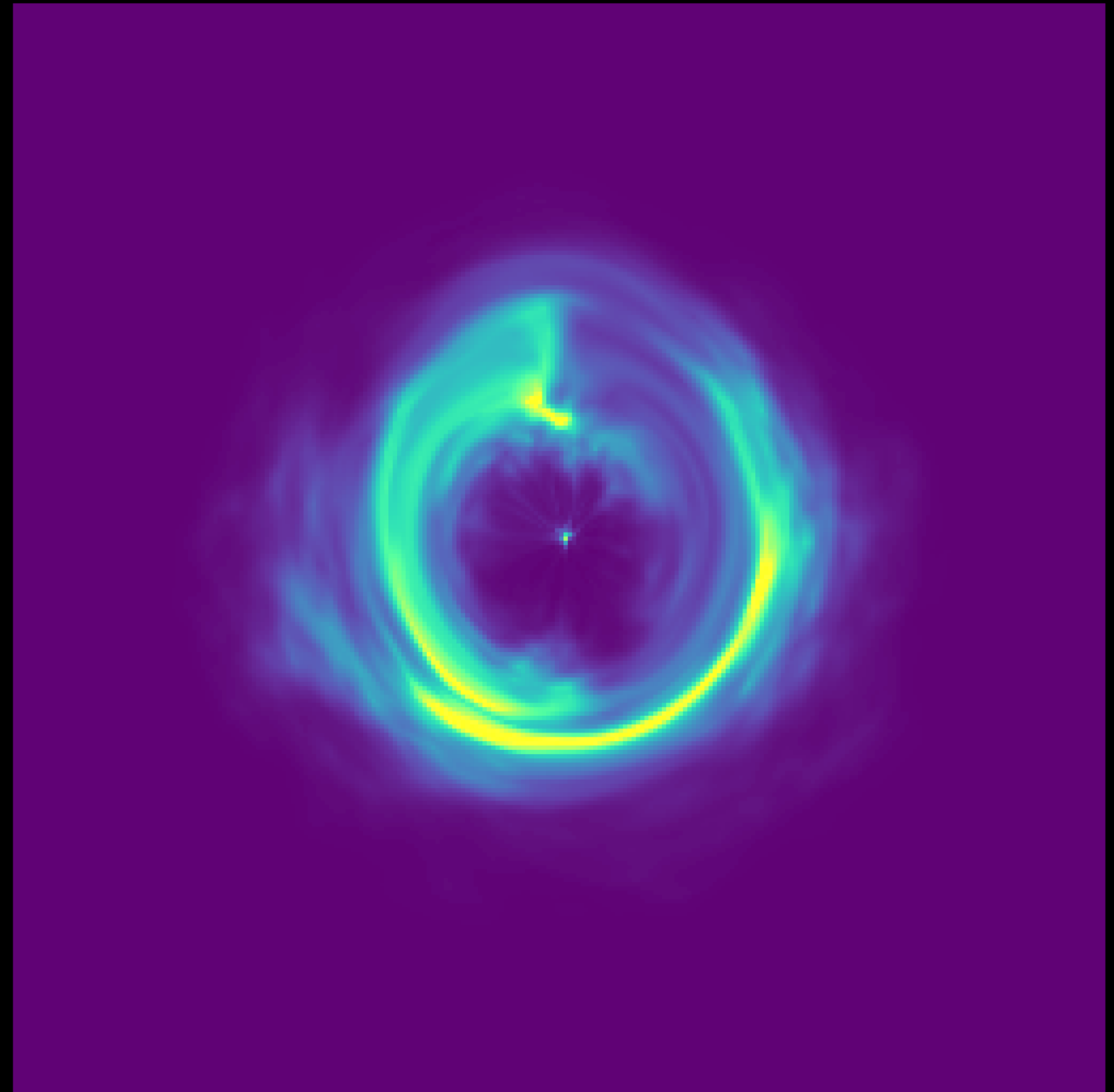
$$P(s | d)$$



# Inference

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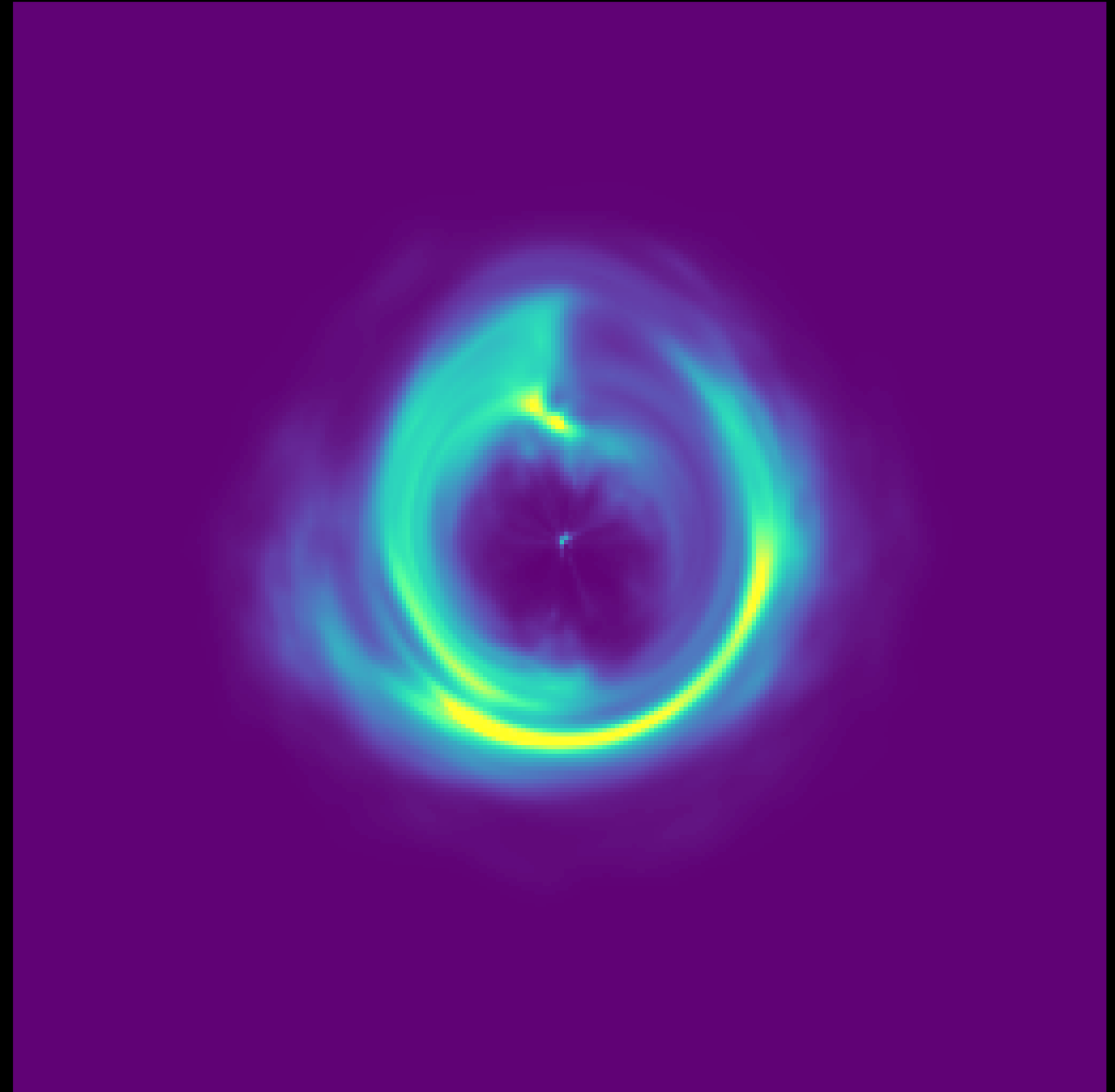
$$P(s | d)$$



# Inference

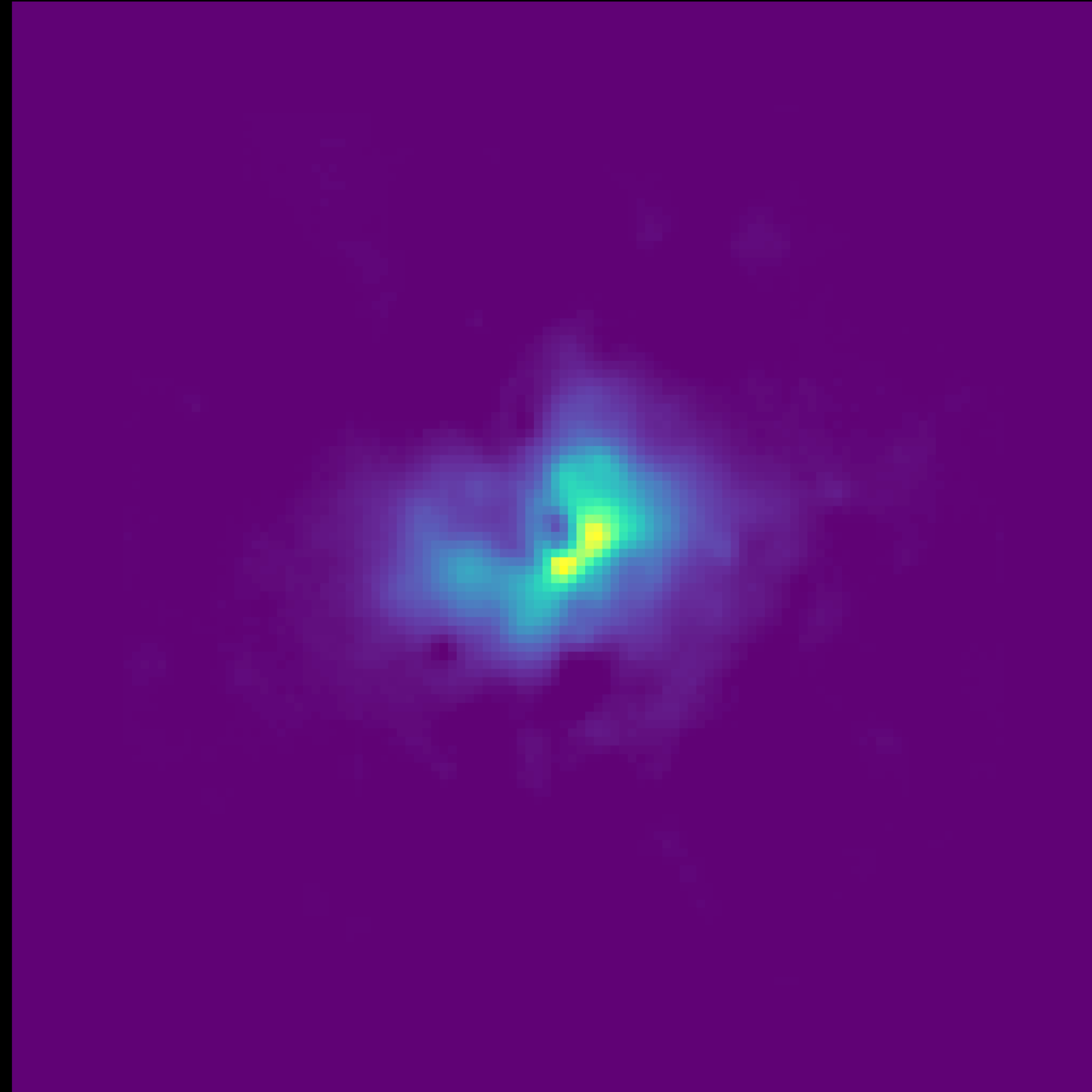
Posterior ( $L_s$ )

$$P(s | d)$$



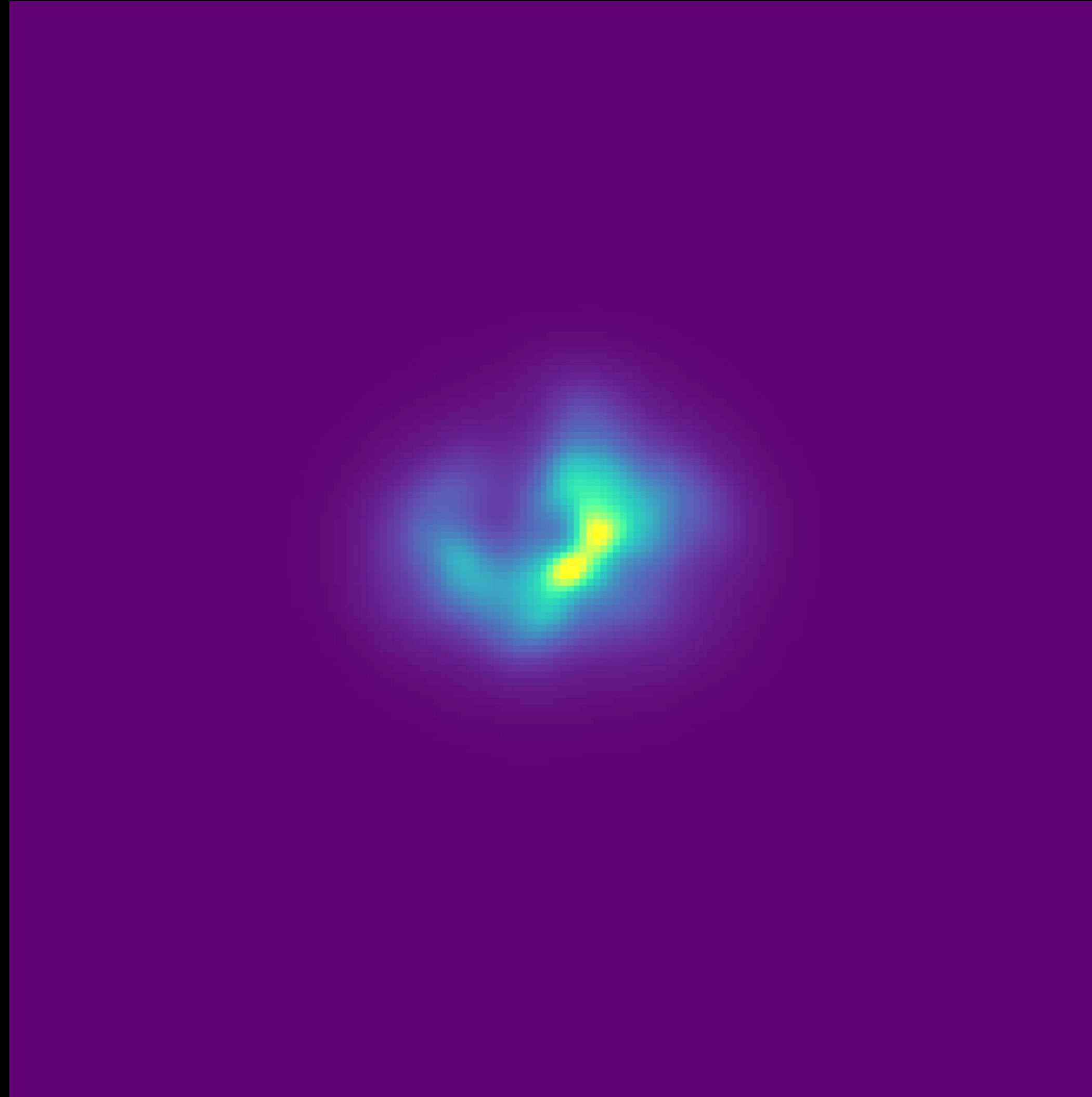
# The source

Ground truth



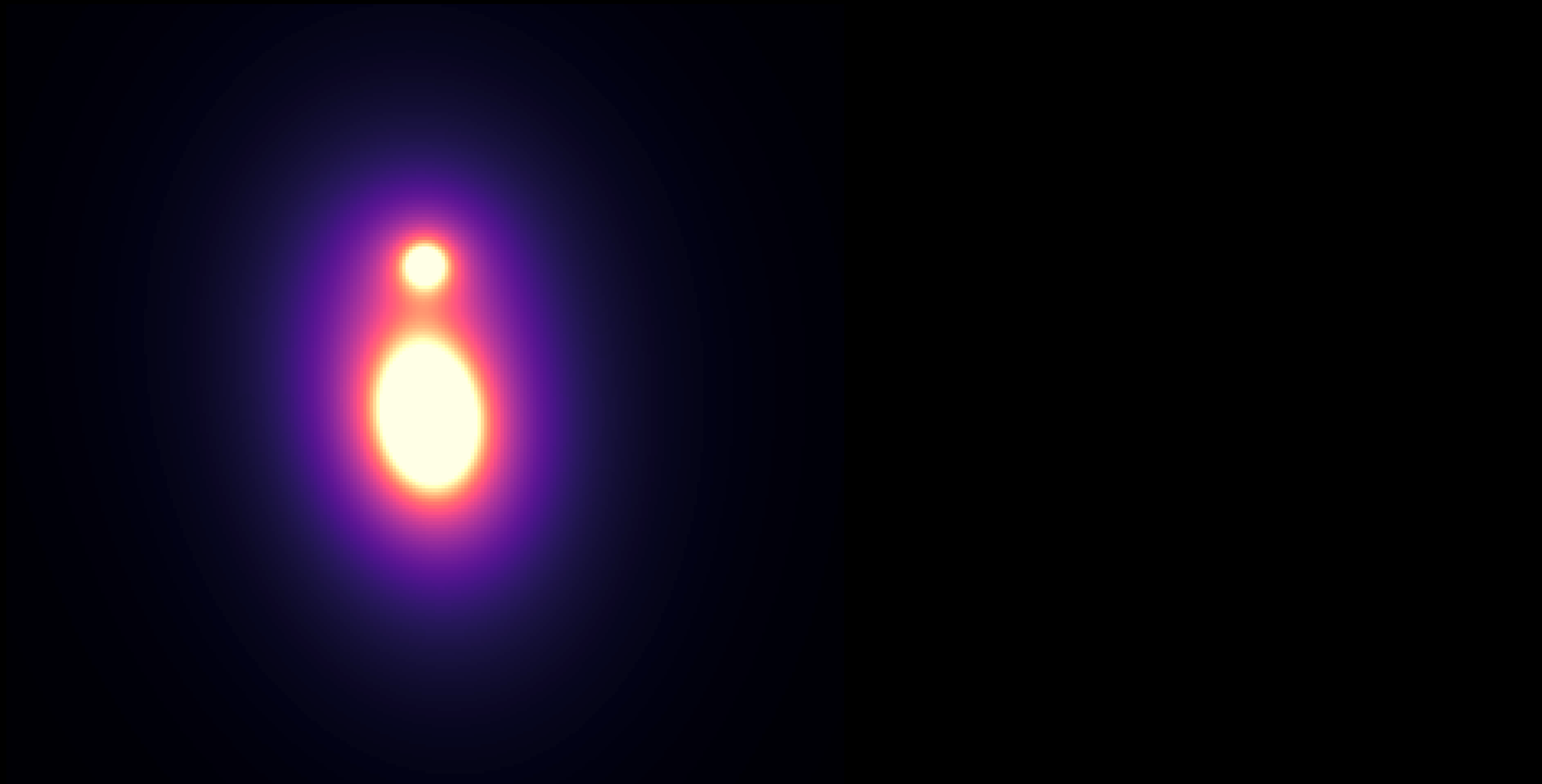
# The source

## Reconstruction



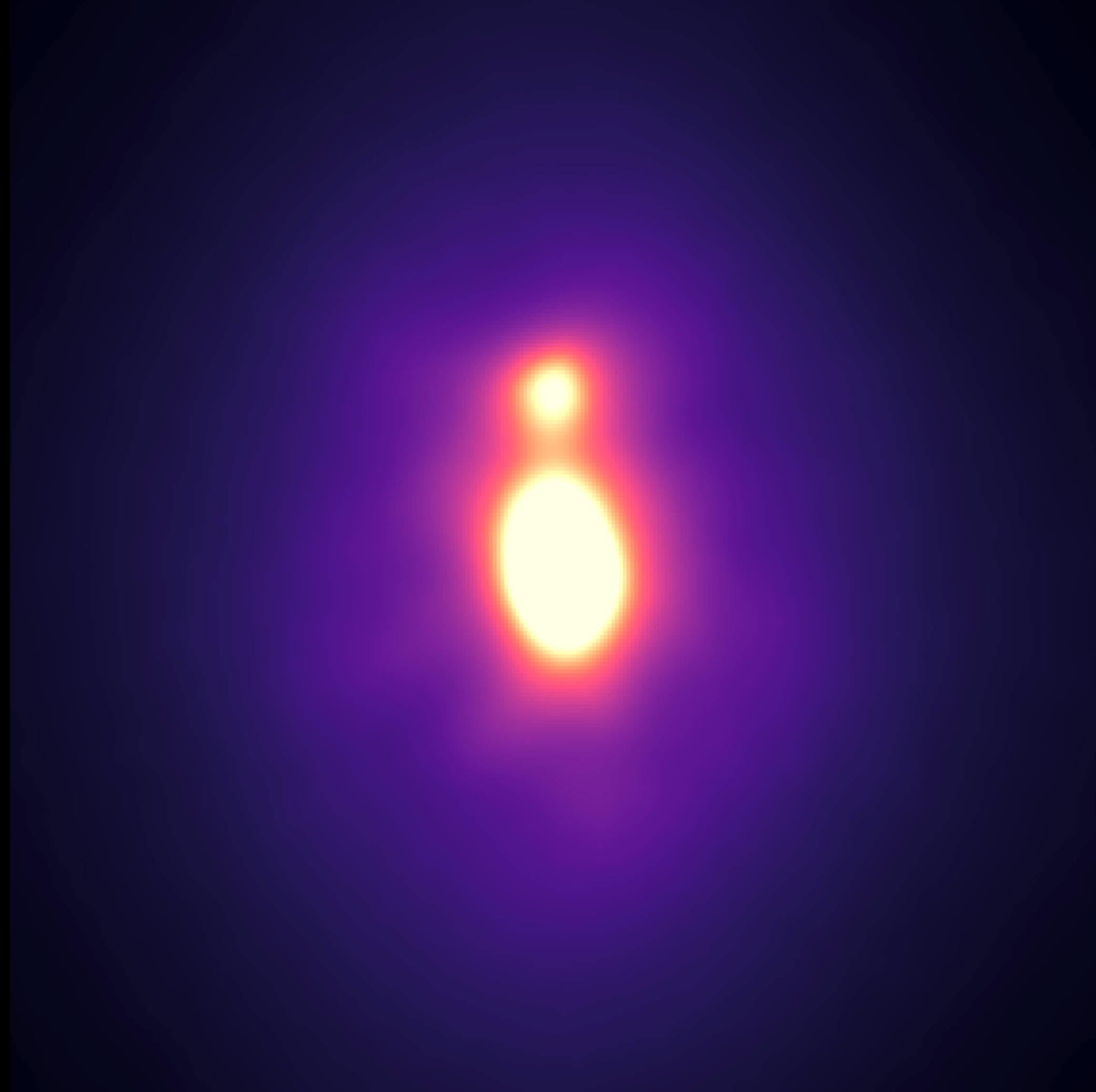
# The convergence

Ground truth



# The convergence

## Reconstruction



**So what's the problem?**

# The problem

# The problem

Fields!

# The problem

**Fields!**

-> allow for **non-trivial degeneracies!**

# The problem

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-> allow for **non-trivial degeneracies!**

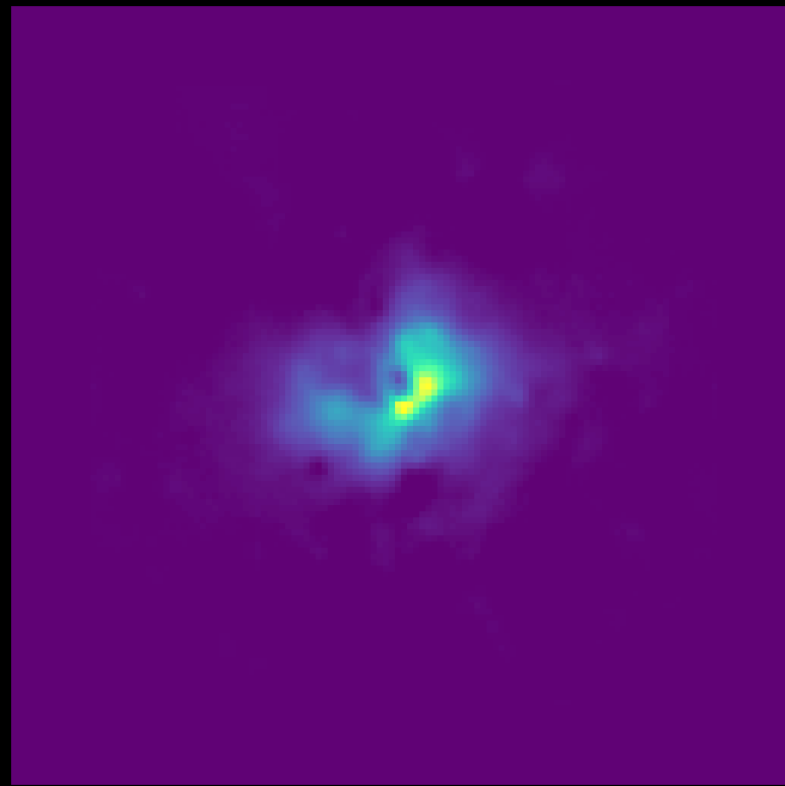
$$M_1(\theta_1)$$

# The problem

Fields!

-> allow for **non-trivial degeneracies!**

$M_1(\theta_1)$

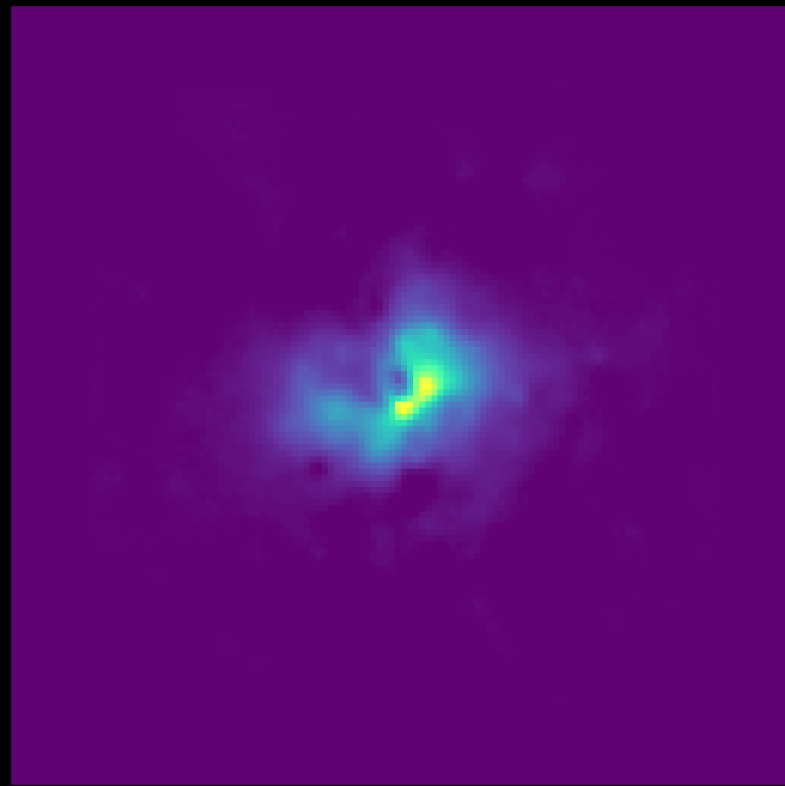


# The problem

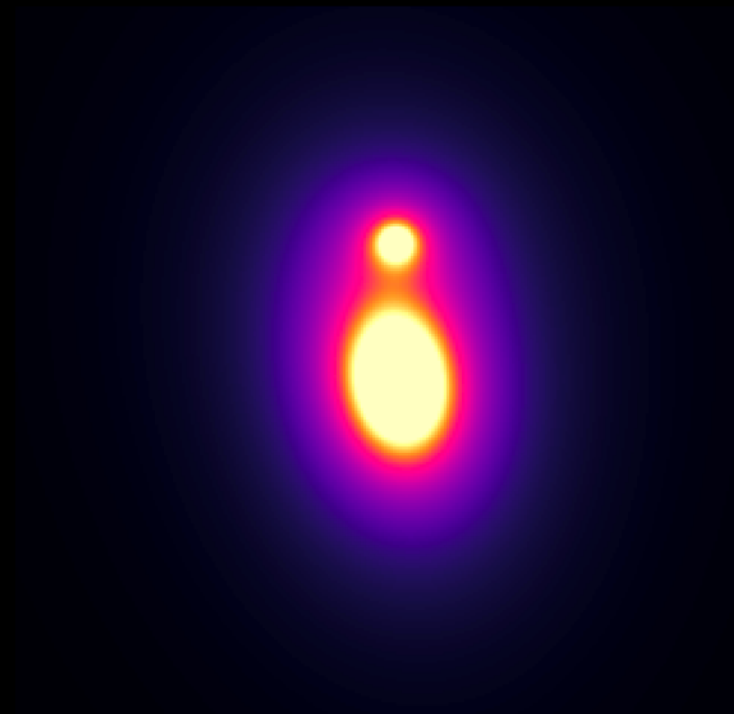
Fields!

-> allow for non-trivial degeneracies!

$M_1(\theta_1)$



$M_2(\theta_2)$

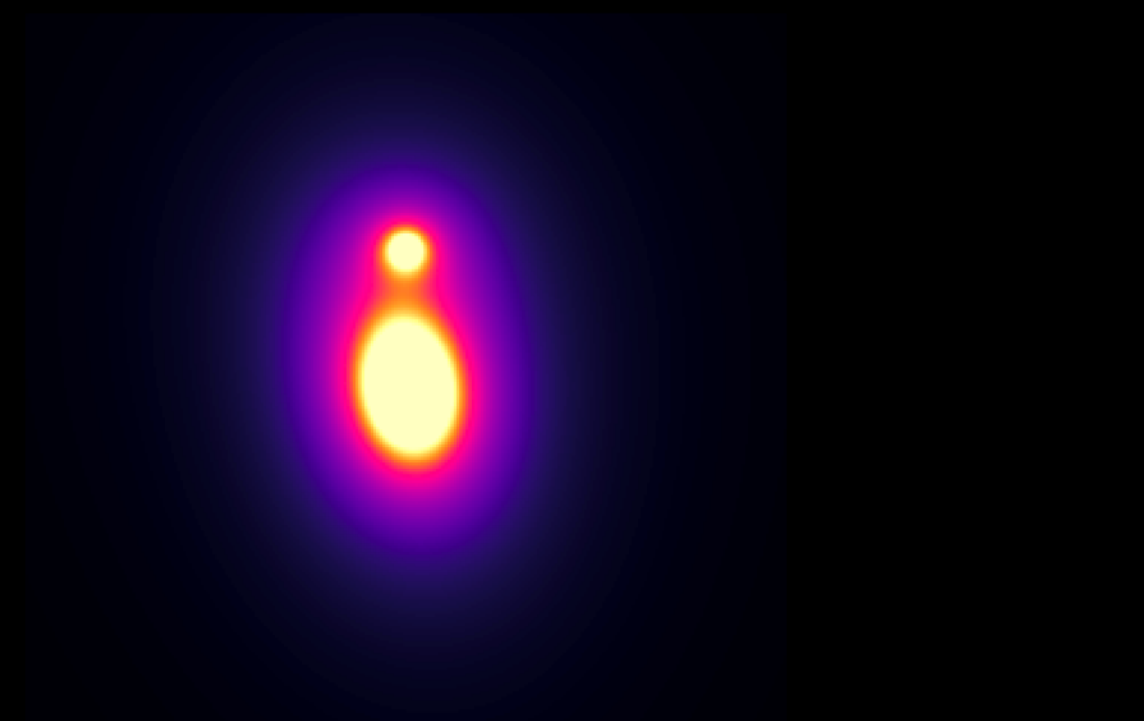
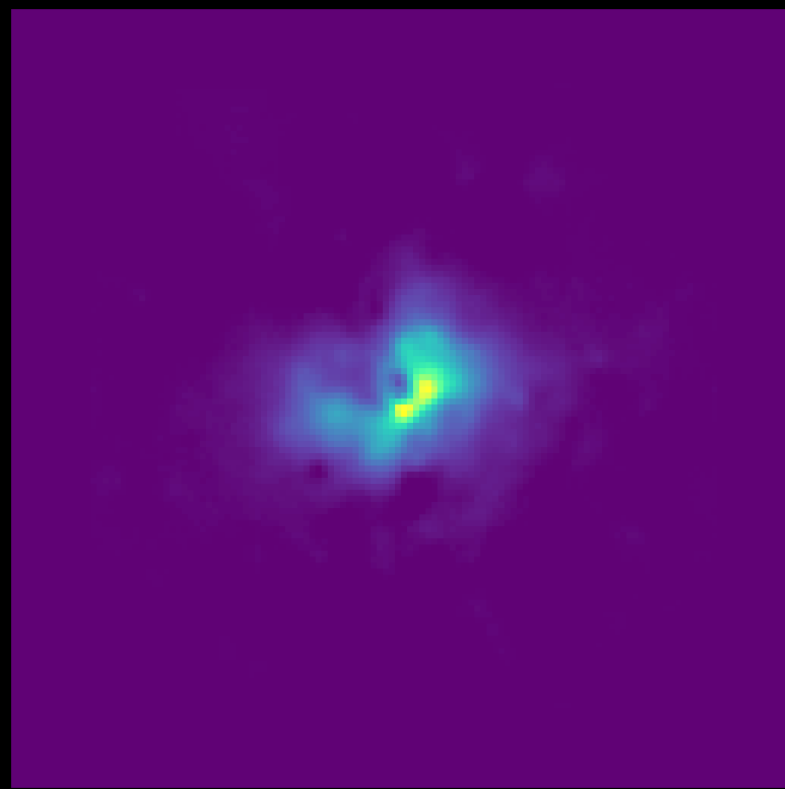


# The problem

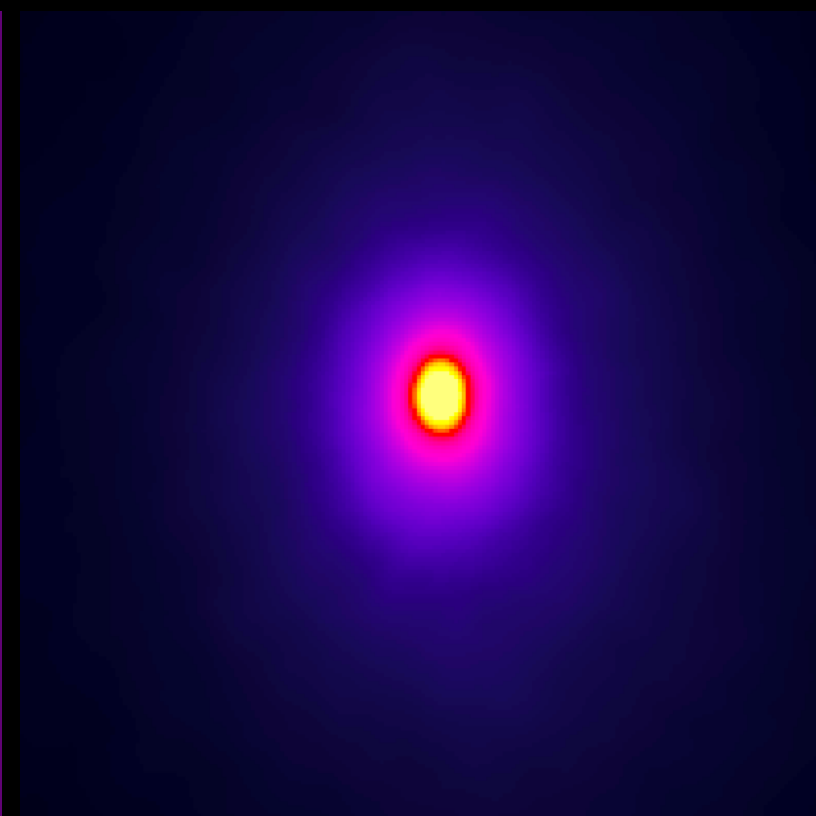
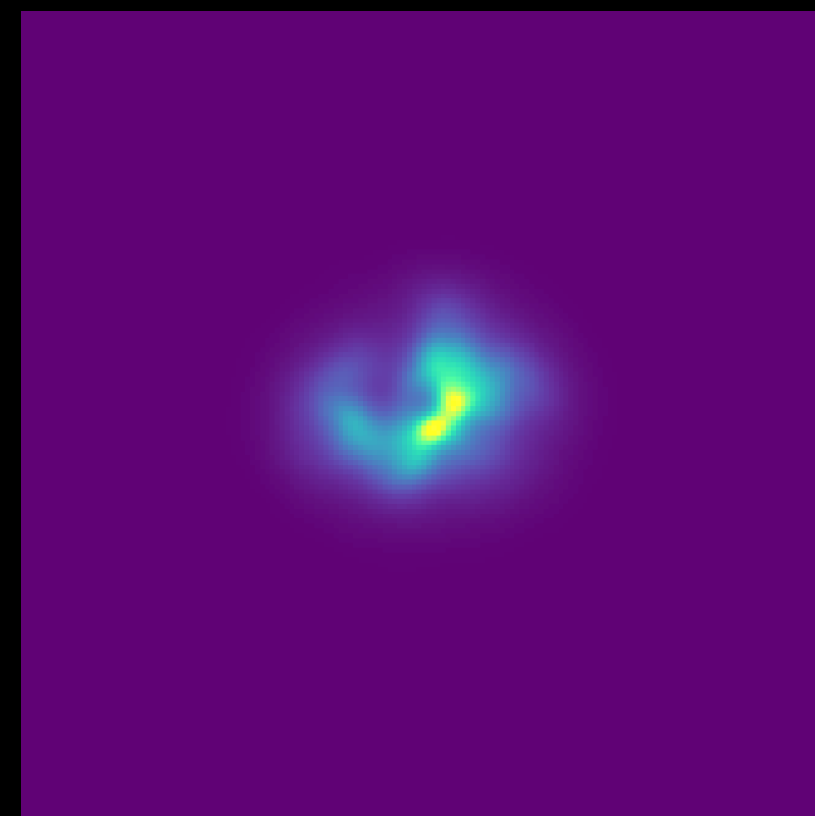
Fields!

-> allow for non-trivial degeneracies!

$M_1(\theta_1)$



$M_2(\theta_2)$

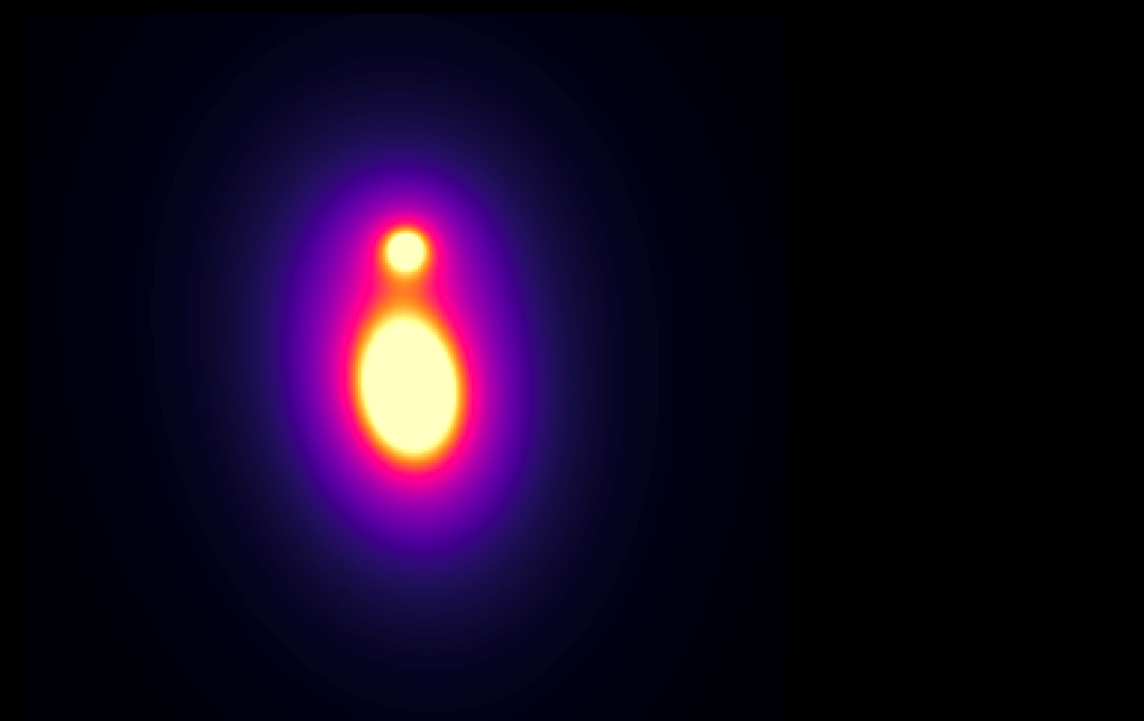
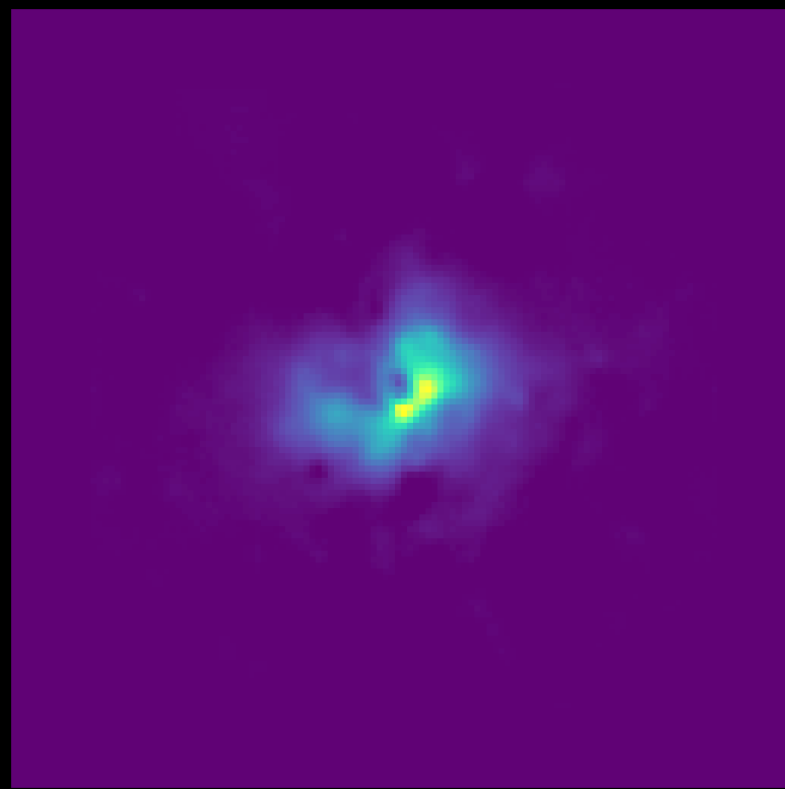


# The problem

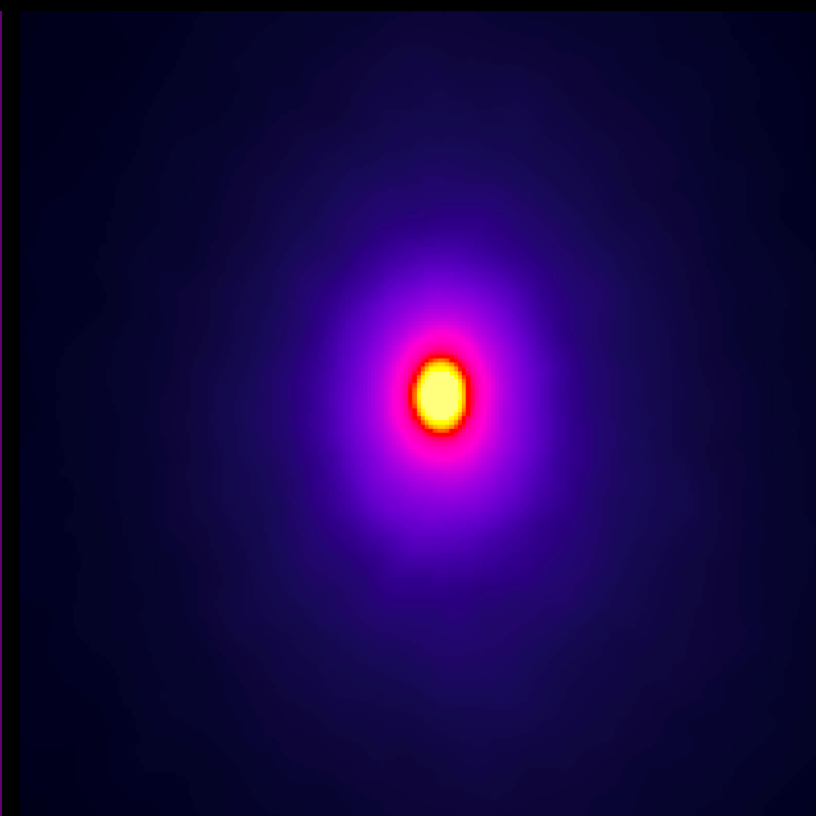
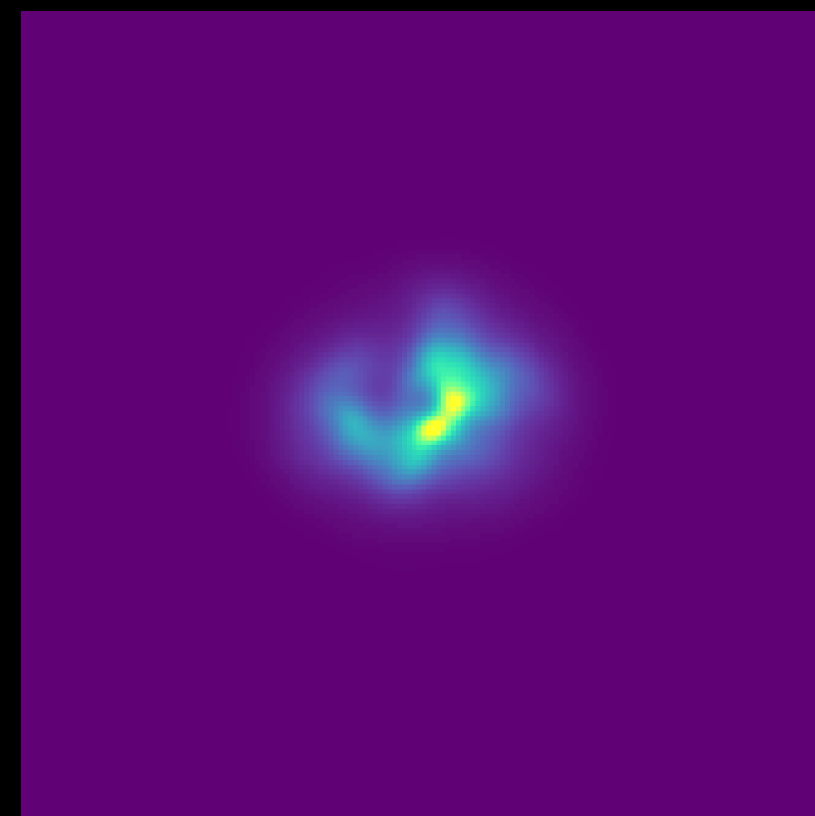
Fields!

-> allow for non-trivial degeneracies!

$M_1(\theta_1)$



$M_2(\theta_2)$



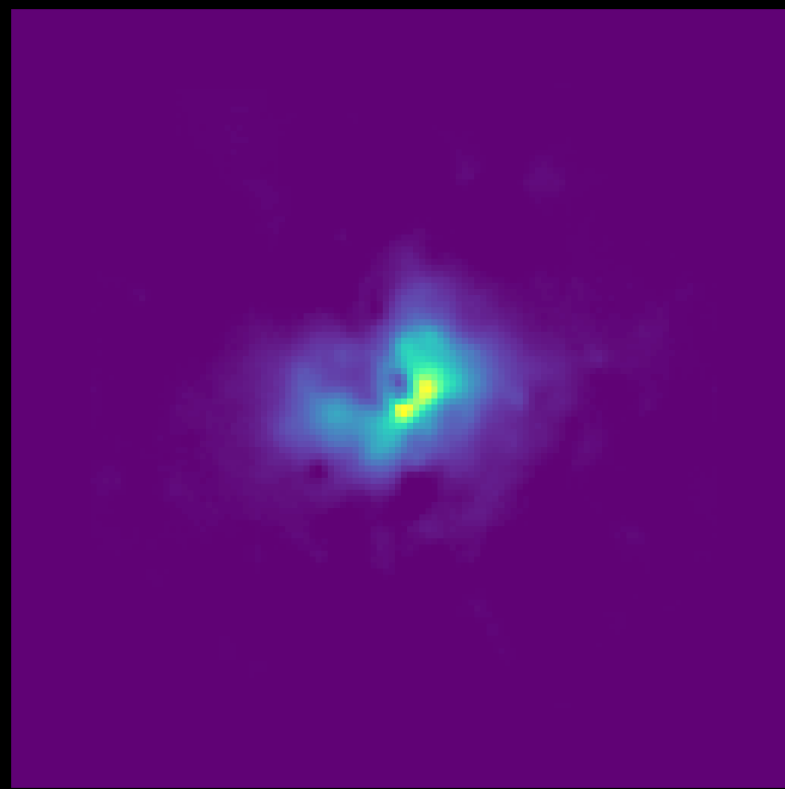
$$\chi_{\text{red}}^2 \simeq 1.01$$

# The problem

Fields!

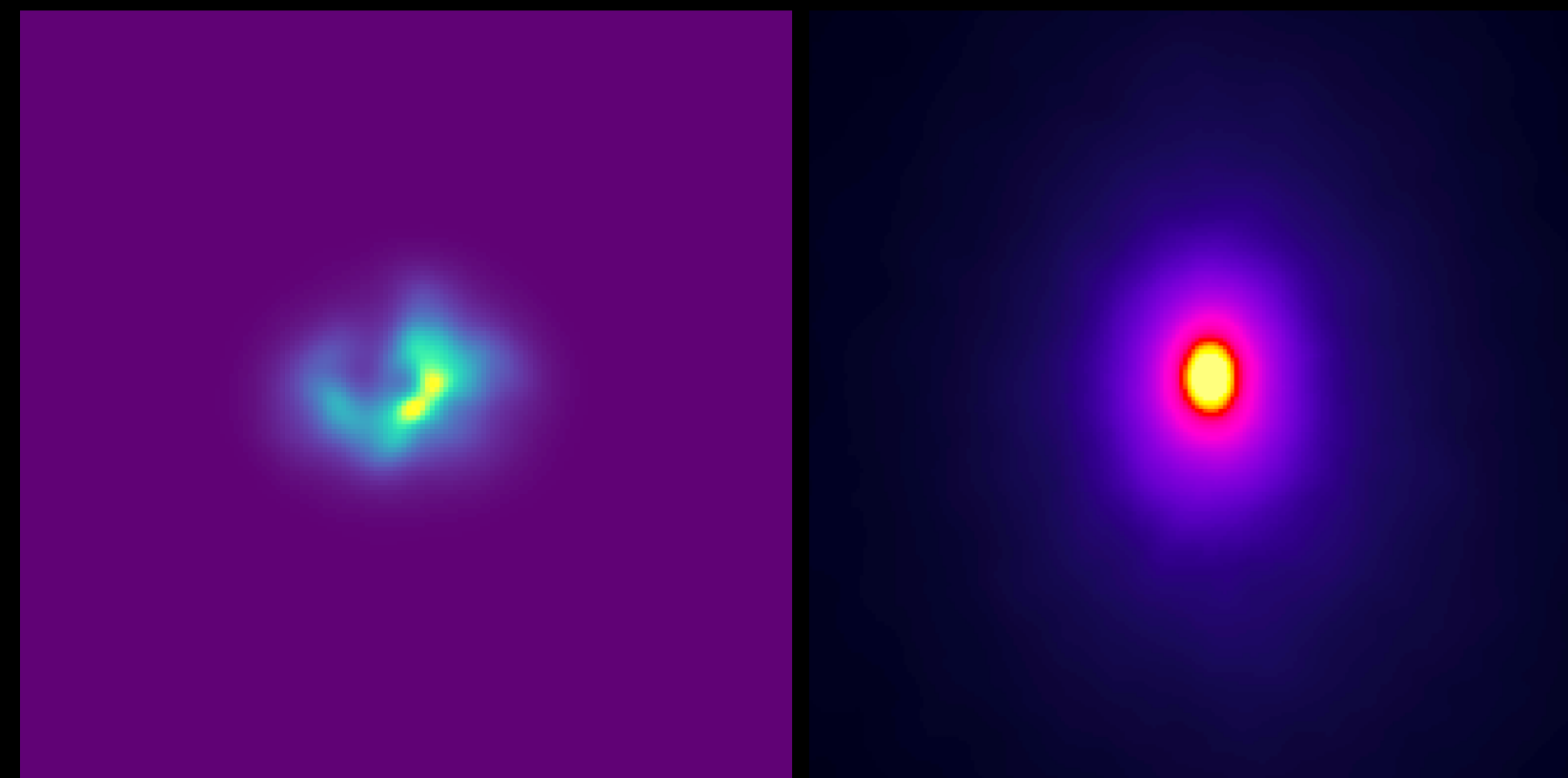
-> allow for non-trivial degeneracies!

$M_1(\theta_1)$



$$\chi_{\text{red}}^2 \simeq 1.01$$

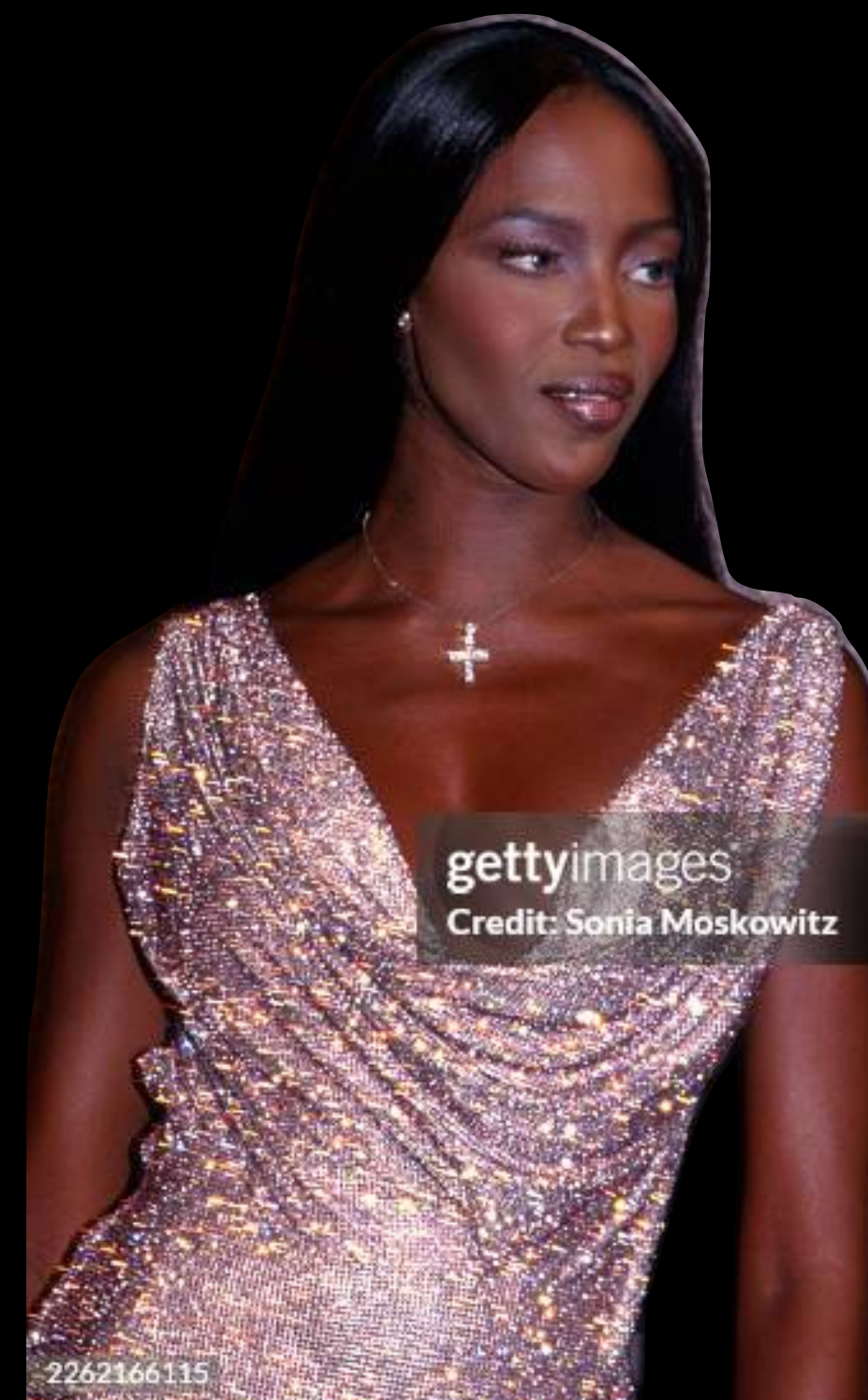
$M_2(\theta_2)$



$$\chi_{\text{red}}^2 \simeq 1.02$$

# Model choice

# Model choice

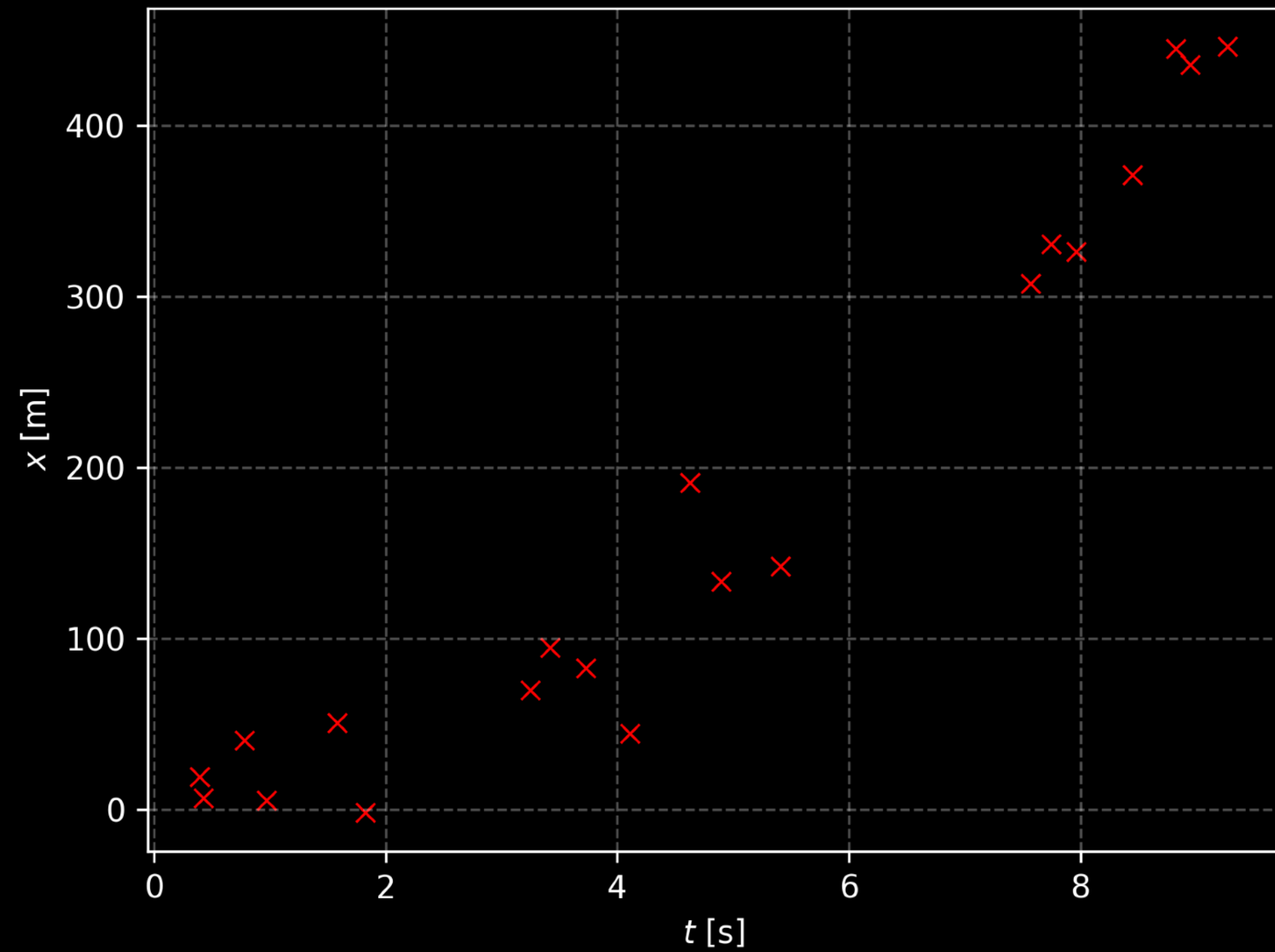


# The solution

Can we let the data decide?

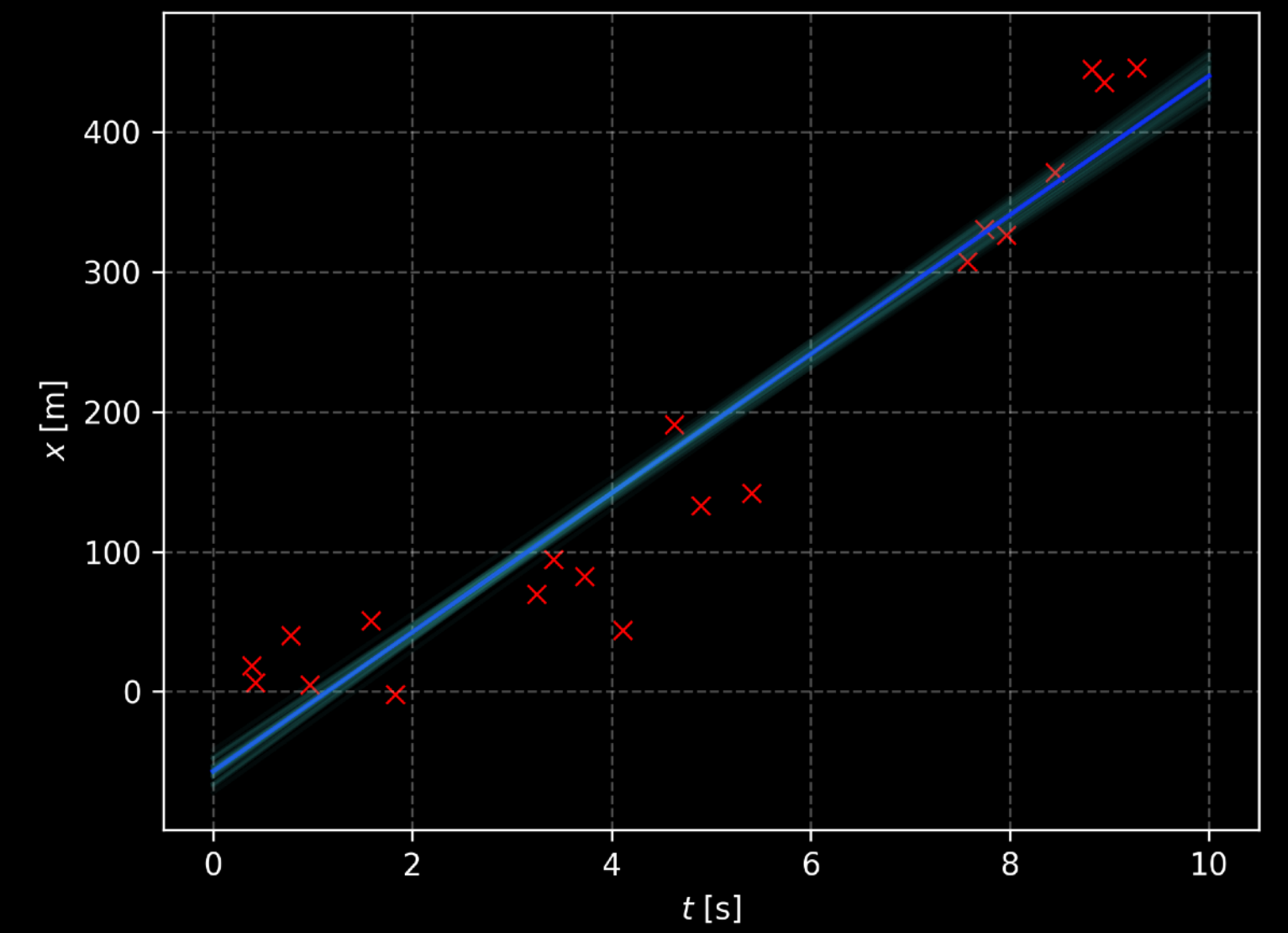
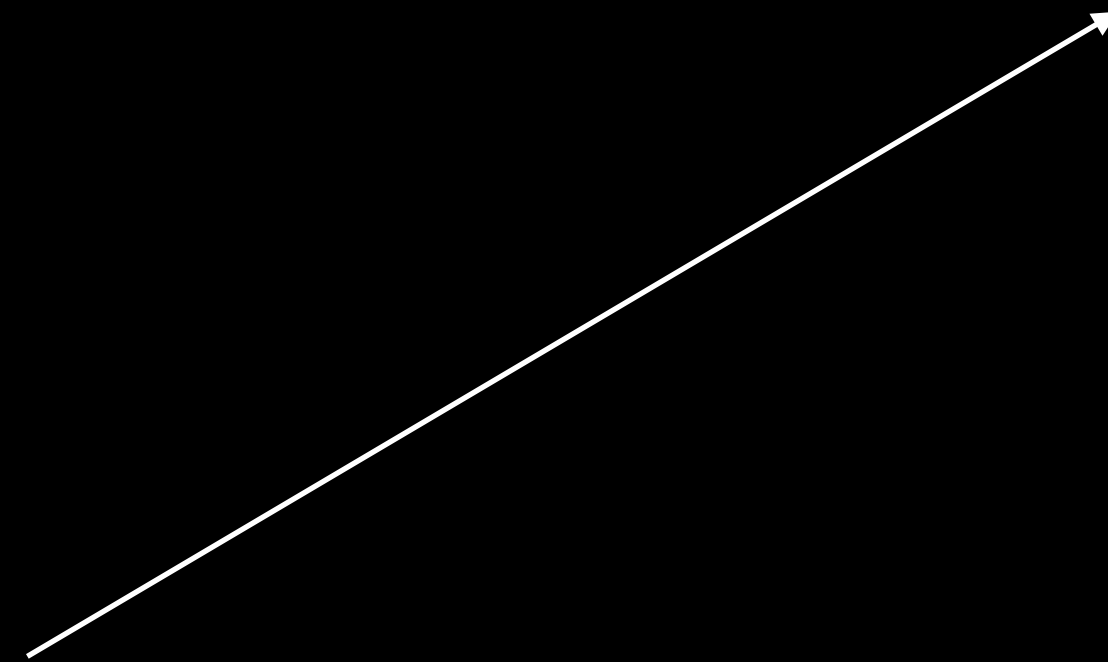
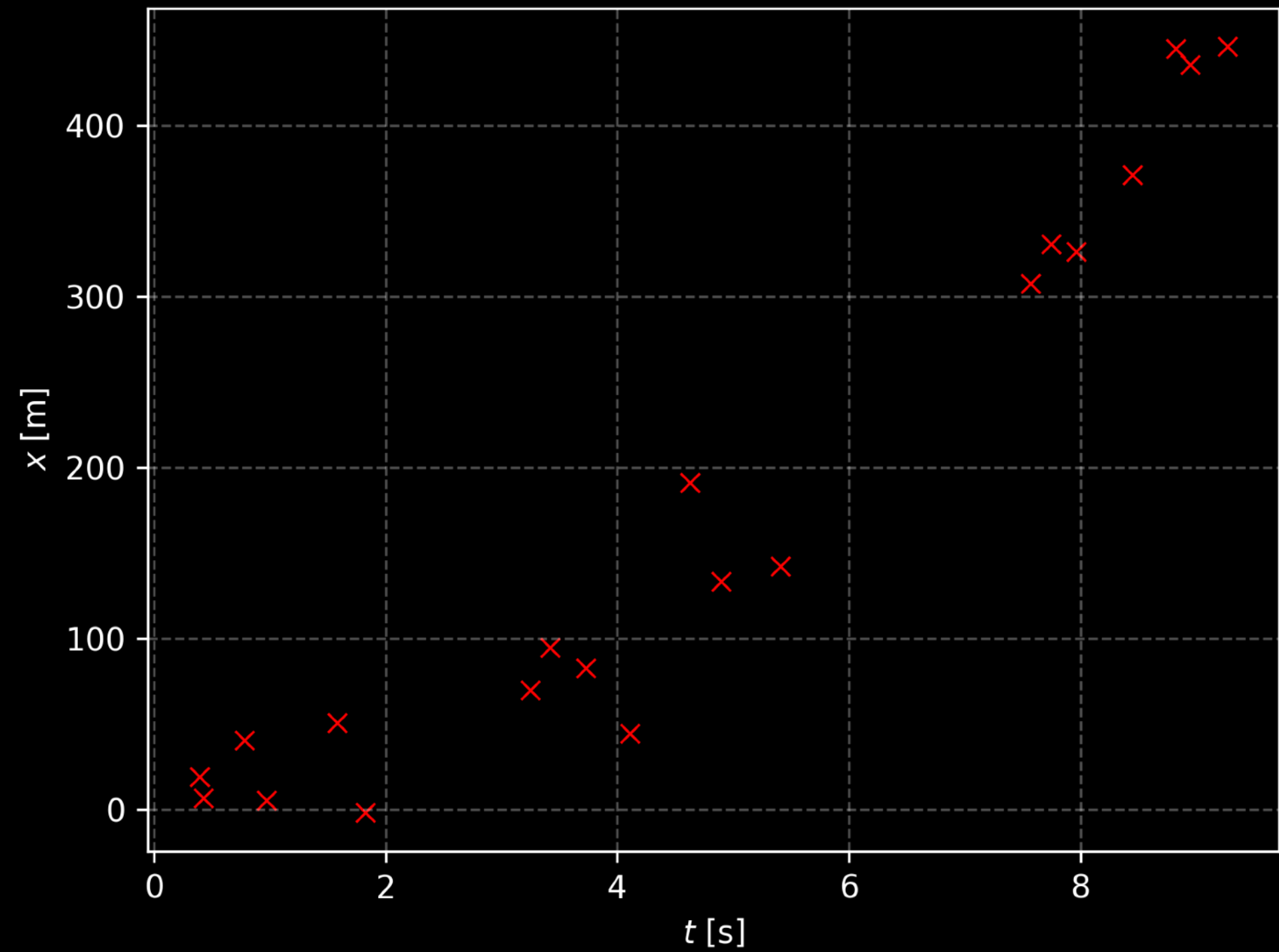
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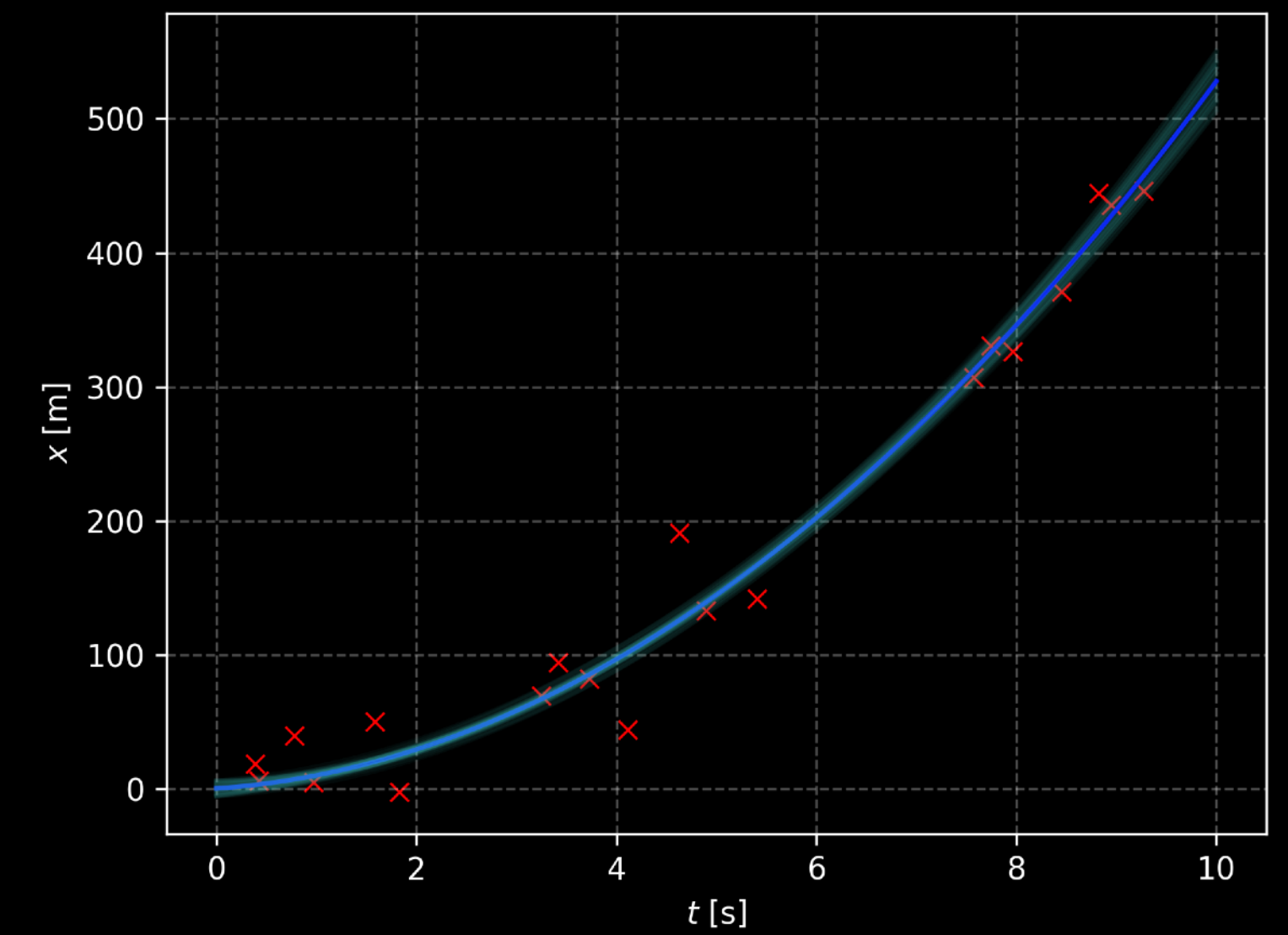
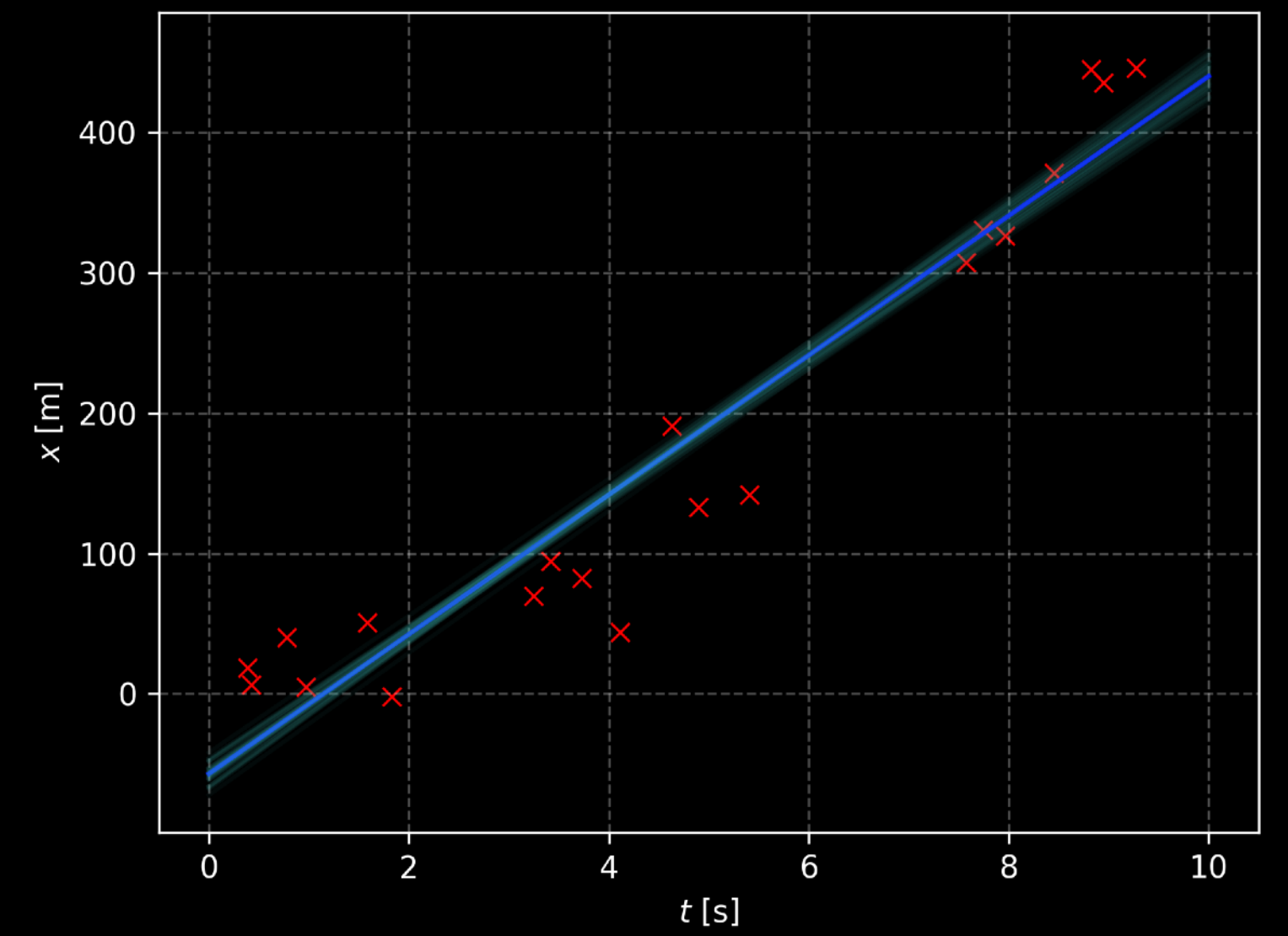
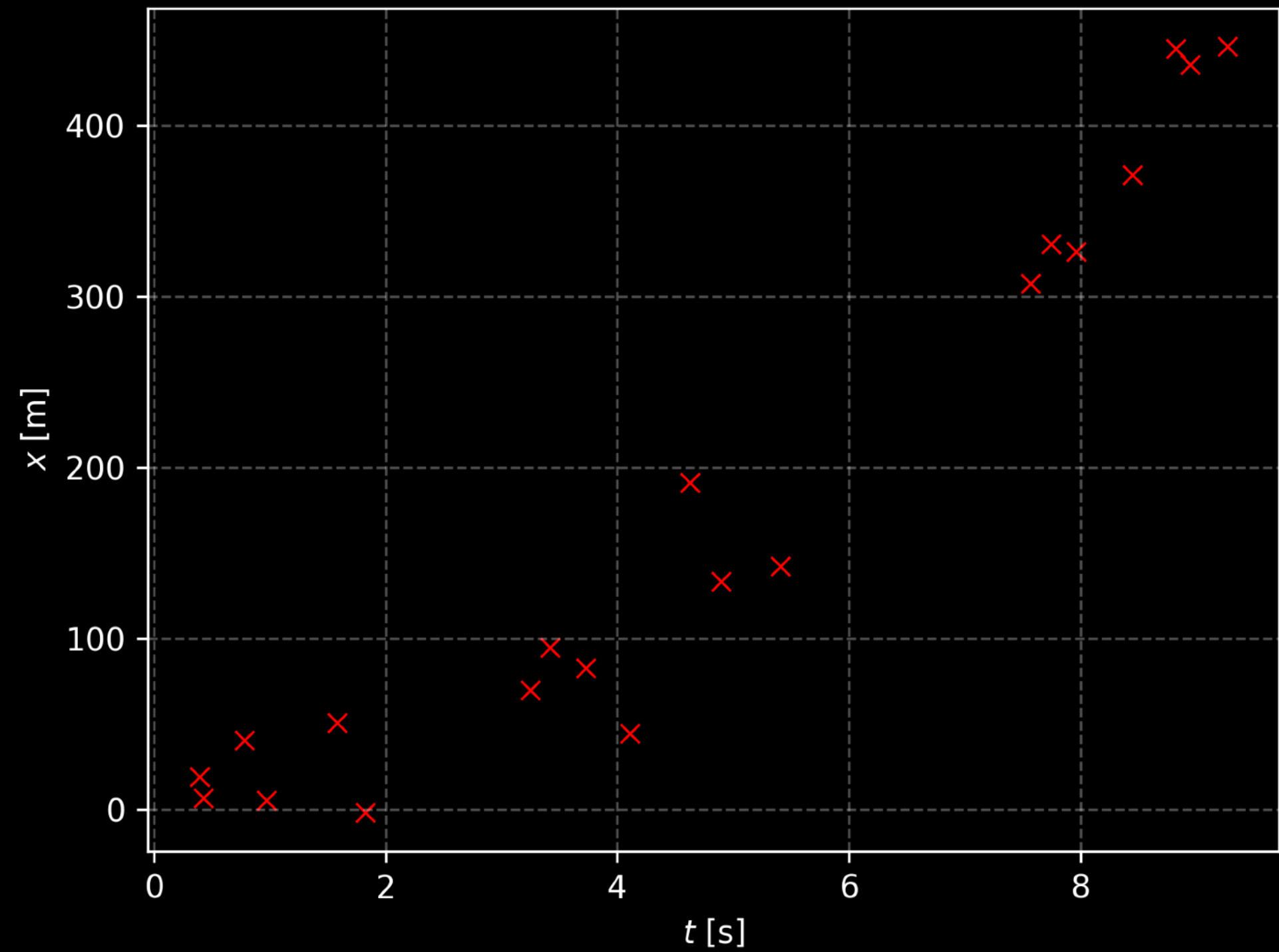
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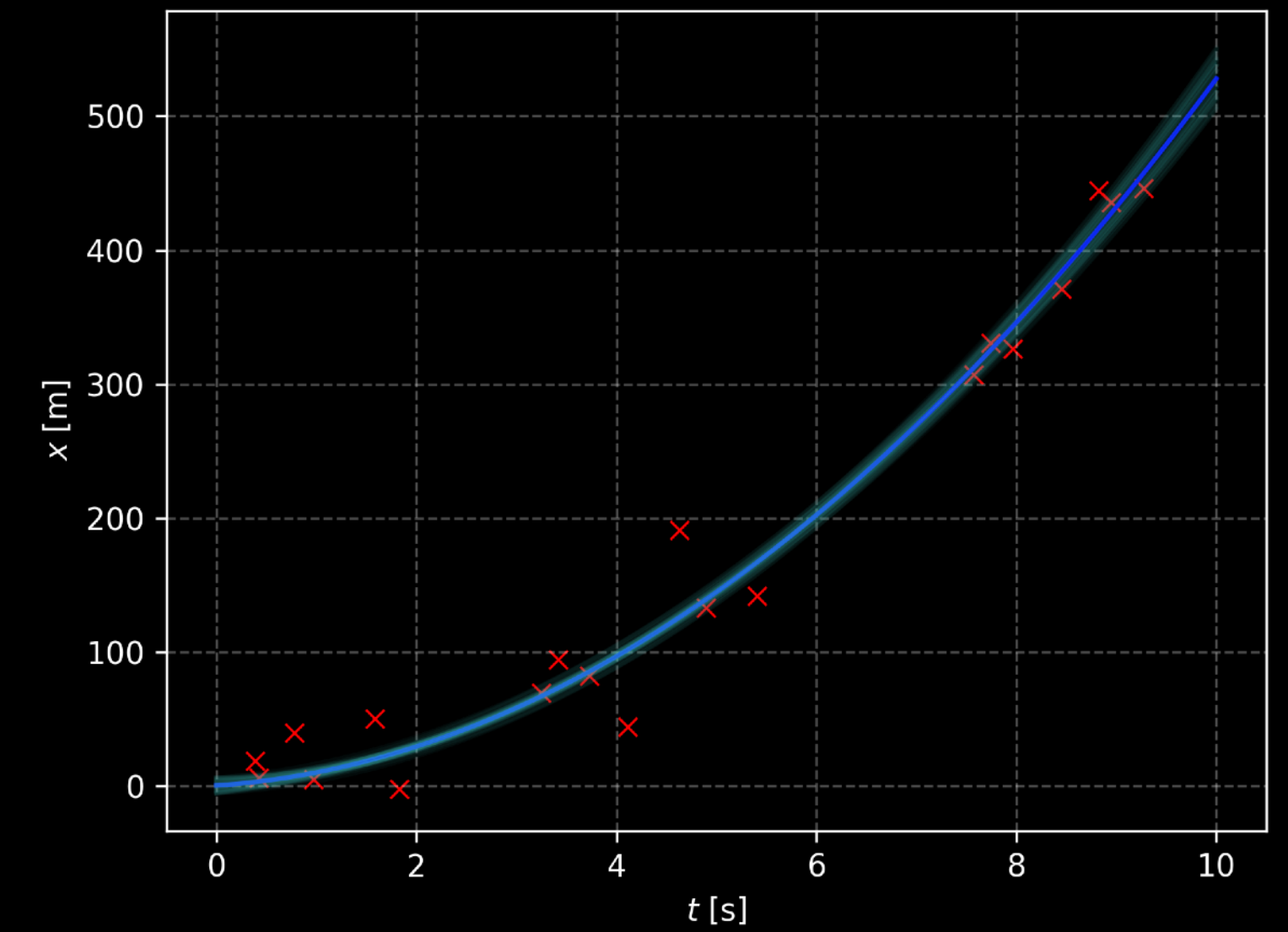
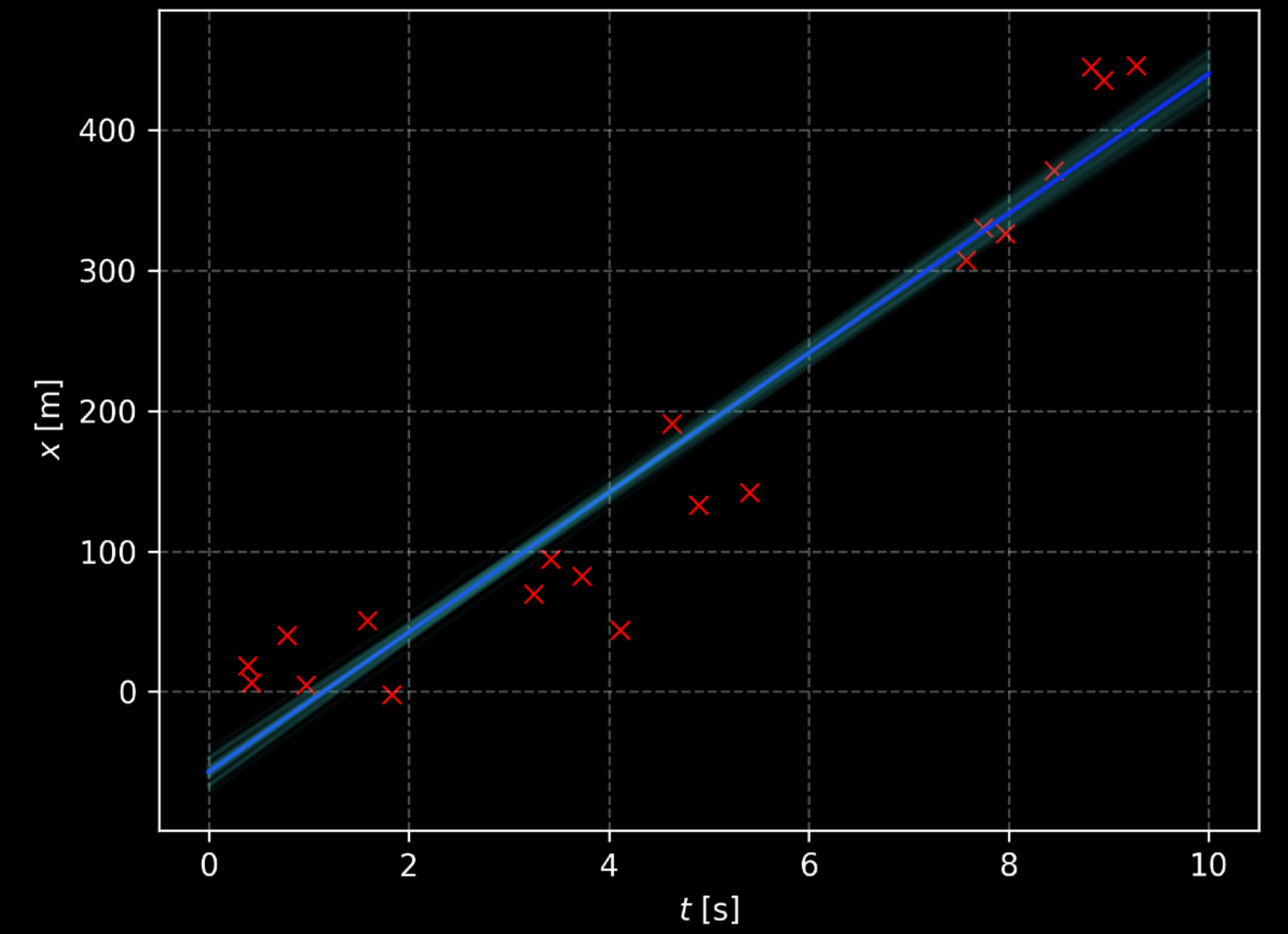
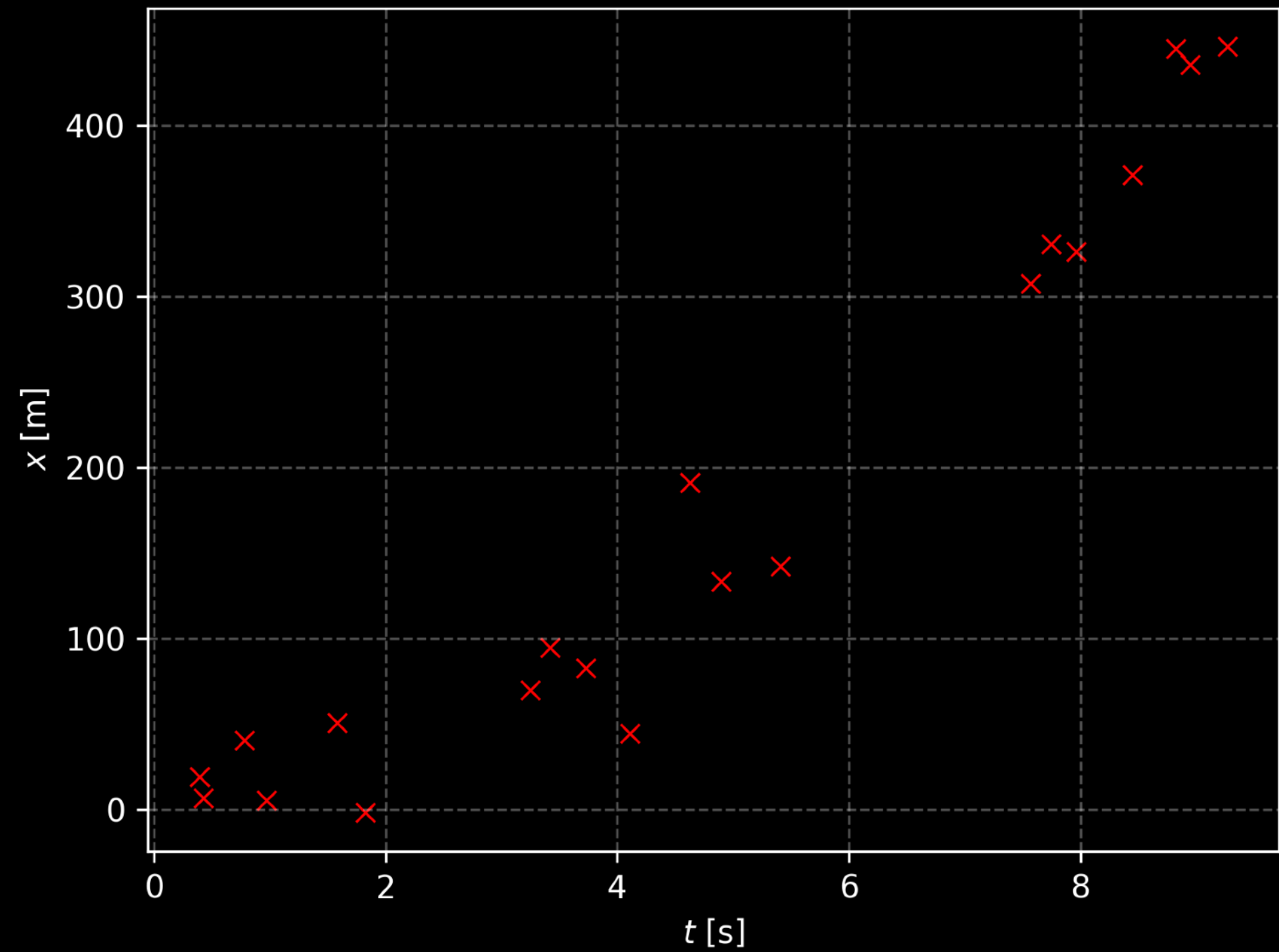
# The solution

Can we let the data decide?



# The solution

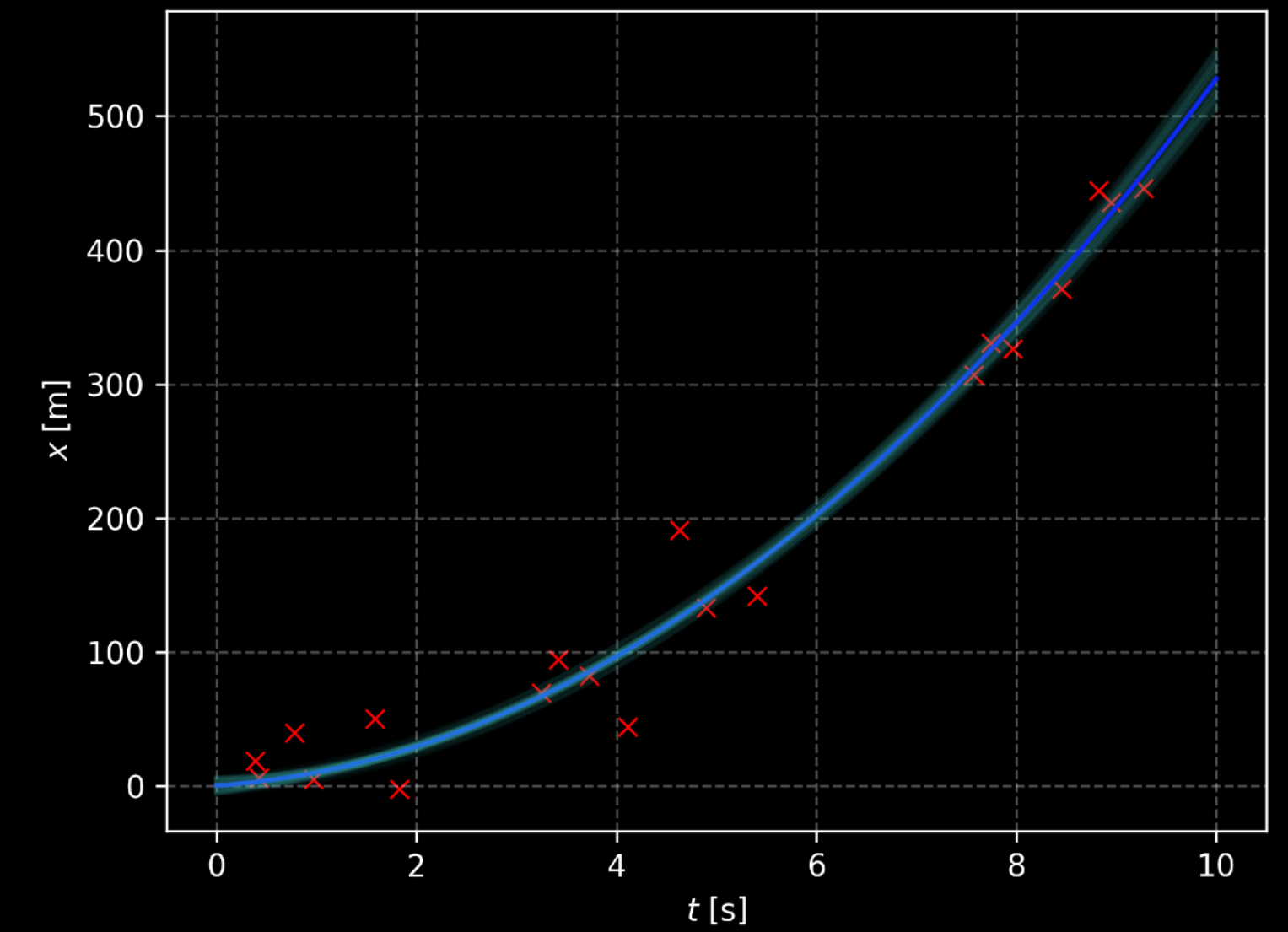
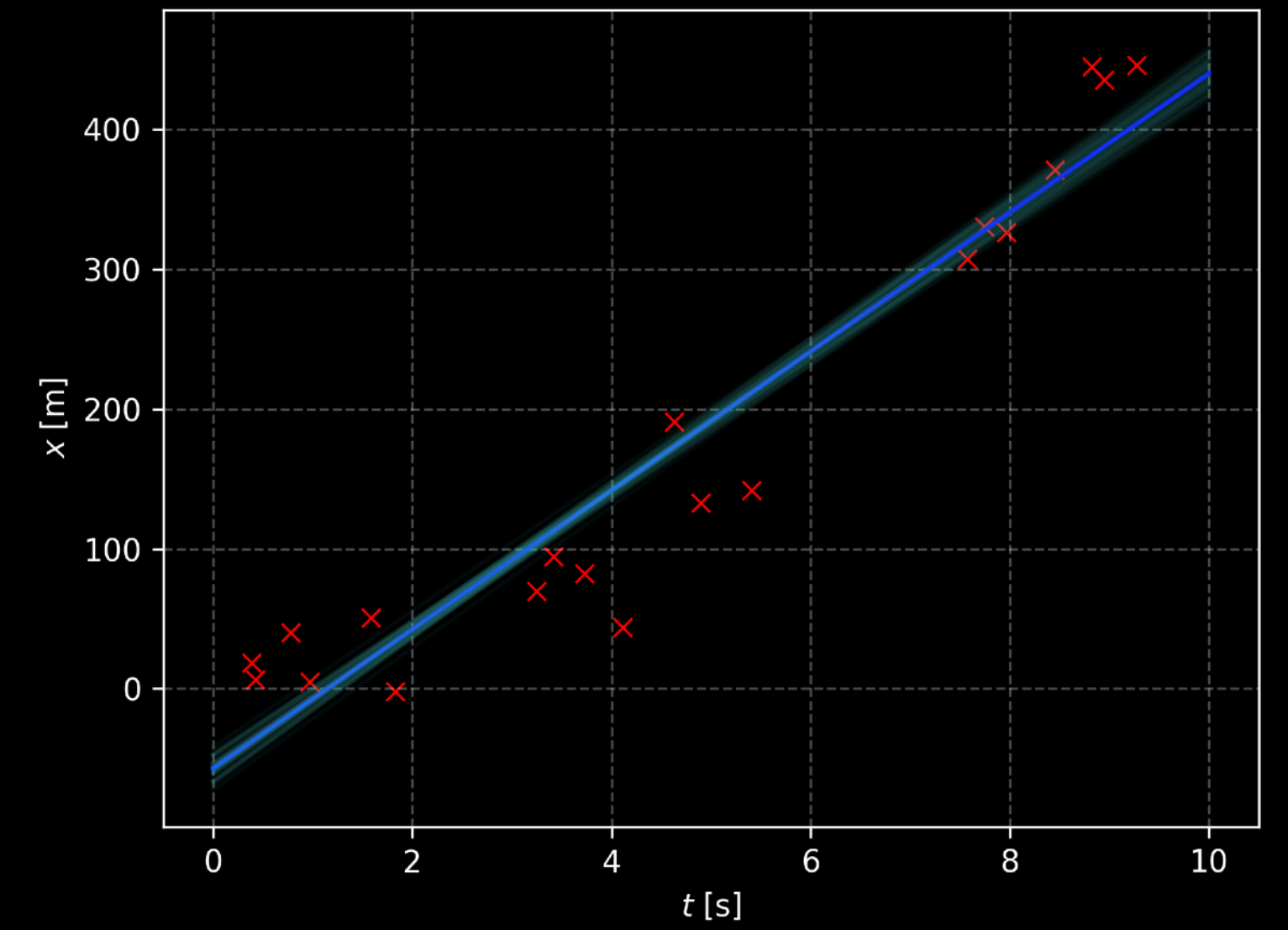
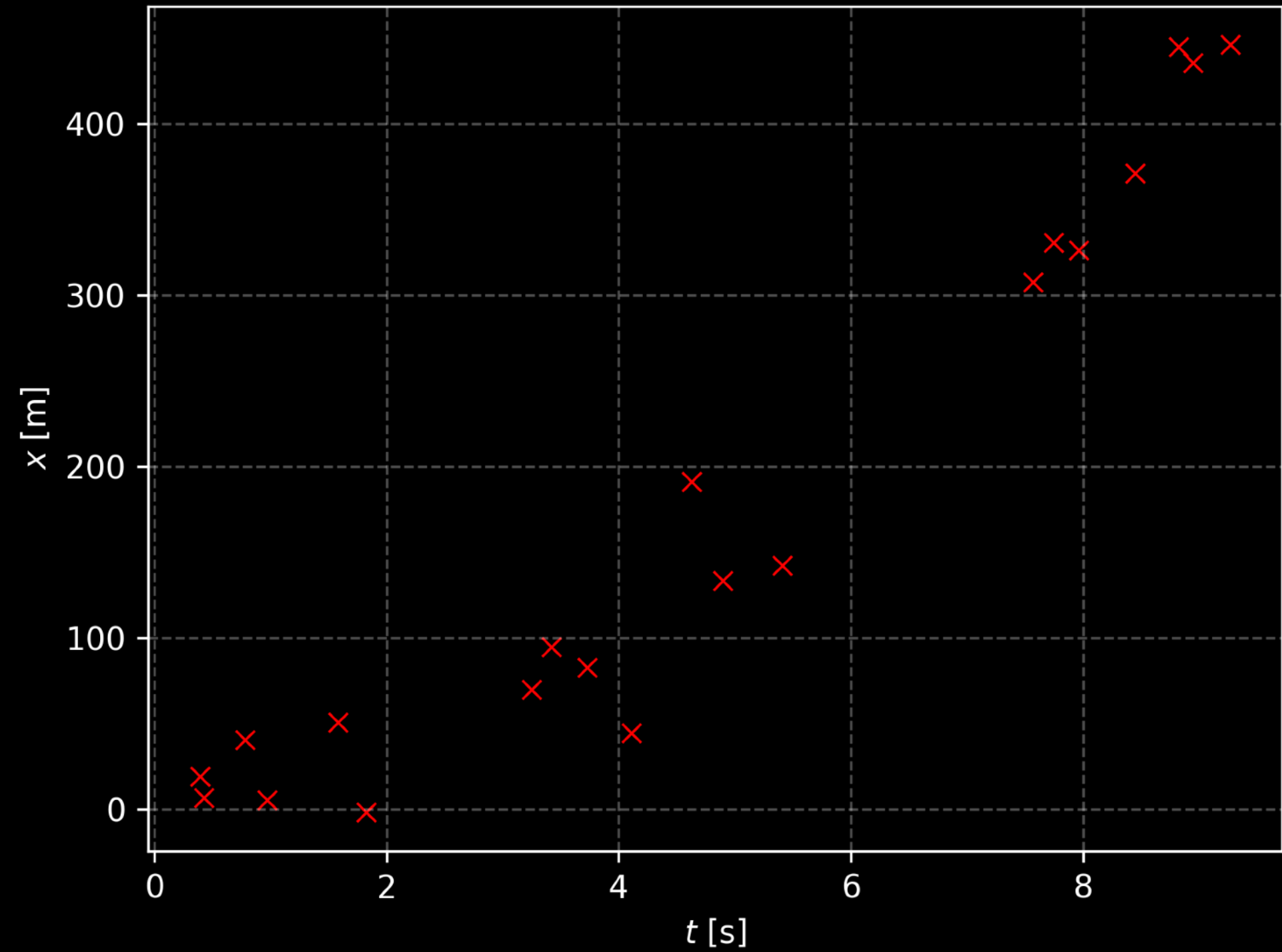
Can we let the data decide?



# The solution

Can we let the data decide?

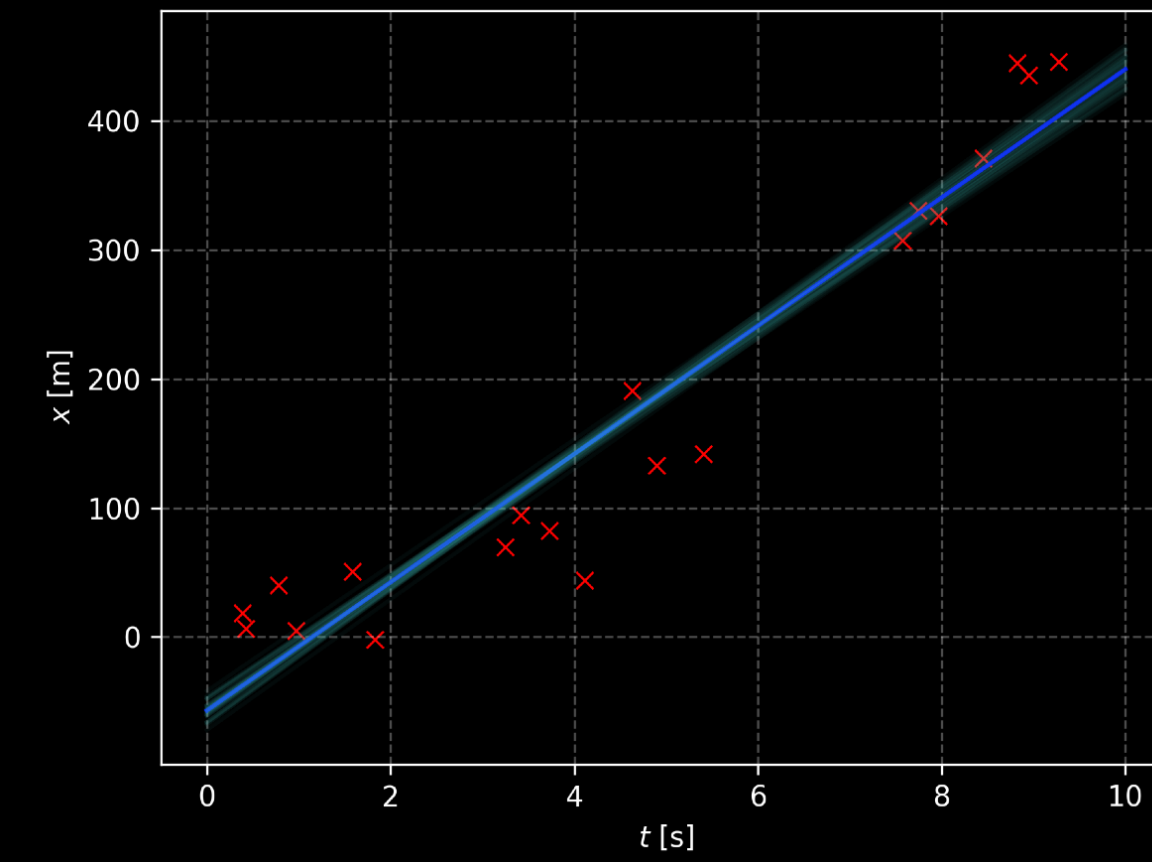
??



# Comparing models

# Comparing models

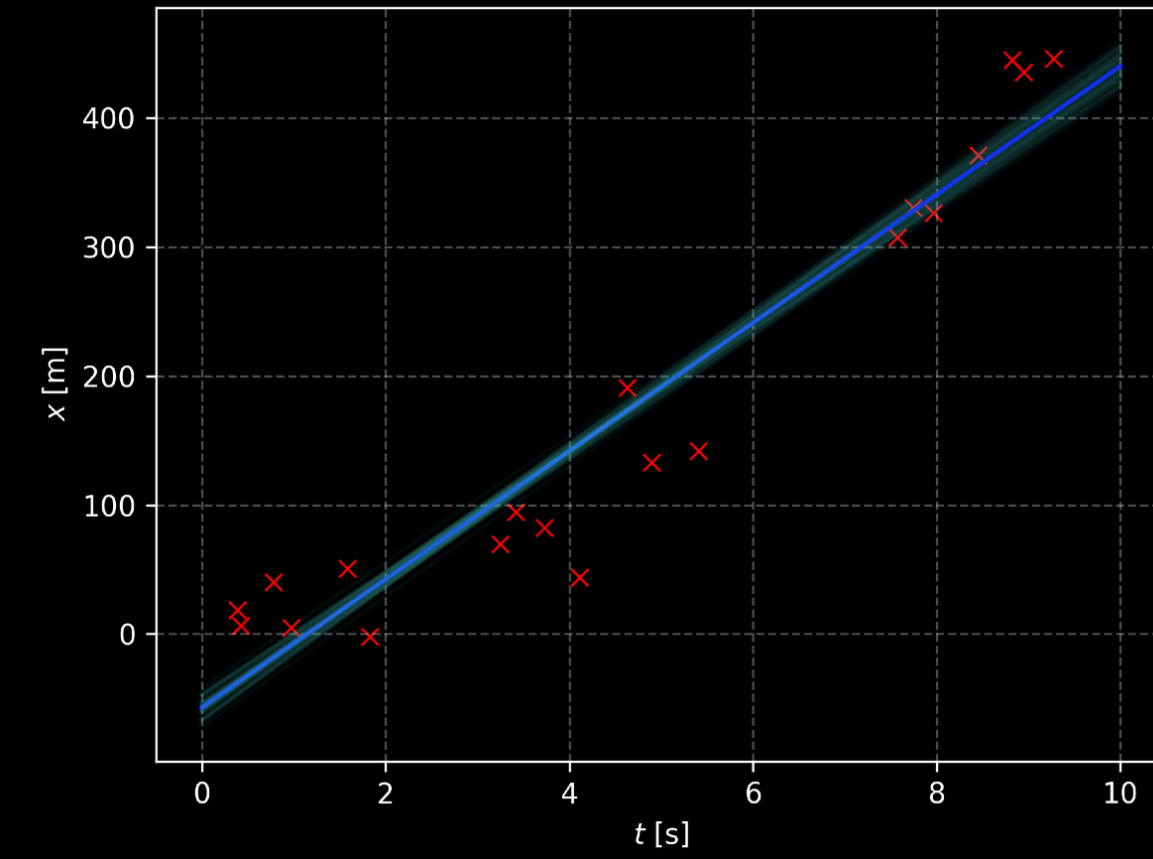
$$M_1(\theta_1)$$



# Comparing models

$M_1(\theta_1)$

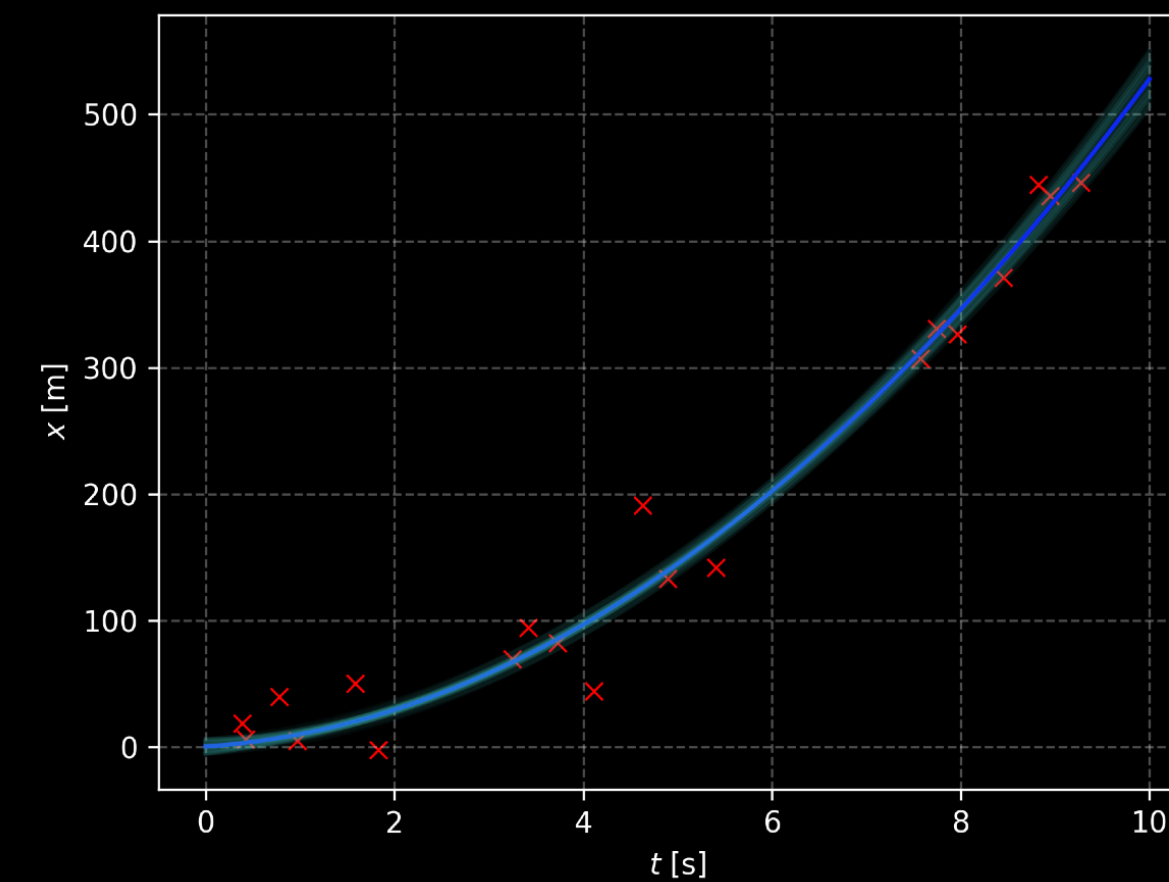
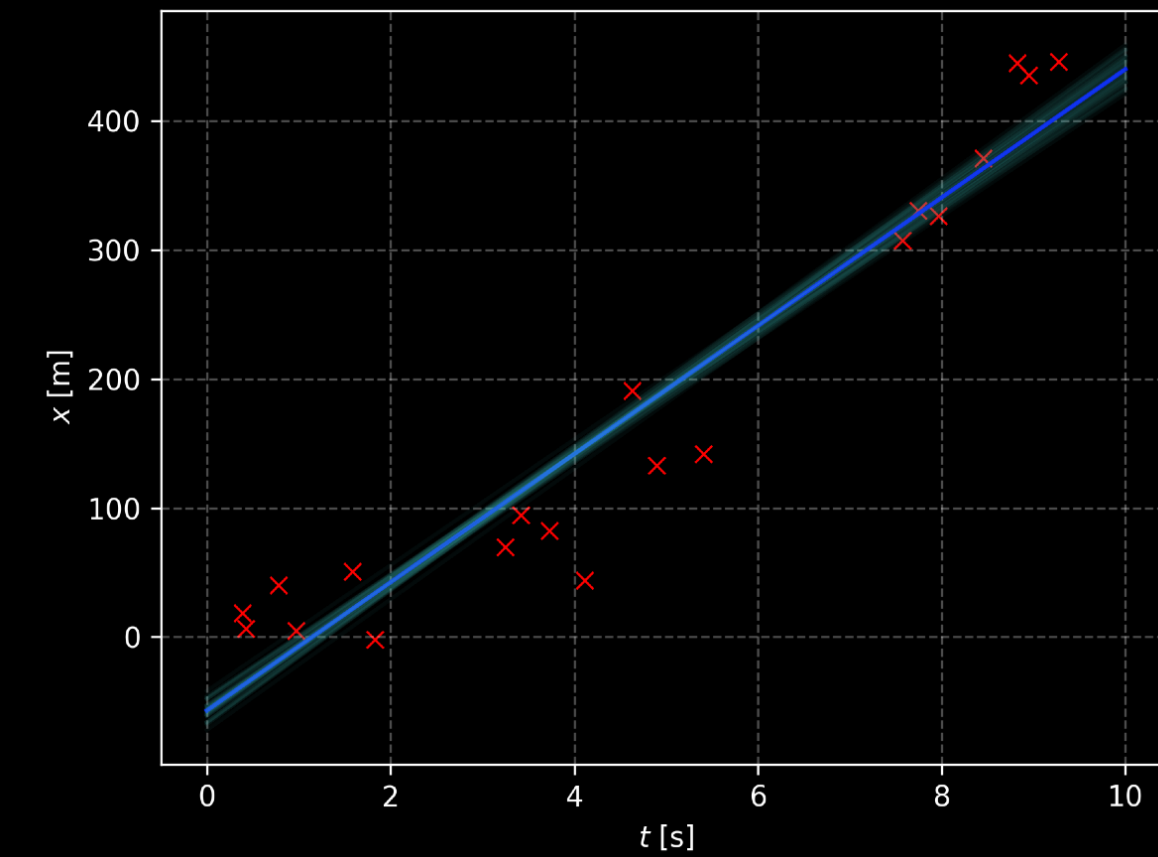
$$p(M_1 | d) = \frac{p(d | M_1) p(M_1)}{p(d)}$$



# Comparing models

$$M_1(\theta_1) \quad p(M_1 | d) = \frac{p(d | M_1) p(M_1)}{p(d)}$$

$$M_2(\theta_2) \quad p(M_2 | d) = \frac{p(d | M_2) p(M_2)}{p(d)}$$

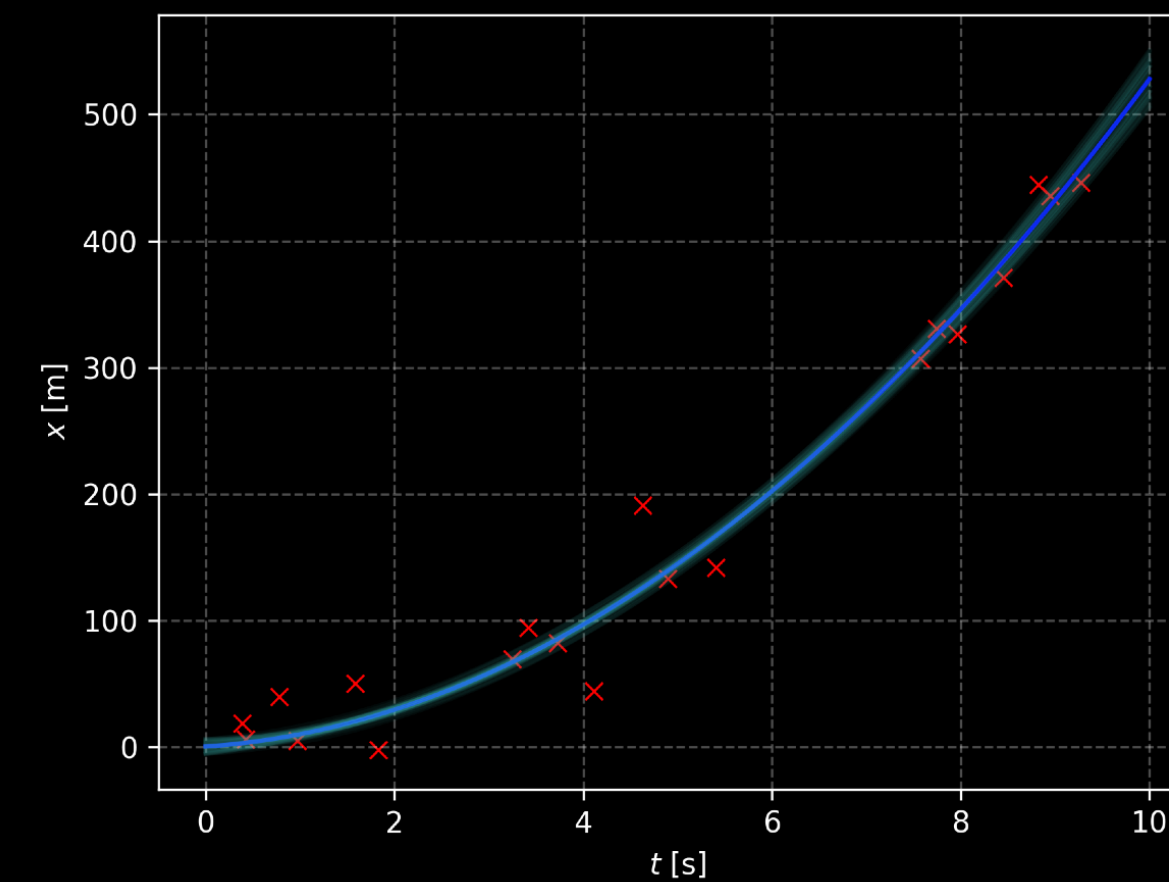
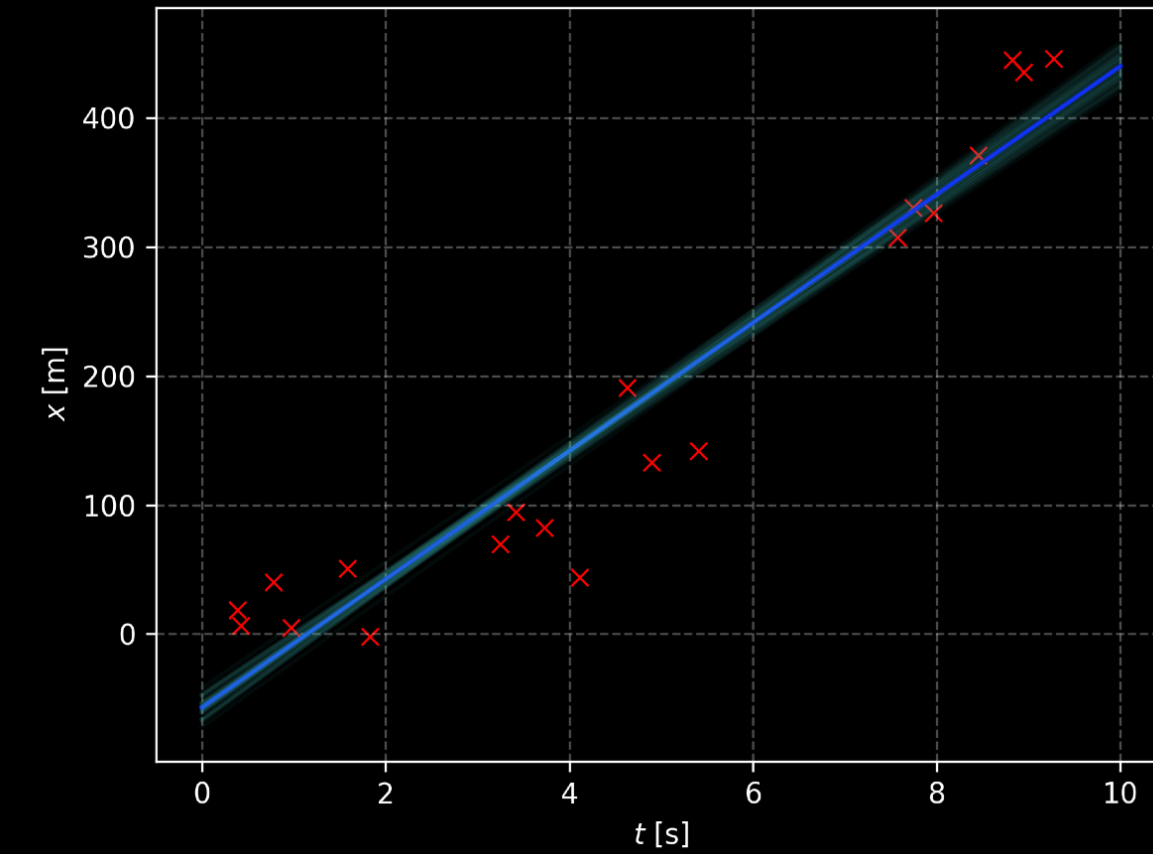


# Comparing models

$$M_1(\theta_1) \quad p(M_1 | d) = \frac{p(d | M_1) p(M_1)}{p(d)}$$

$$M_2(\theta_2) \quad p(M_2 | d) = \frac{p(d | M_2) p(M_2)}{p(d)}$$

$$\mathcal{O}(M_1, M_2) := \frac{p(d | M_1) \cancel{p(M_1)}}{p(d | M_2) \cancel{p(M_2)}} = \frac{p(d | M_1)}{p(d | M_2)}$$

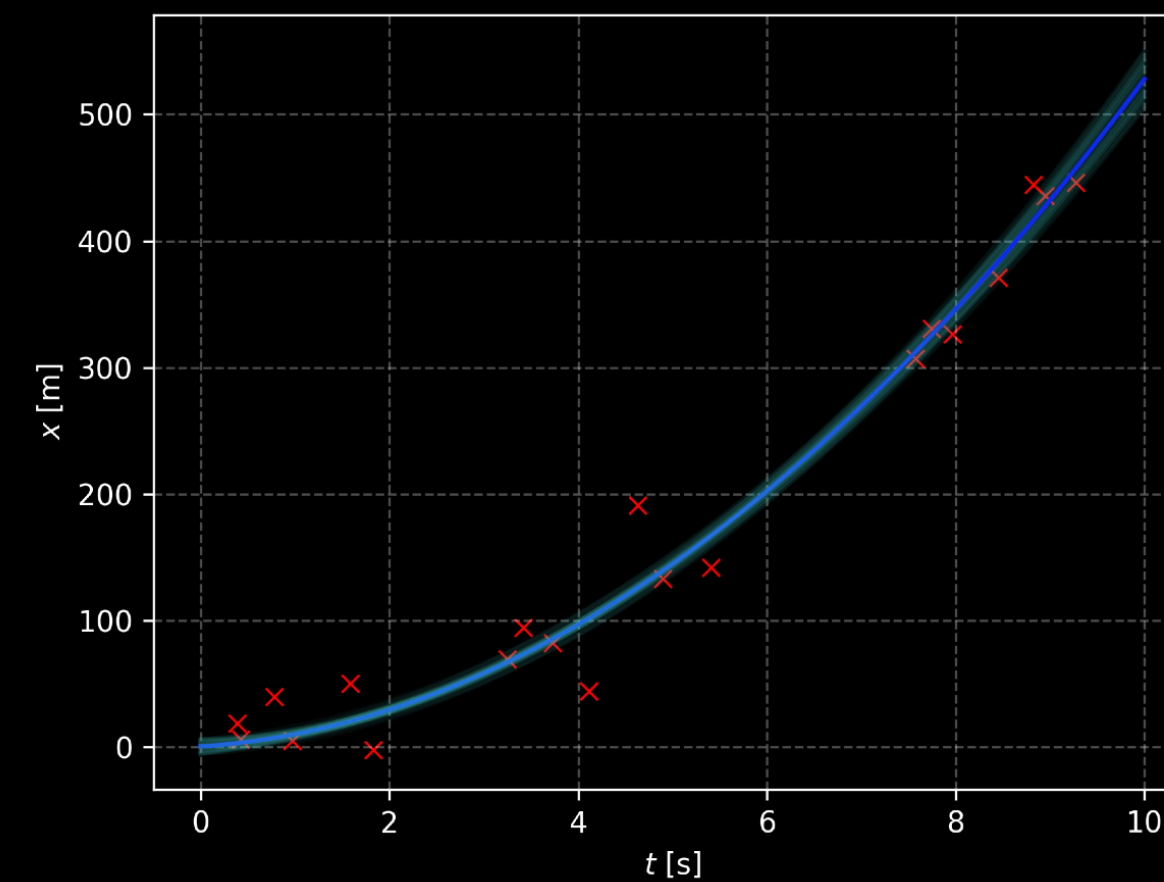
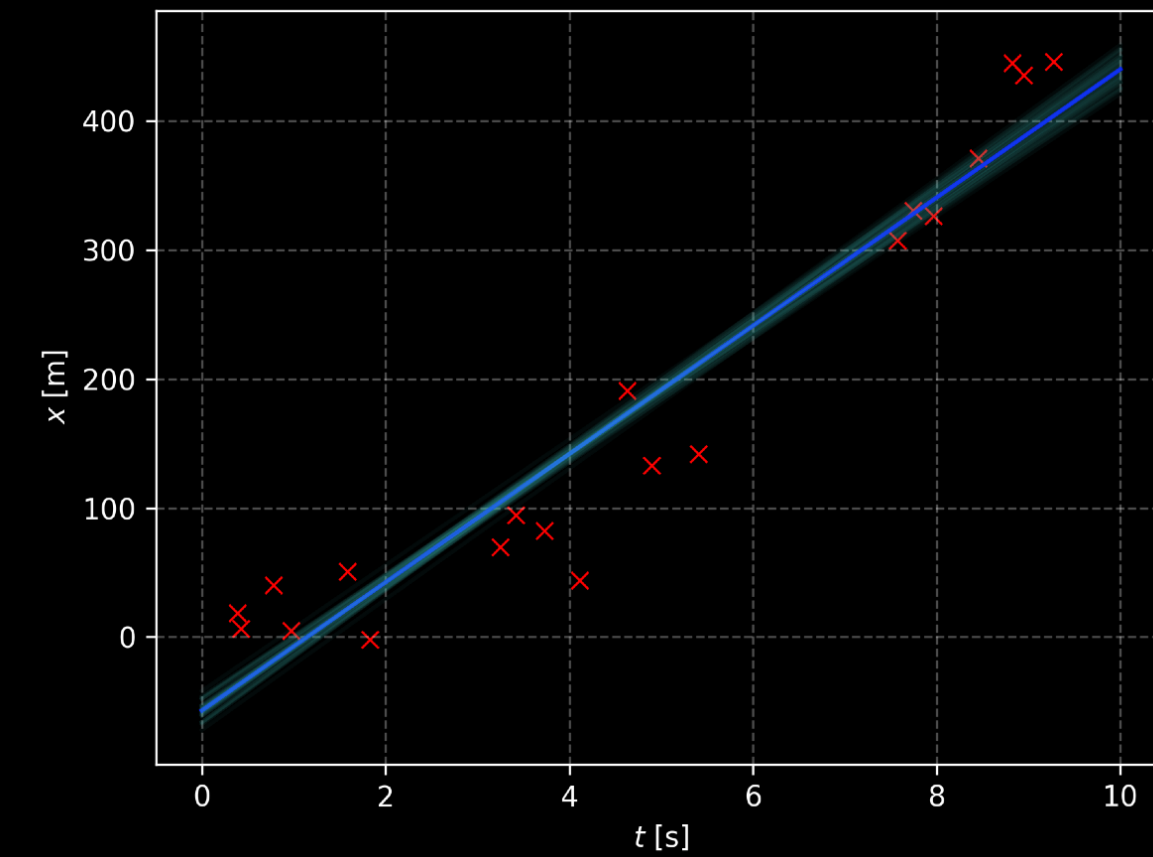


# Comparing models

$$M_1(\theta_1) \quad p(M_1 | d) = \frac{p(d | M_1) p(M_1)}{p(d)}$$

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$$\mathcal{O}(M_1, M_2) := \frac{p(d | M_1) \cancel{p(M_1)}}{p(d | M_2) \cancel{p(M_2)}} = \frac{p(d | M_1)}{p(d | M_2)} \approx e^{-24}$$



# Comparing models

$M_1(\theta_1)$

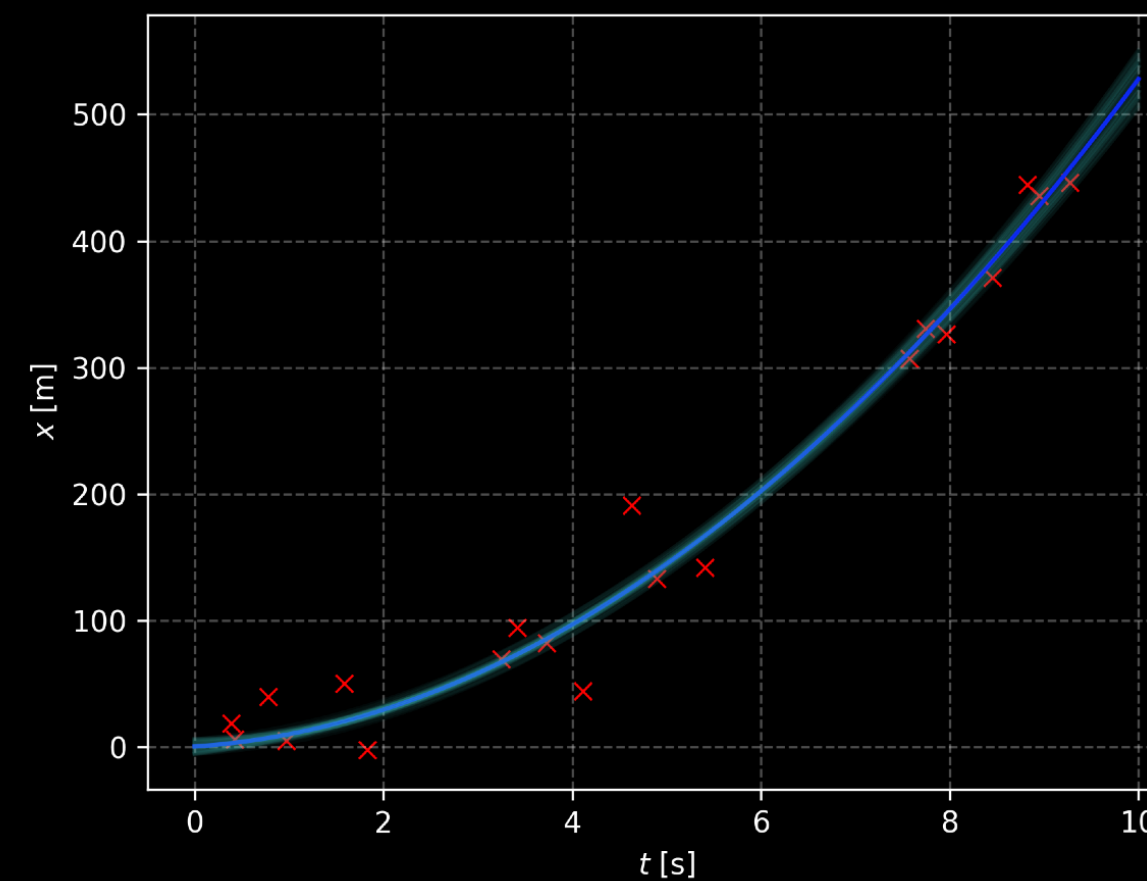
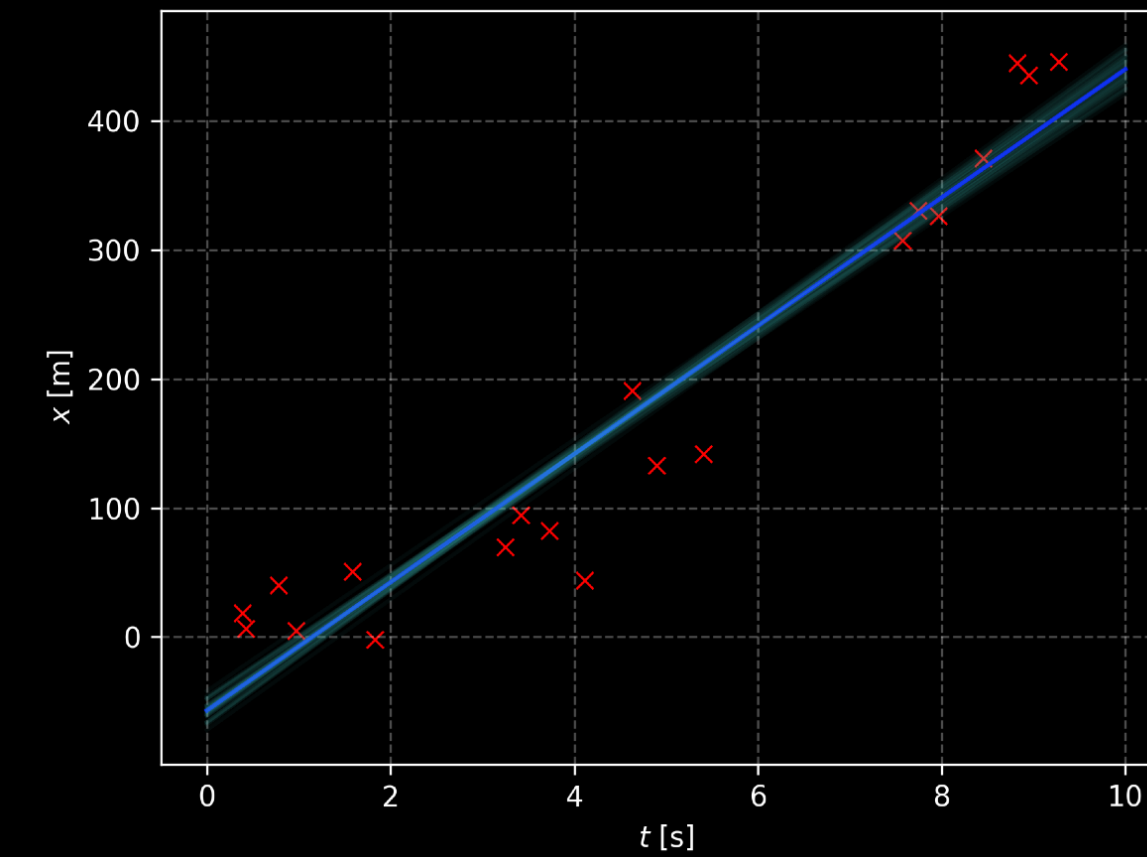
$$p(M_1 | d) = \frac{p(d | M_1) p(M_1)}{p(d)}$$



$M_2(\theta_2)$

$$p(M_2 | d) = \frac{p(d | M_2) p(M_2)}{p(d)}$$

$$\mathcal{O}(M_1, M_2) := \frac{p(d | M_1) \cancel{p(M_1)}}{p(d | M_2) \cancel{p(M_2)}} = \frac{p(d | M_1)}{p(d | M_2)} \simeq e^{-24}$$



**So what's the problem?**

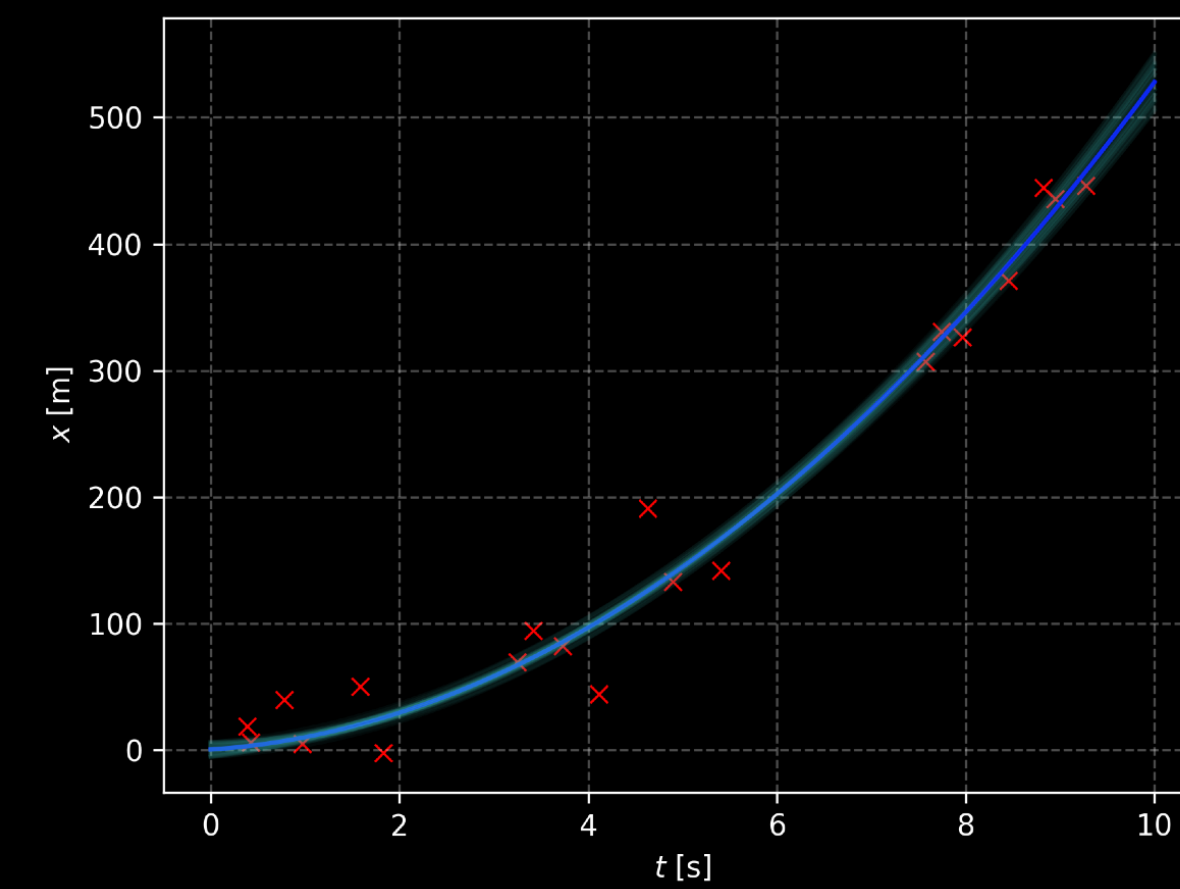
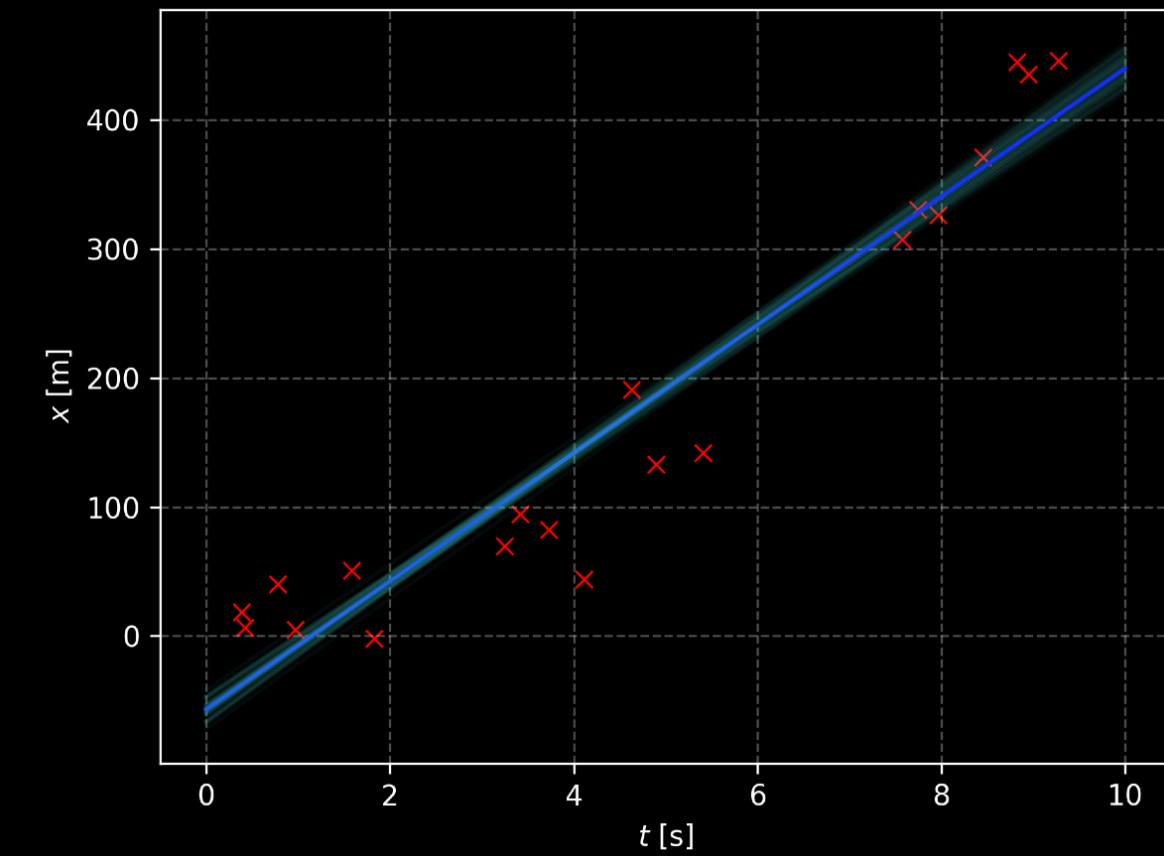
# Evidence in HD

# Evidence in HD

$$p(d | M) = \int p(d | \theta, M) p(\theta | M) d\theta$$

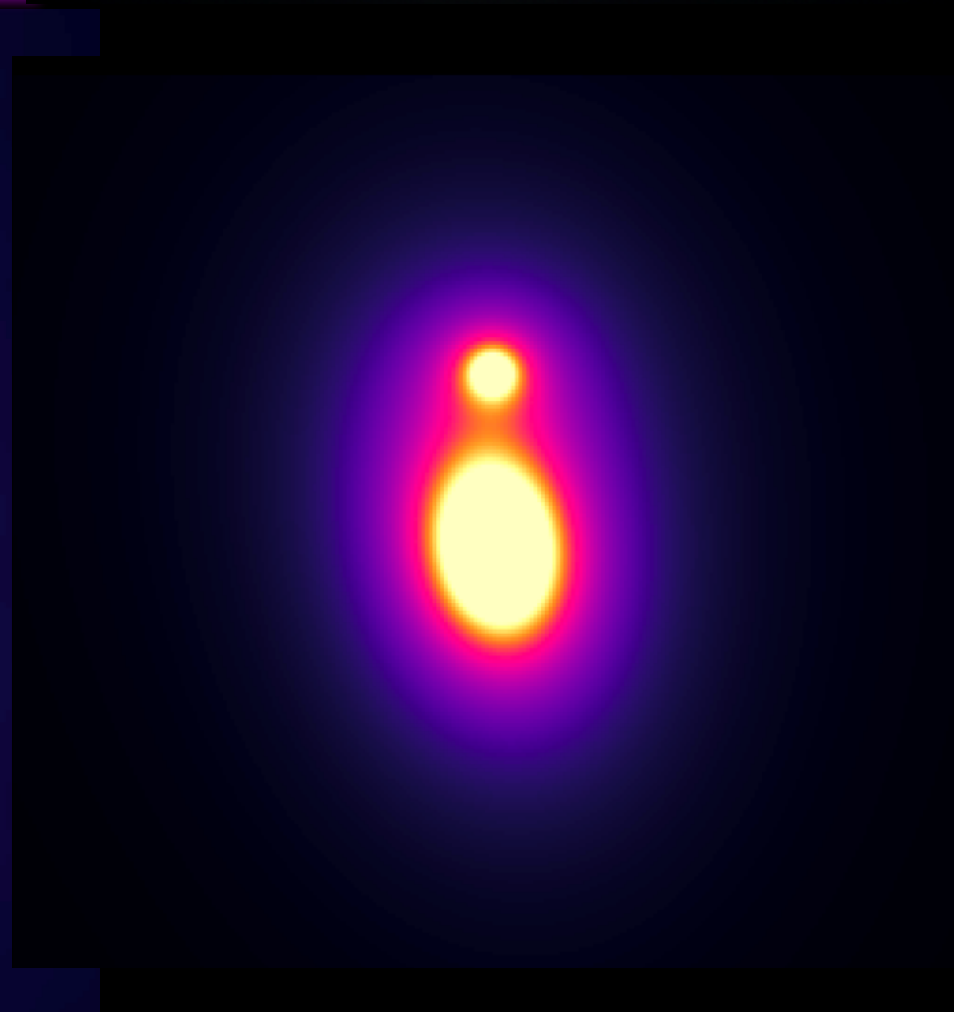
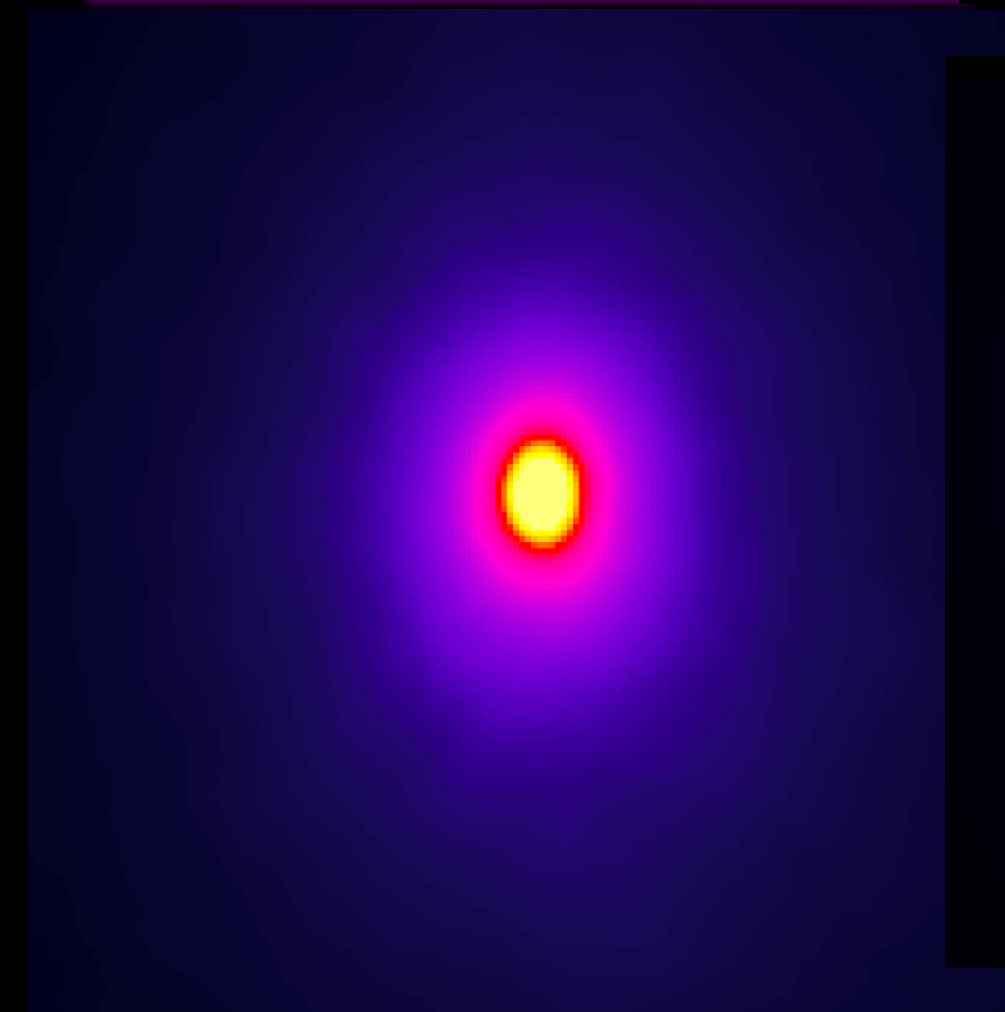
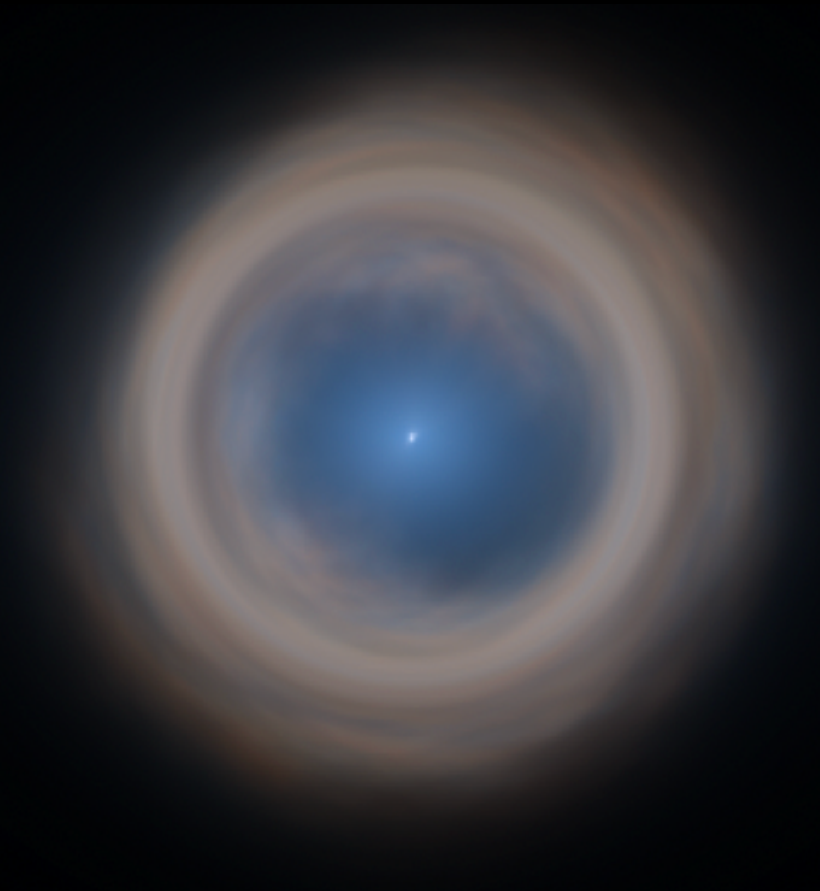
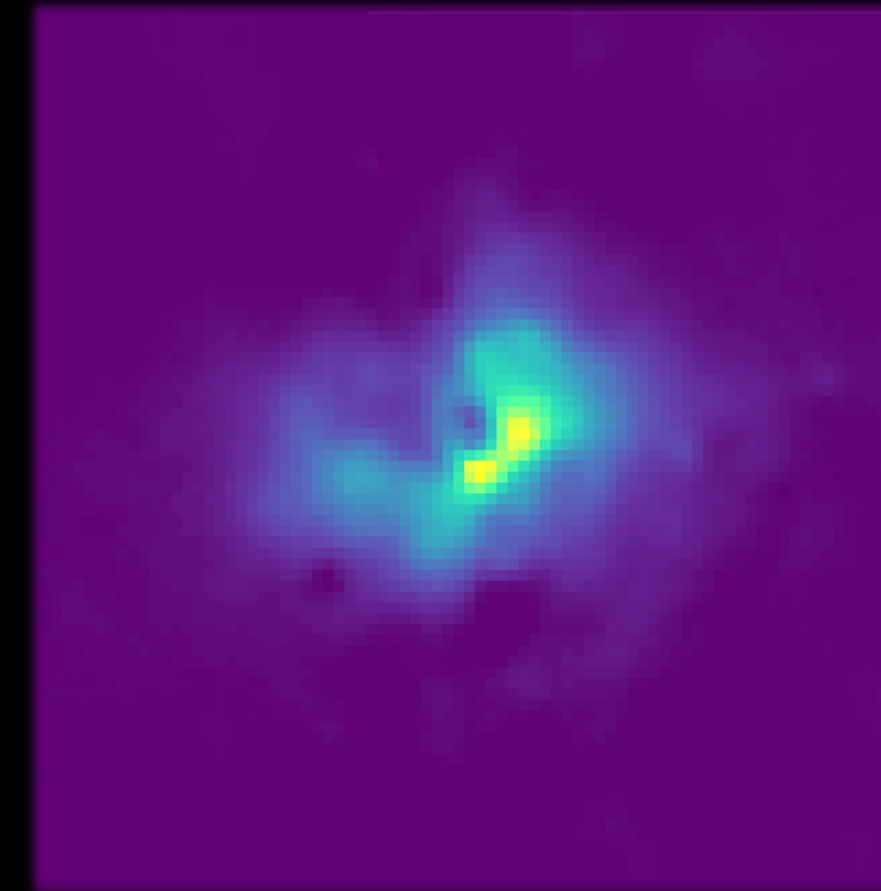
# Evidence in HD

$$p(d | M) = \int p(d | \theta, M) p(\theta | M) d\theta$$



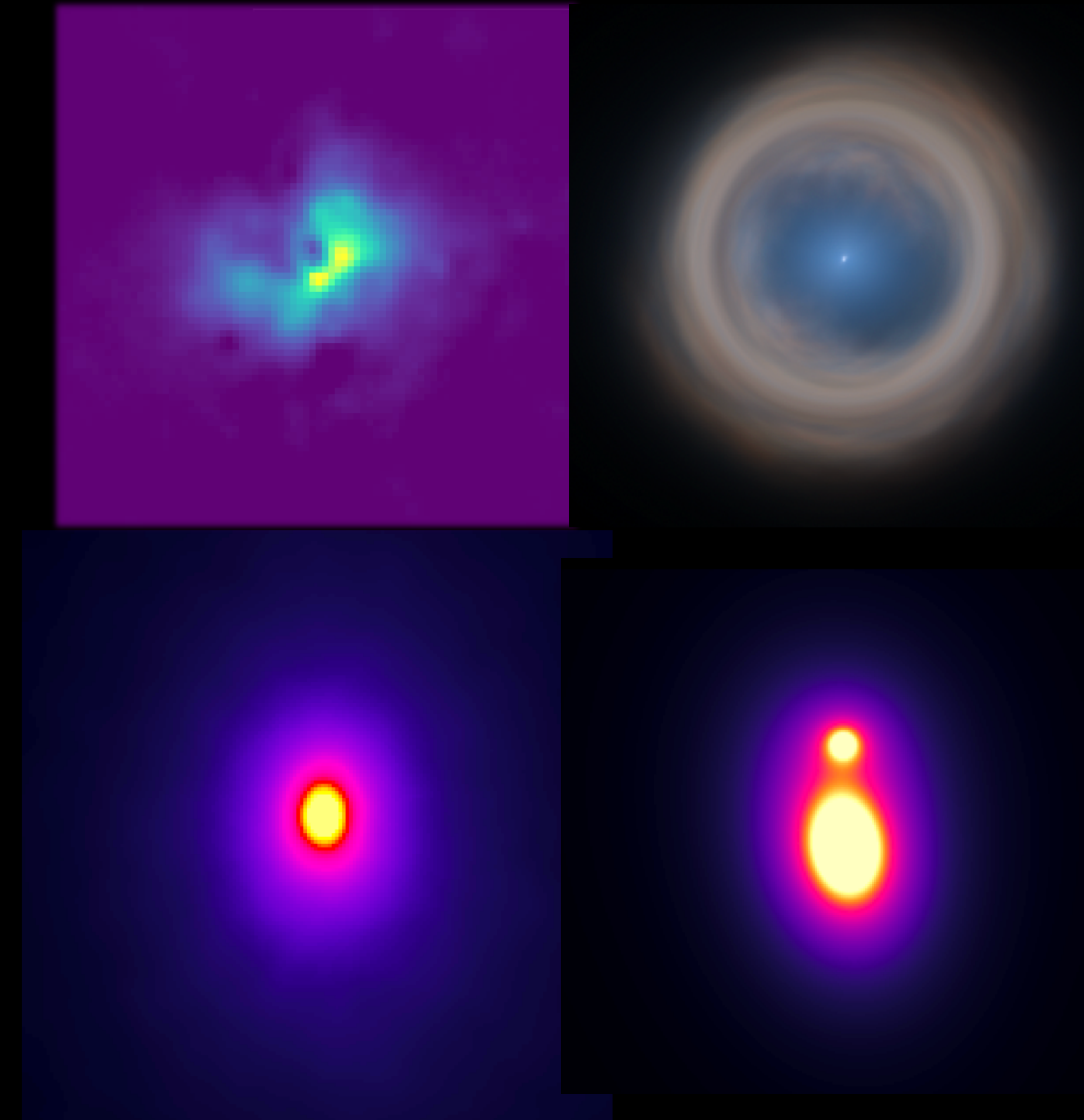
# Evidence in HD

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# Evidence in HD

$$p(d | M) = \int p(d | \theta, M) p(\theta | M) d\theta$$



$\dim(\theta) \sim 10^6 - 10^9$

# Model choice

For fields :)

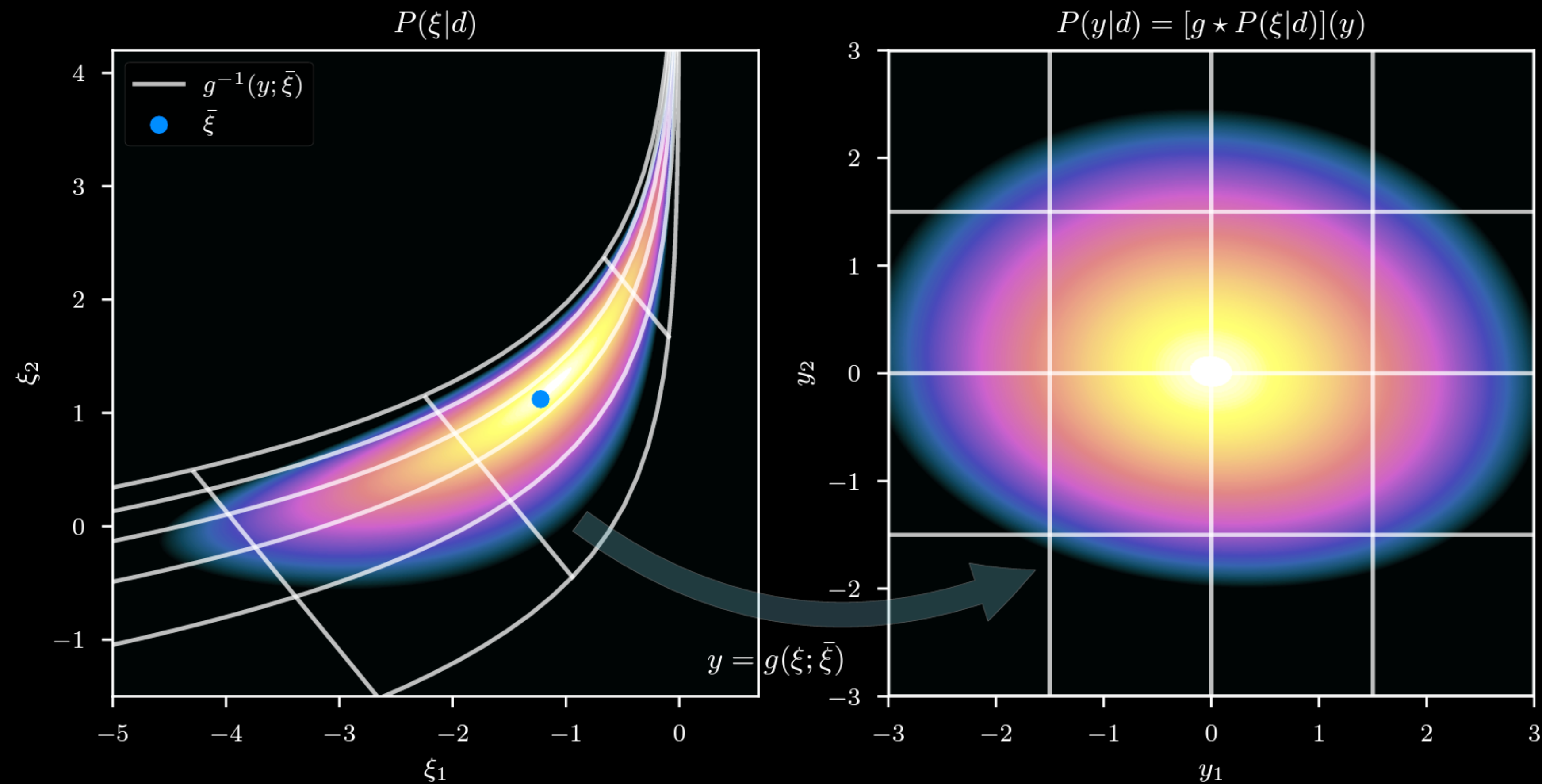
# Model choice

For fields :)



# Inference

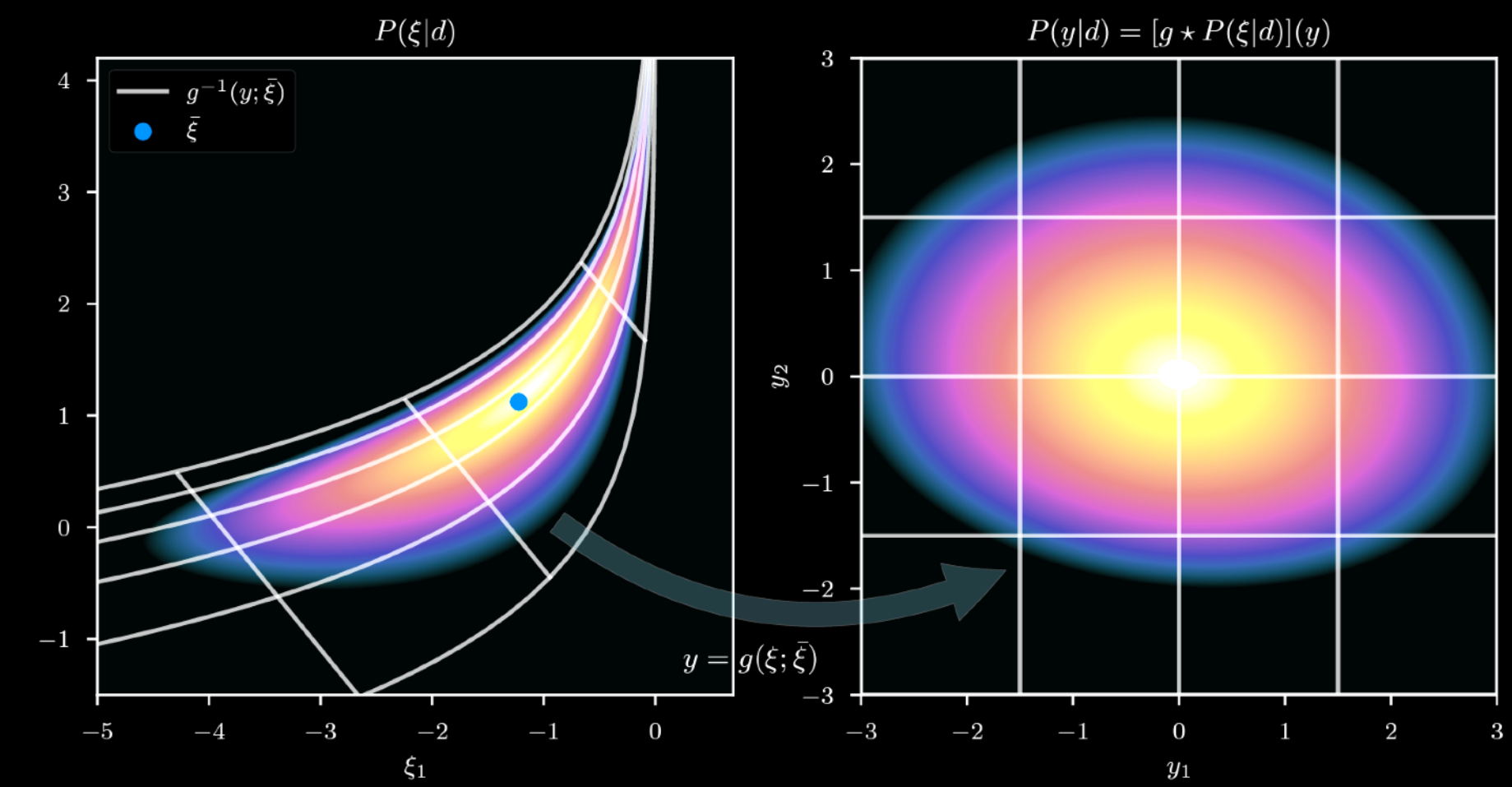
## geometric Variational Inference



Credits @ Frank, P.; Leike, R.; EnBlin, T.A. Geometric Variational Inference. *Entropy* **2021**, *23*, 853.

# Inference

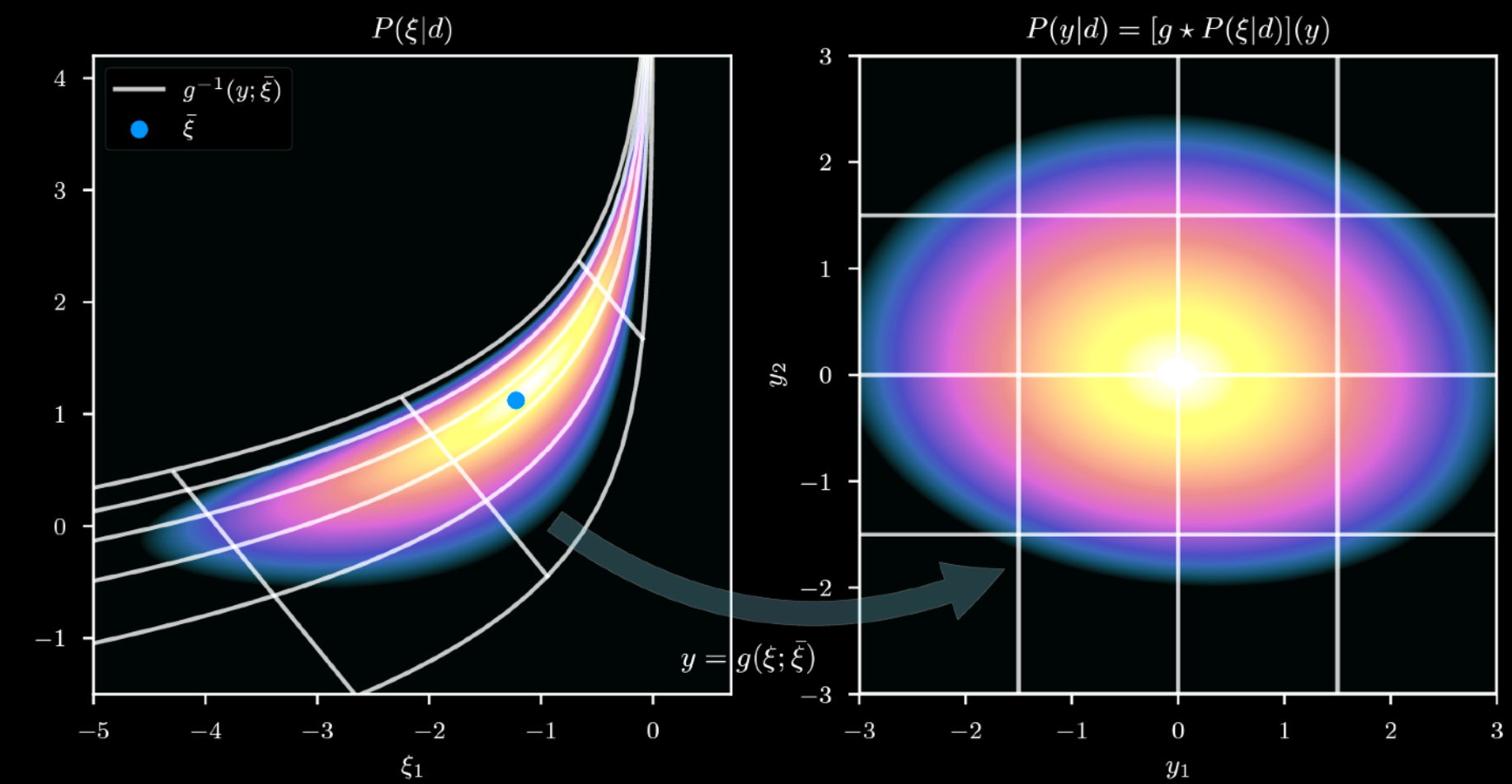
## geometric Variational Inference



# Inference

## geometric Variational Inference

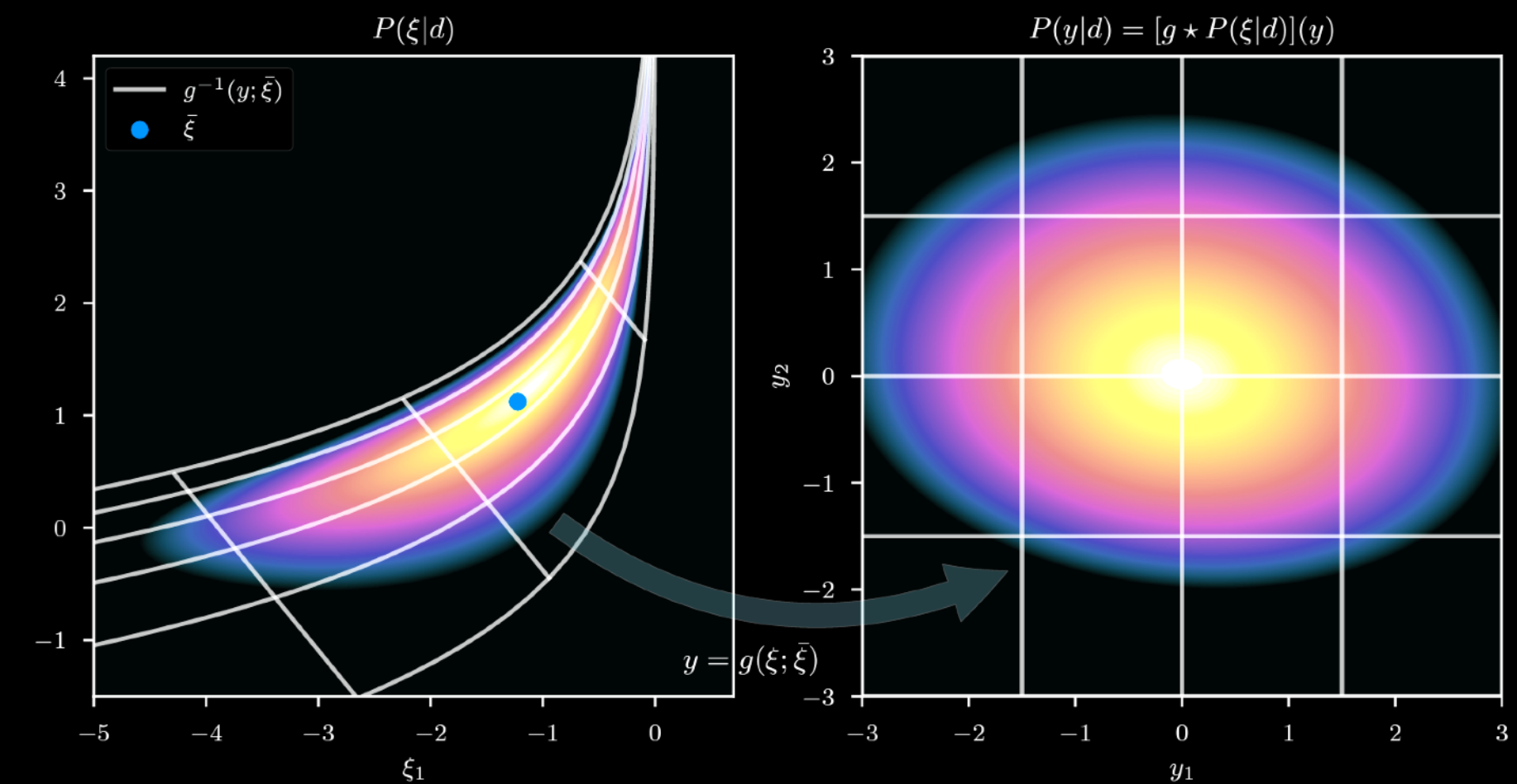
$$D_{\text{KL}}(q_\phi \parallel p) = \int_{\Theta} q_\phi(\theta) \log \frac{q_\phi(\theta)}{p(\theta \mid d, M)} d\theta$$



# Inference

## geometric Variational Inference

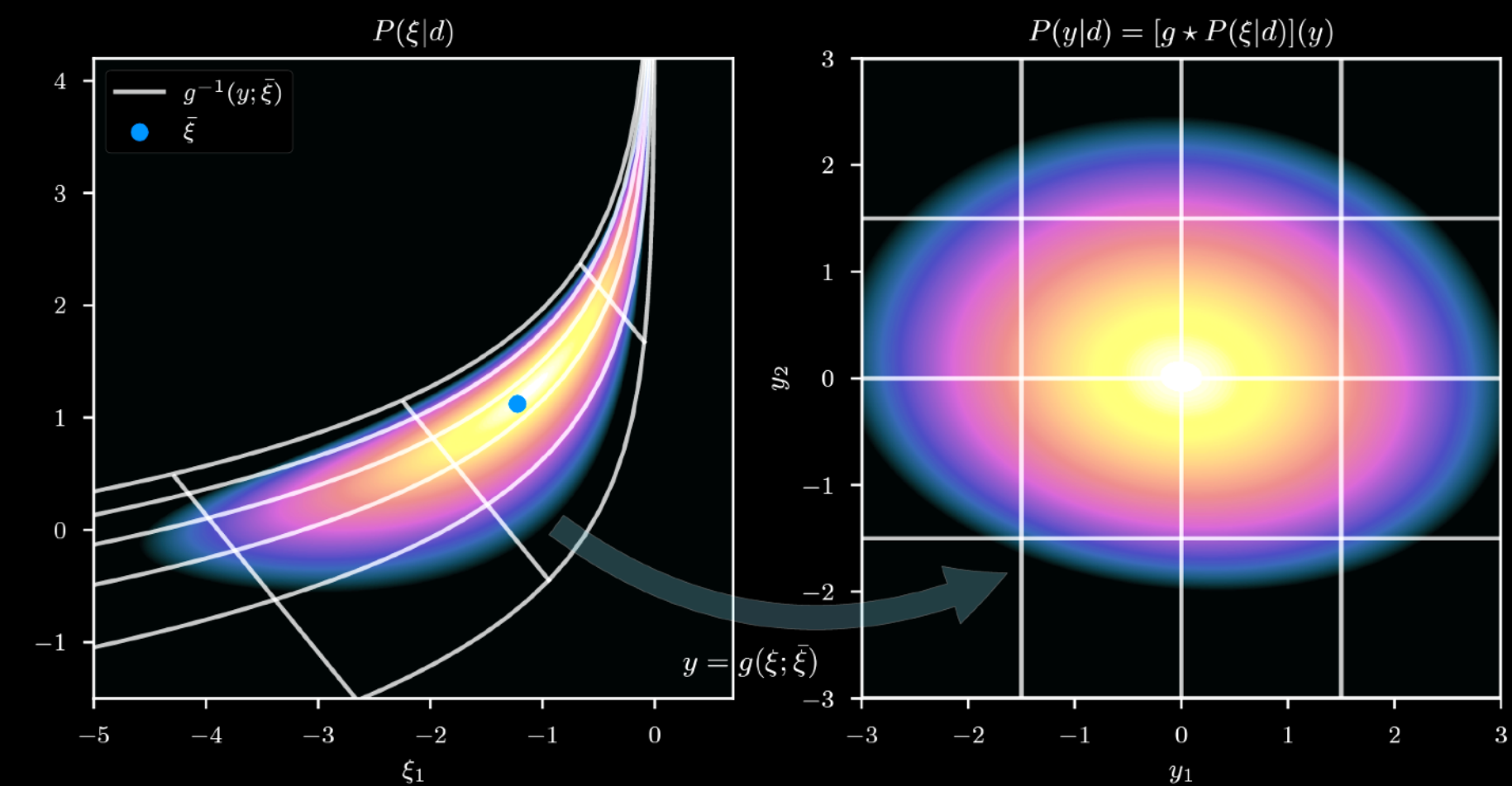
$$D_{\text{KL}}(q_\phi \parallel p) = \int_{\Theta} q_\phi(\theta) \log \frac{q_\phi(\theta)}{p(\theta \mid d, M)} d\theta$$
$$= \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log \frac{q_\phi(\theta)}{p(\theta \mid d, M)} \right]$$



# Inference

## geometric Variational Inference

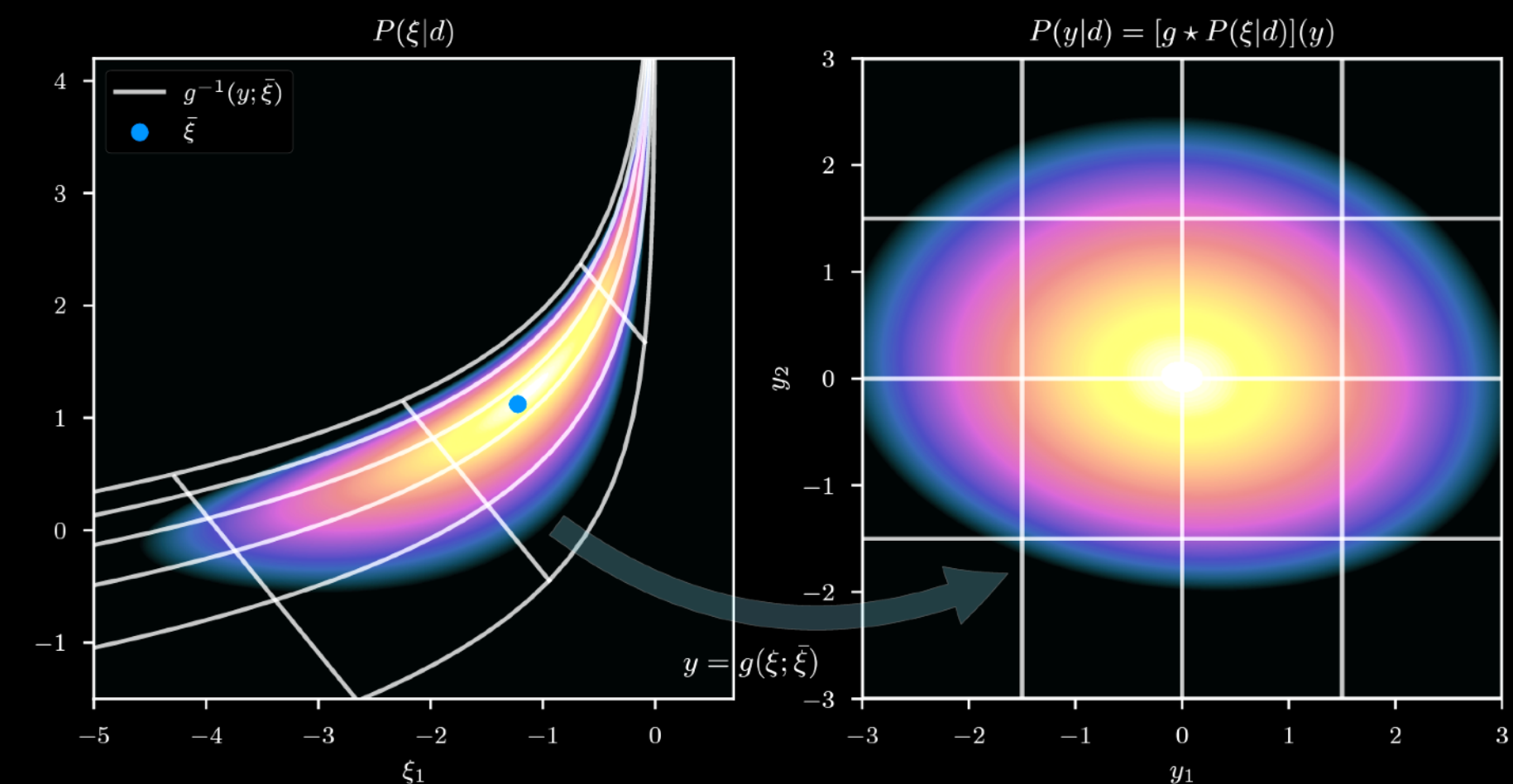
$$\begin{aligned} D_{\text{KL}}(q_\phi \parallel p) &= \int_{\Theta} q_\phi(\theta) \log \frac{q_\phi(\theta)}{p(\theta \mid d, M)} d\theta \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log \frac{q_\phi(\theta)}{p(\theta \mid d, M)} \right] \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log q_\phi(\theta) \right] - \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log p(\theta \mid d, M) \right] \end{aligned}$$



# Inference

## geometric Variational Inference

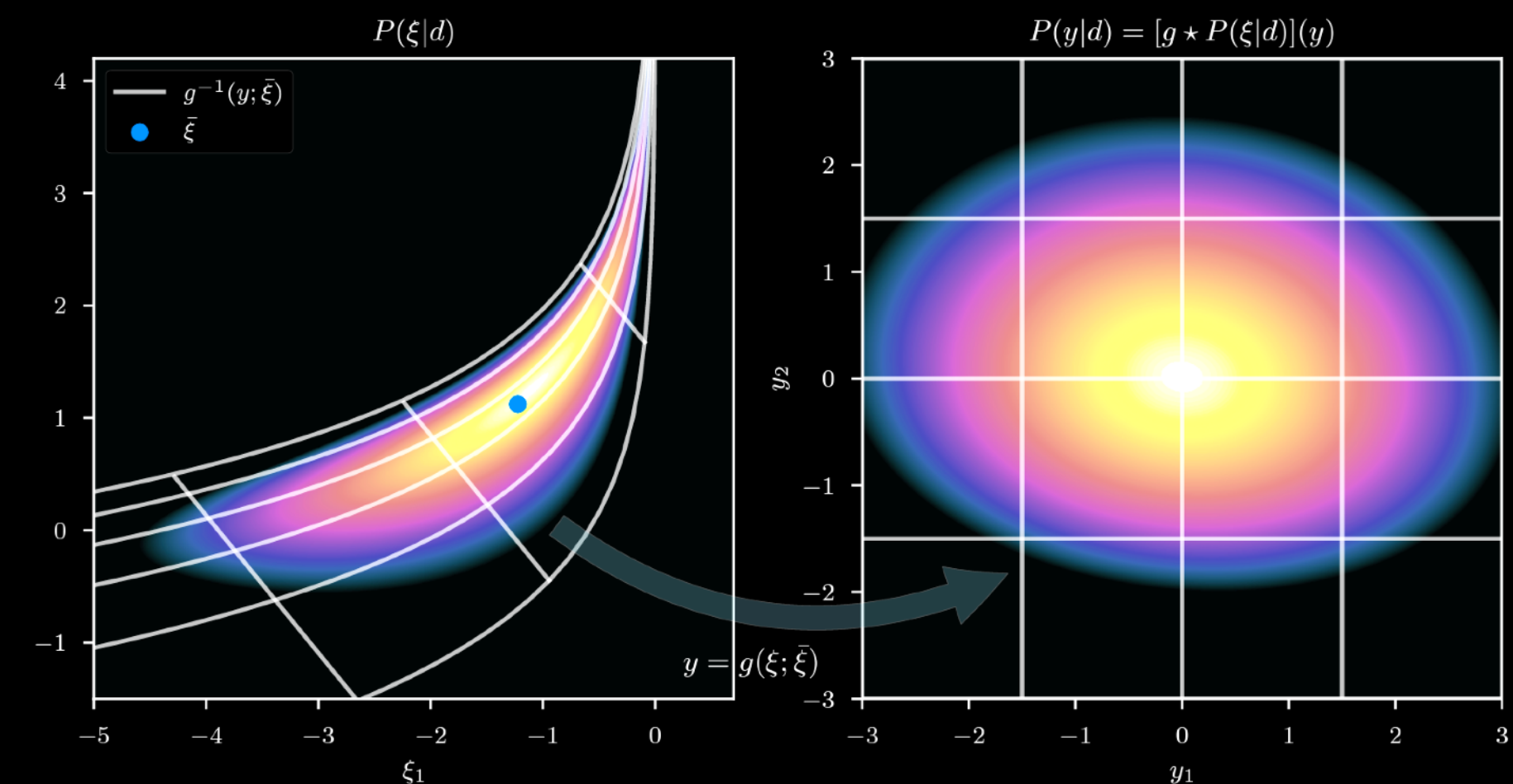
$$\begin{aligned} D_{\text{KL}}(q_\phi \parallel p) &= \int_{\Theta} q_\phi(\theta) \log \frac{q_\phi(\theta)}{p(\theta \mid d, M)} d\theta \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log \frac{q_\phi(\theta)}{p(\theta \mid d, M)} \right] \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log q_\phi(\theta) \right] - \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log p(\theta \mid d, M) \right] \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log q_\phi(\theta) \right] - \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log \frac{p(\theta, d \mid M)}{p(d \mid M)} \right] \end{aligned}$$



# Inference

## geometric Variational Inference

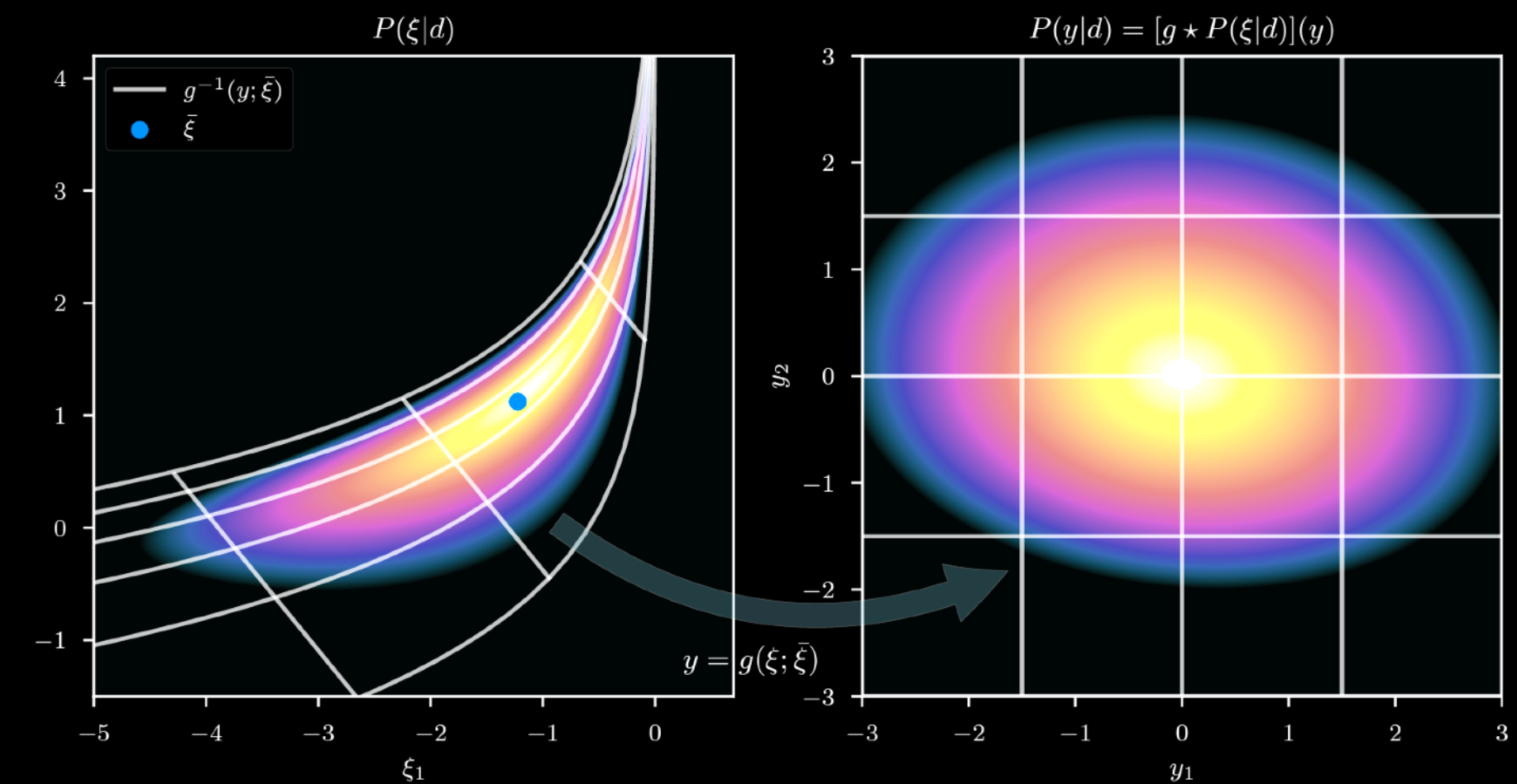
$$\begin{aligned} D_{\text{KL}}(q_\phi \parallel p) &= \int_{\Theta} q_\phi(\theta) \log \frac{q_\phi(\theta)}{p(\theta \mid d, M)} d\theta \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log \frac{q_\phi(\theta)}{p(\theta \mid d, M)} \right] \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log q_\phi(\theta) \right] - \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log p(\theta \mid d, M) \right] \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log q_\phi(\theta) \right] - \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log \frac{p(\theta, d \mid M)}{p(d \mid M)} \right] \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log q_\phi(\theta) \right] - \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log p(\theta, d \mid M) \right] + \log p(d \mid M) \end{aligned}$$



# Inference

## geometric Variational Inference

$$\begin{aligned} D_{\text{KL}}(q_\phi \parallel p) &= \int_{\Theta} q_\phi(\theta) \log \frac{q_\phi(\theta)}{p(\theta \mid d, M)} d\theta \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log \frac{q_\phi(\theta)}{p(\theta \mid d, M)} \right] \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log q_\phi(\theta) \right] - \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log p(\theta \mid d, M) \right] \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log q_\phi(\theta) \right] - \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log \frac{p(\theta, d \mid M)}{p(d \mid M)} \right] \\ &= \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log q_\phi(\theta) \right] - \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \log p(\theta, d \mid M) \right] + \log p(d \mid M) \\ &= - \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \mathcal{H}_q(\theta) \right] + \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \mathcal{H}_p(\theta, d \mid M) \right] + \log p(d \mid M). \end{aligned}$$



# Inference

geometric Variational Inference

# Inference

## geometric Variational Inference

$$D_{\text{KL}}(q_\phi \parallel p) = -\mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \mathcal{H}_q(\theta) \right] + \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \mathcal{H}_p(\theta, d \mid M) \right] + \log p(d \mid M)$$

# Inference

## geometric Variational Inference

$$D_{\text{KL}}(q_\phi \parallel p) = \underbrace{-\mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \mathcal{H}_q(\theta) \right] + \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi} \left[ \mathcal{H}_p(\theta, d \mid M) \right]}_{-\text{ELBO}} + \log p(d \mid M)$$

# Inference

## geometric Variational Inference

$$D_{\text{KL}}(q_\phi \parallel p) = \underbrace{-\mathbb{E}_{q_\phi}[\mathcal{H}_q(\theta)] + \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi}[\mathcal{H}_p(\theta, d \mid M)]}_{-\text{ELBO}} + \log p(d \mid M)$$

$$\log p(d \mid M) = D_{\text{KL}}(q_\phi \parallel p) + \text{ELBO}$$

# Inference

## geometric Variational Inference

$$D_{\text{KL}}(q_\phi \parallel p) = \underbrace{-\mathbb{E}_{q_\phi}[\mathcal{H}_q(\theta)] + \mathbb{E}_{q_\phi}[\mathcal{H}_p(\theta, d \mid M)]}_{-\text{ELBO}} + \log p(d \mid M)$$

$$\log p(d \mid M) \leq \text{ELBO}$$

# Comparing models

Fields

# Comparing models

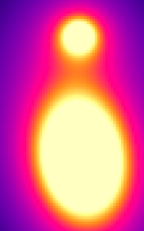
## Fields

$$\log \mathcal{O}(M_1, M_2 | d) = [\text{ELBO}_1 - \text{ELBO}_2] + [\mathcal{D}_{\text{KL},1} - \mathcal{D}_{\text{KL},2}] + \log \frac{p(M_1)}{p(M_2)}$$

# Comparing models

## Fields

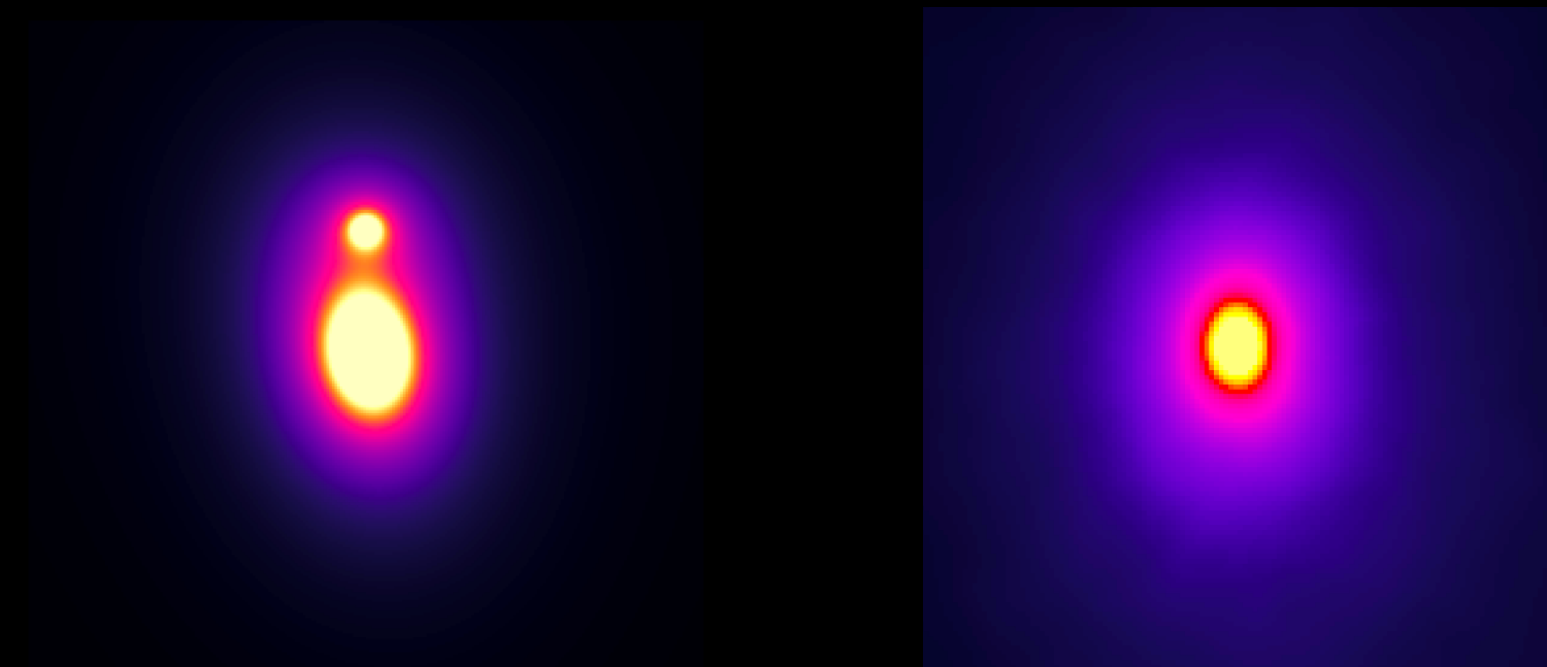
$$\log \mathcal{O}(M_1, M_2 | d) = [\text{ELBO}_1 - \text{ELBO}_2] + [\mathcal{D}_{\text{KL},1} - \mathcal{D}_{\text{KL},2}] + \log \frac{p(M_1)}{p(M_2)}$$



# Comparing models

## Fields

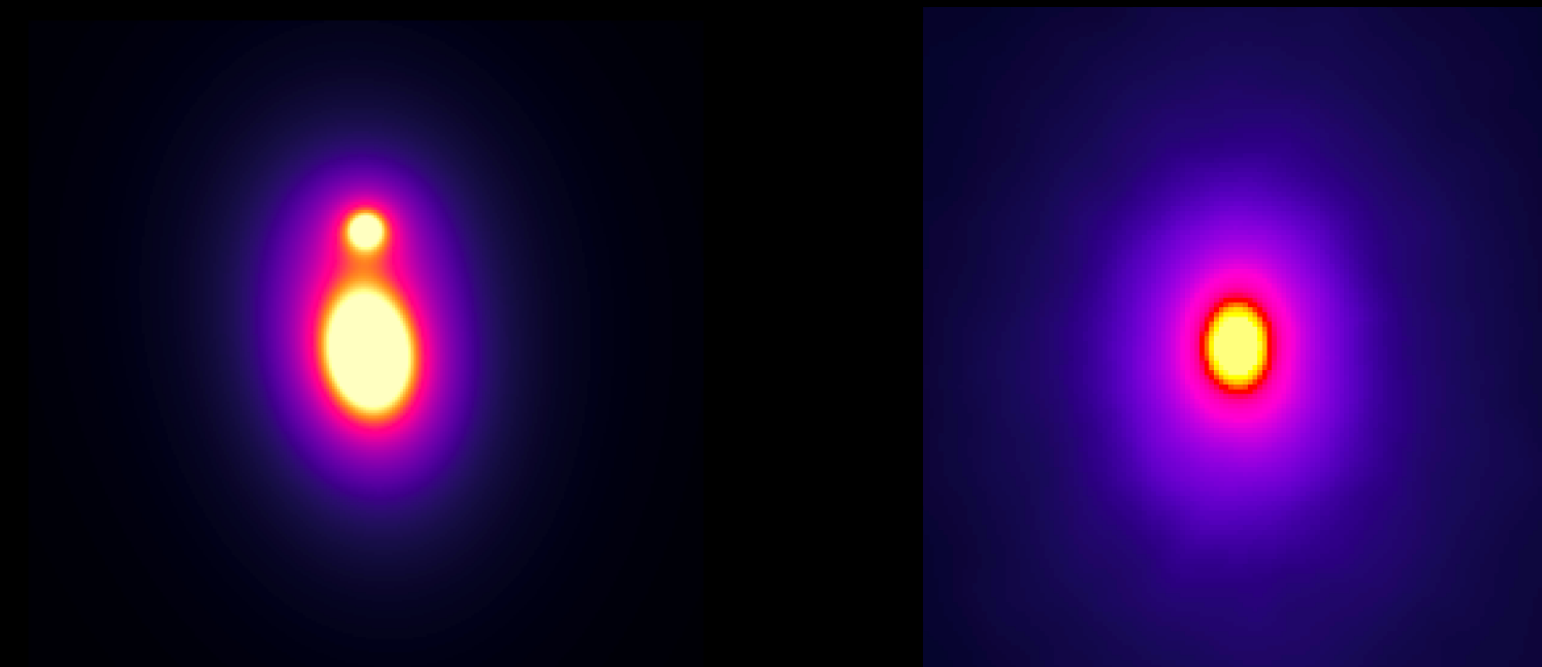
$$\log \mathcal{O}(M_1, M_2 | d) = [\text{ELBO}_1 - \text{ELBO}_2] + [\mathcal{D}_{\text{KL},1} - \mathcal{D}_{\text{KL},2}] + \log \frac{p(M_1)}{p(M_2)}$$



# Comparing models

Fields

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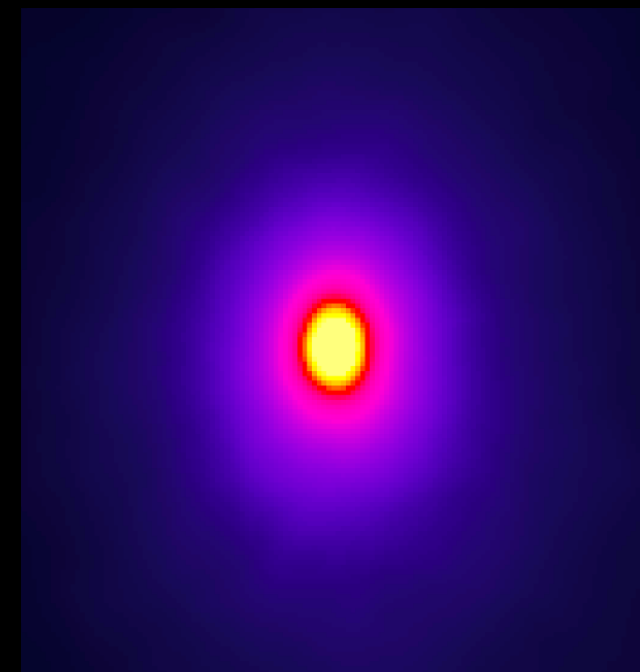


$$\log \mathcal{O}(M_1, M_2 | d) \simeq 28$$

# Comparing models

## Fields

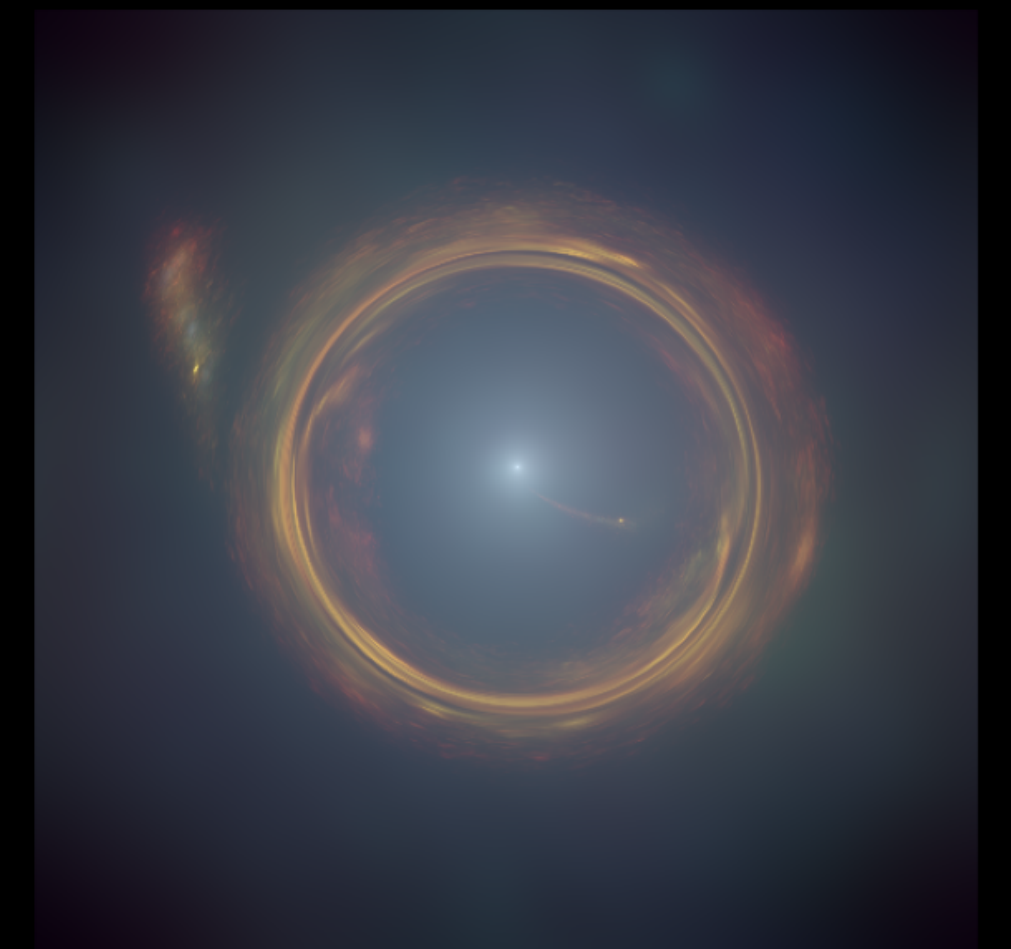
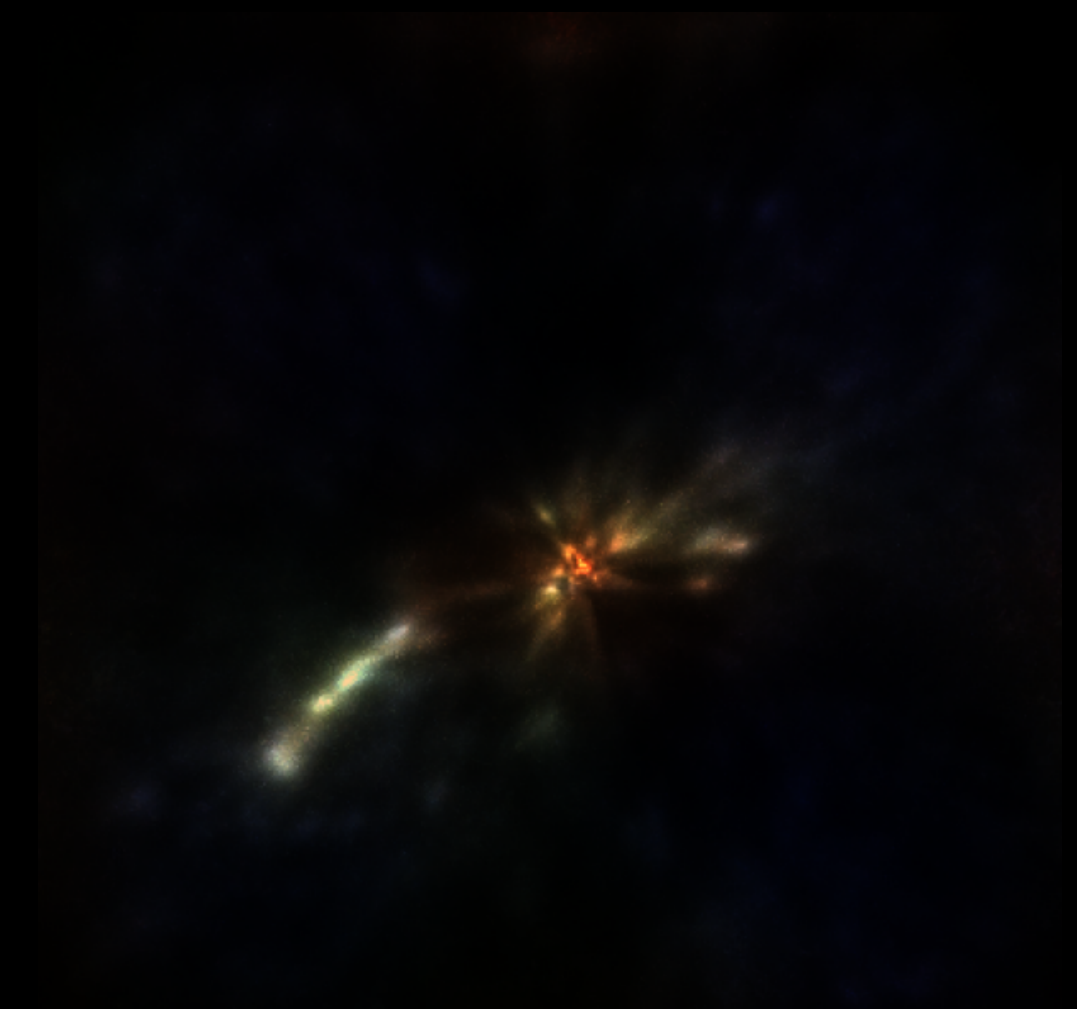
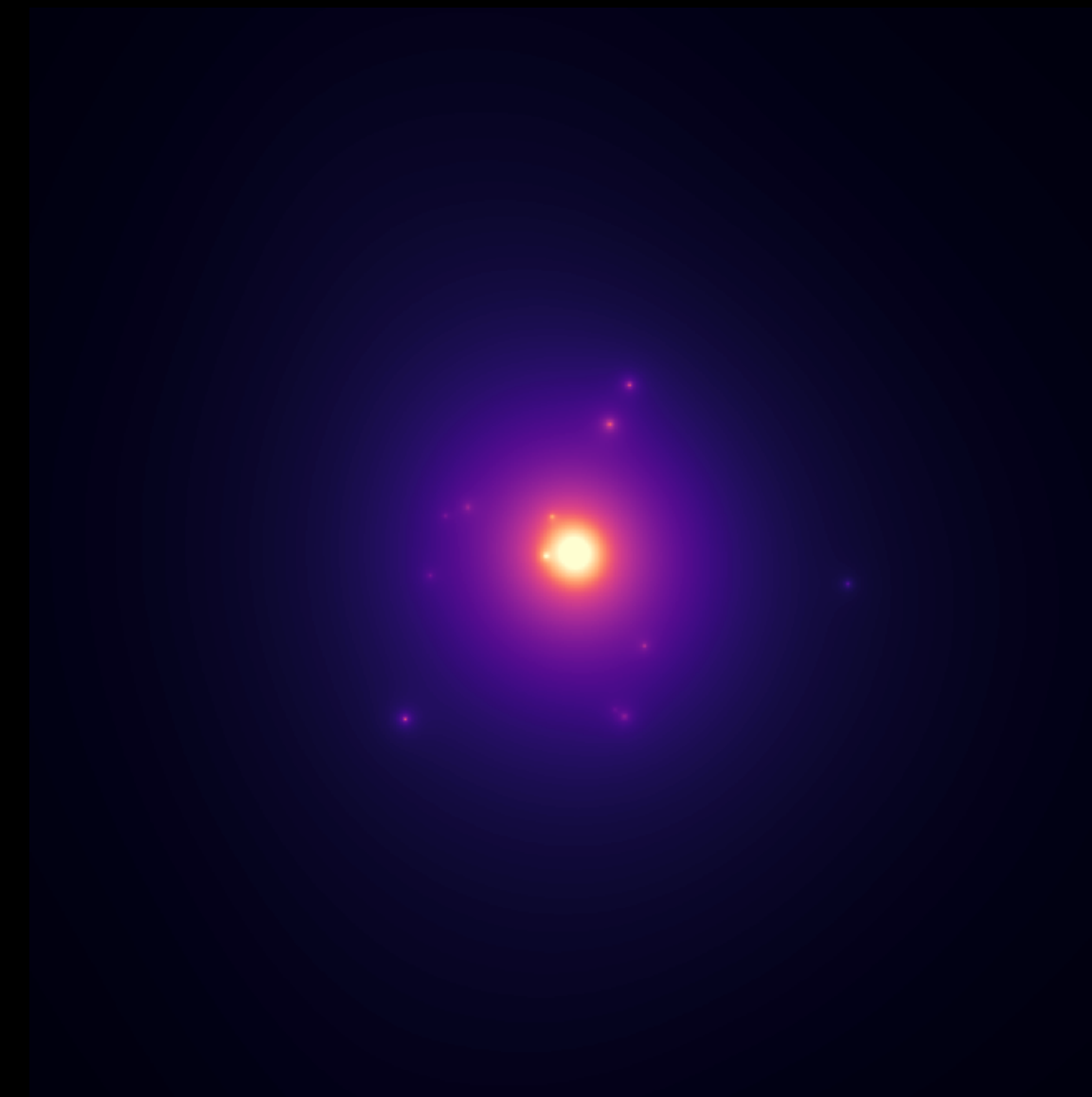
$$\log \mathcal{O}(M_1, M_2 | d) = [\text{ELBO}_1 - \text{ELBO}_2] + [\mathcal{D}_{\text{KL},1} - \mathcal{D}_{\text{KL},2}] + \log \frac{p(M_1)}{p(M_2)}$$



$$\log \mathcal{O}(M_1, M_2 | d) \simeq 28$$

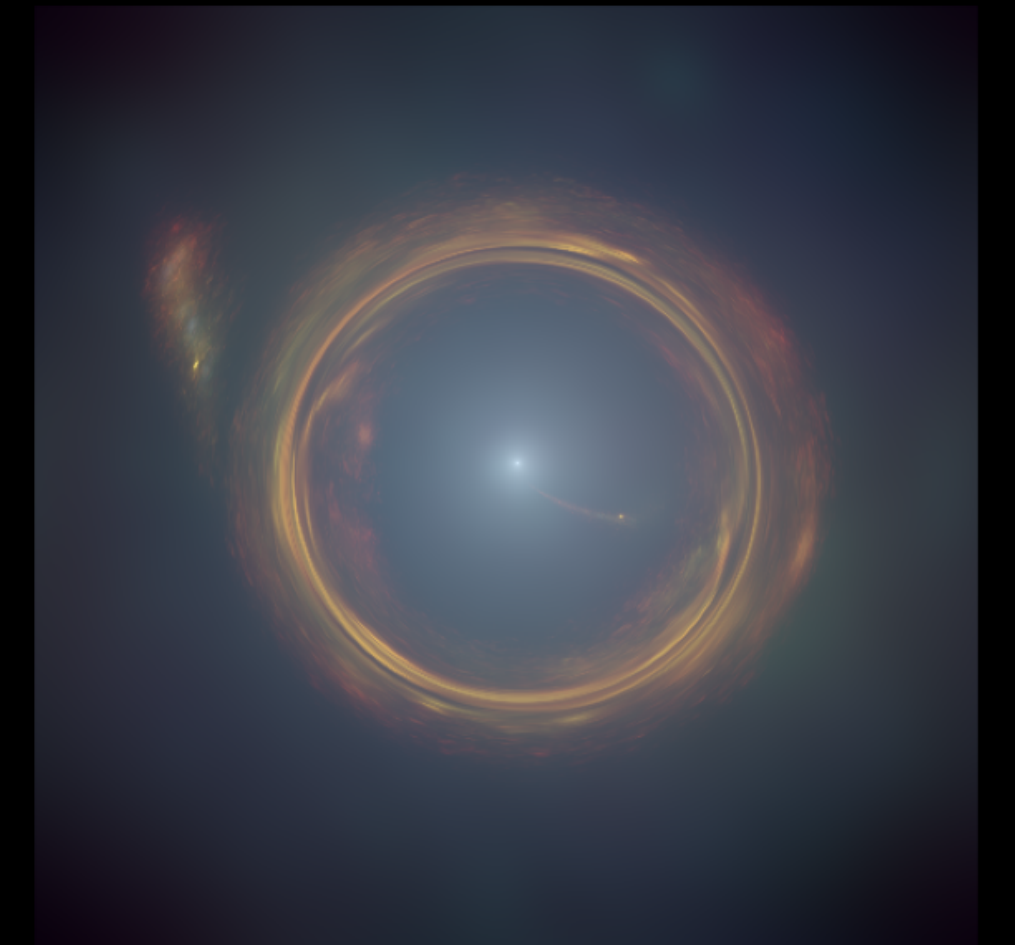
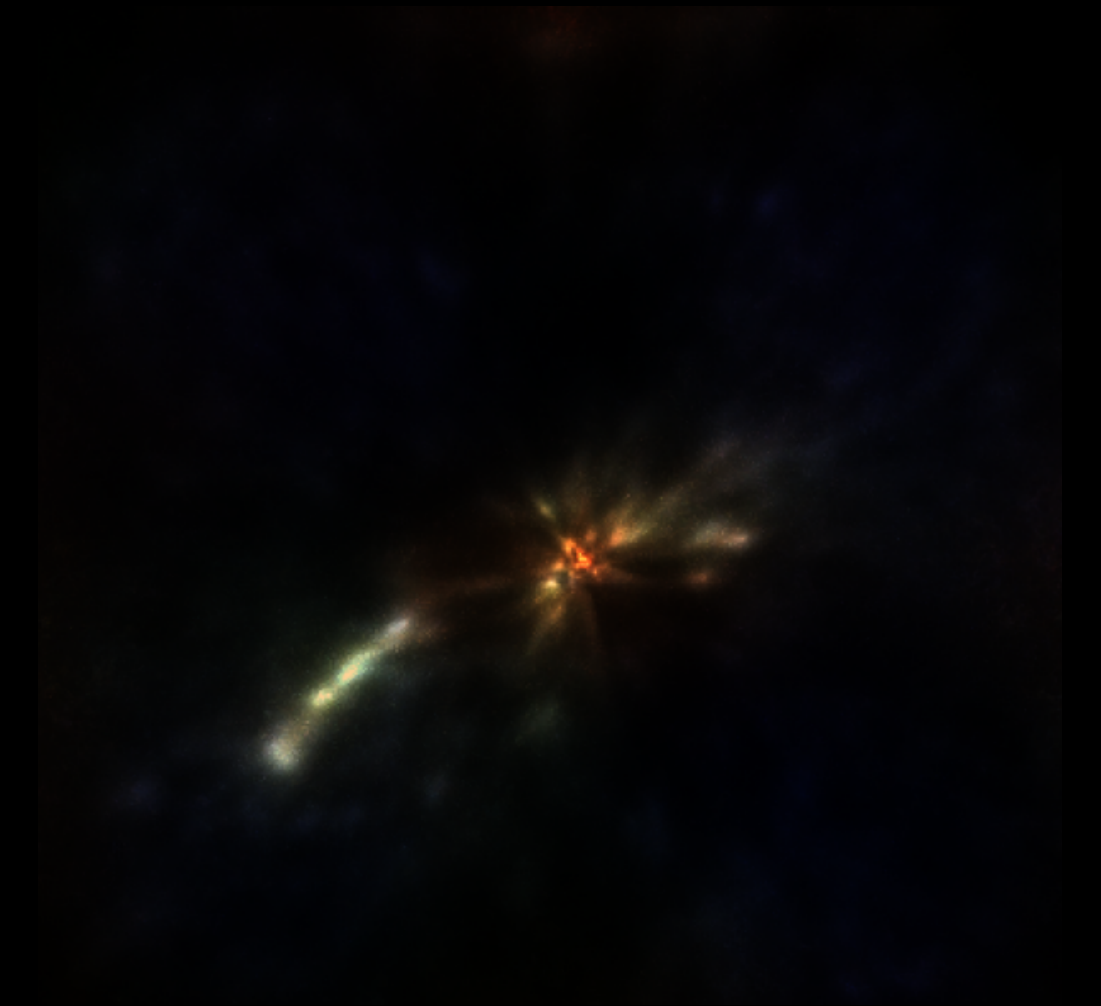
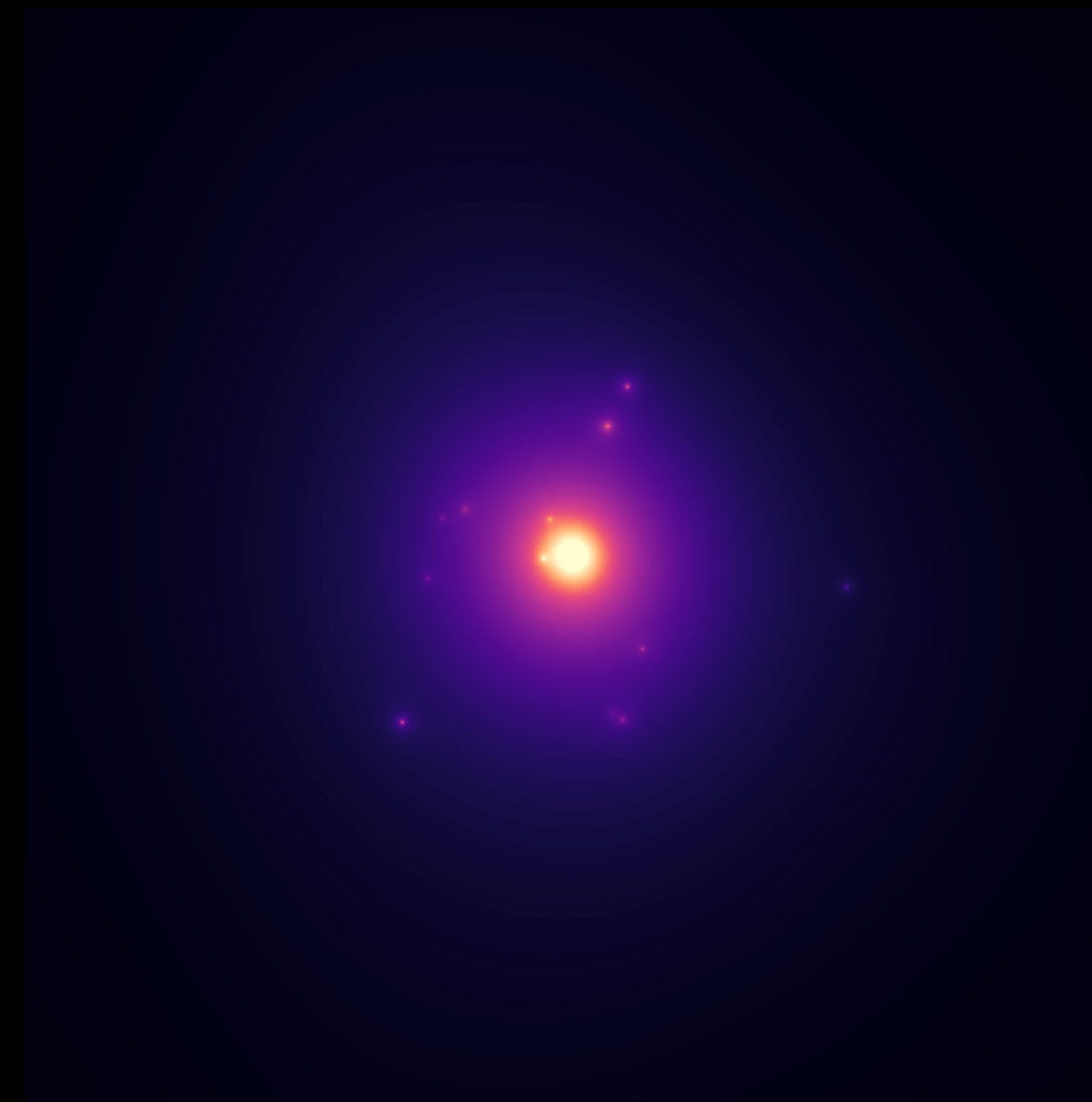


# Take home



# Take home

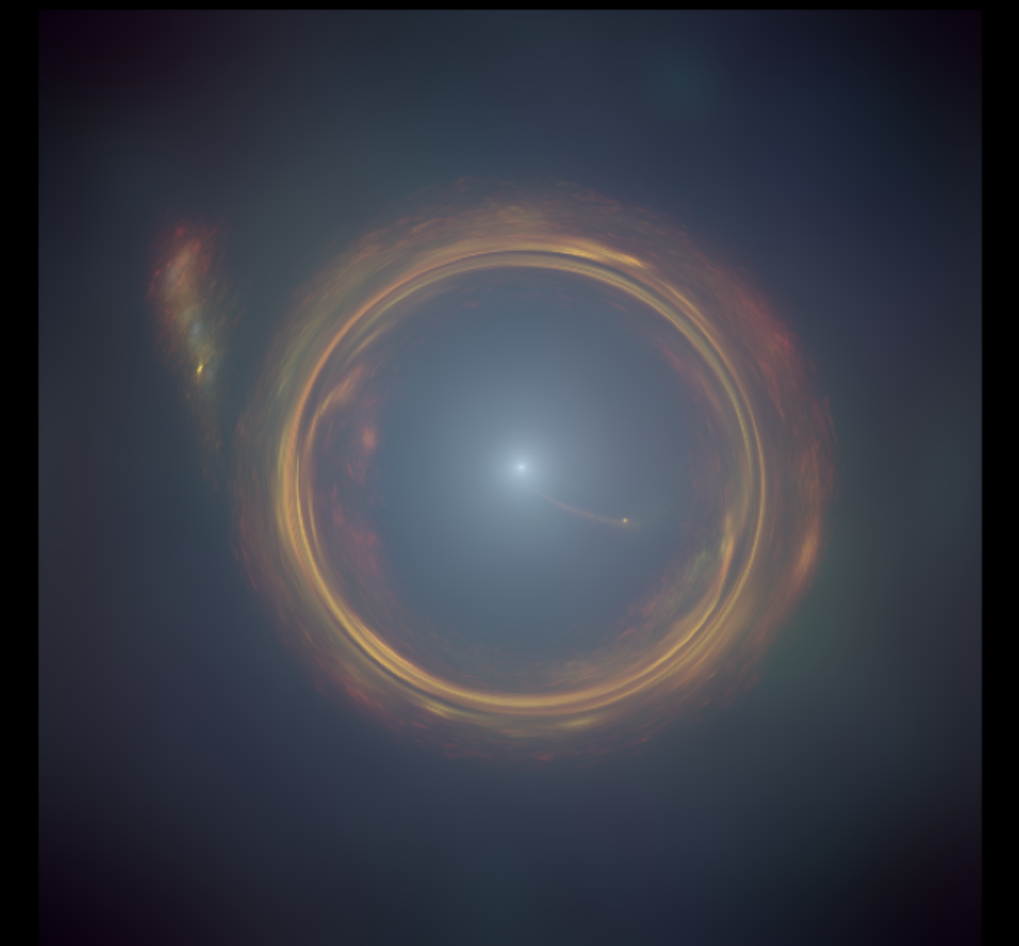
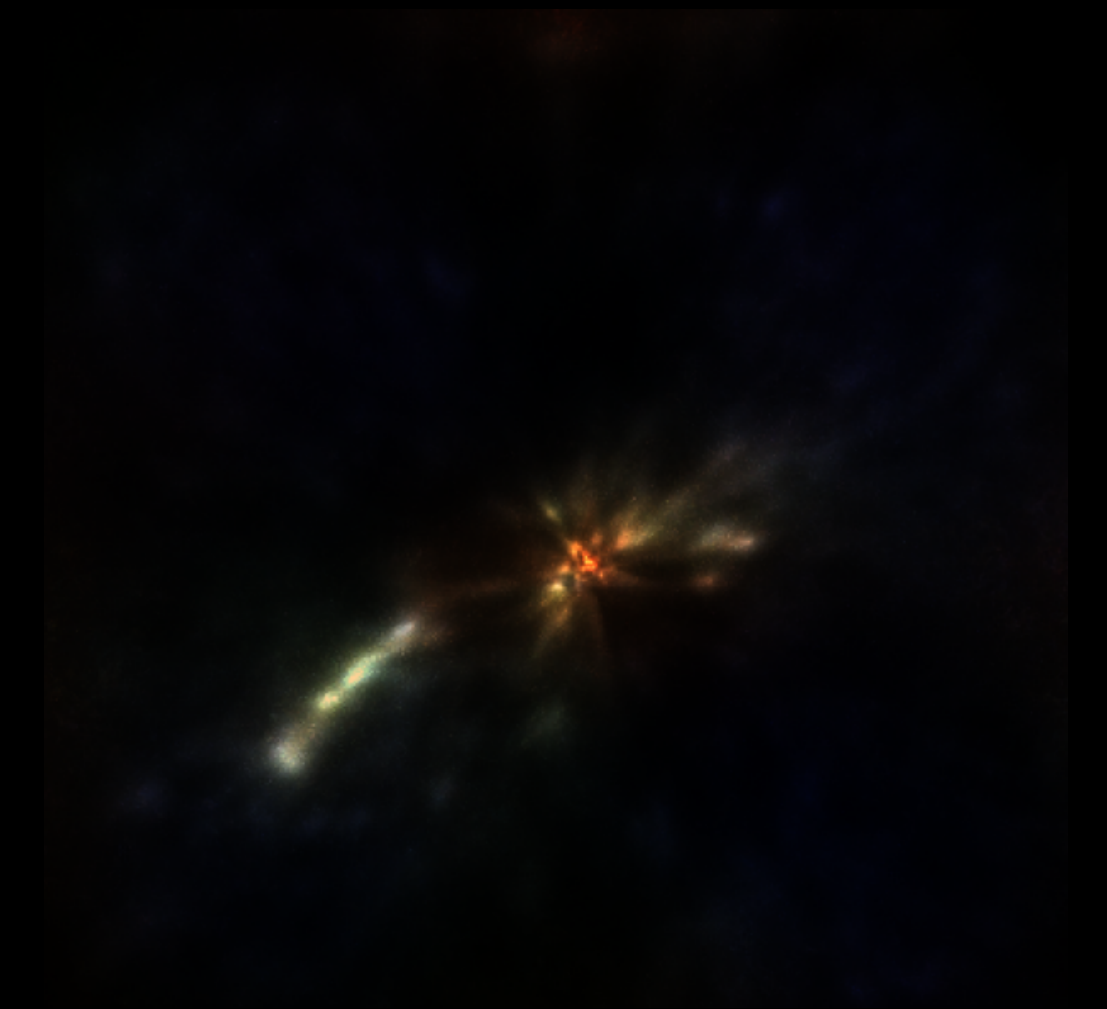
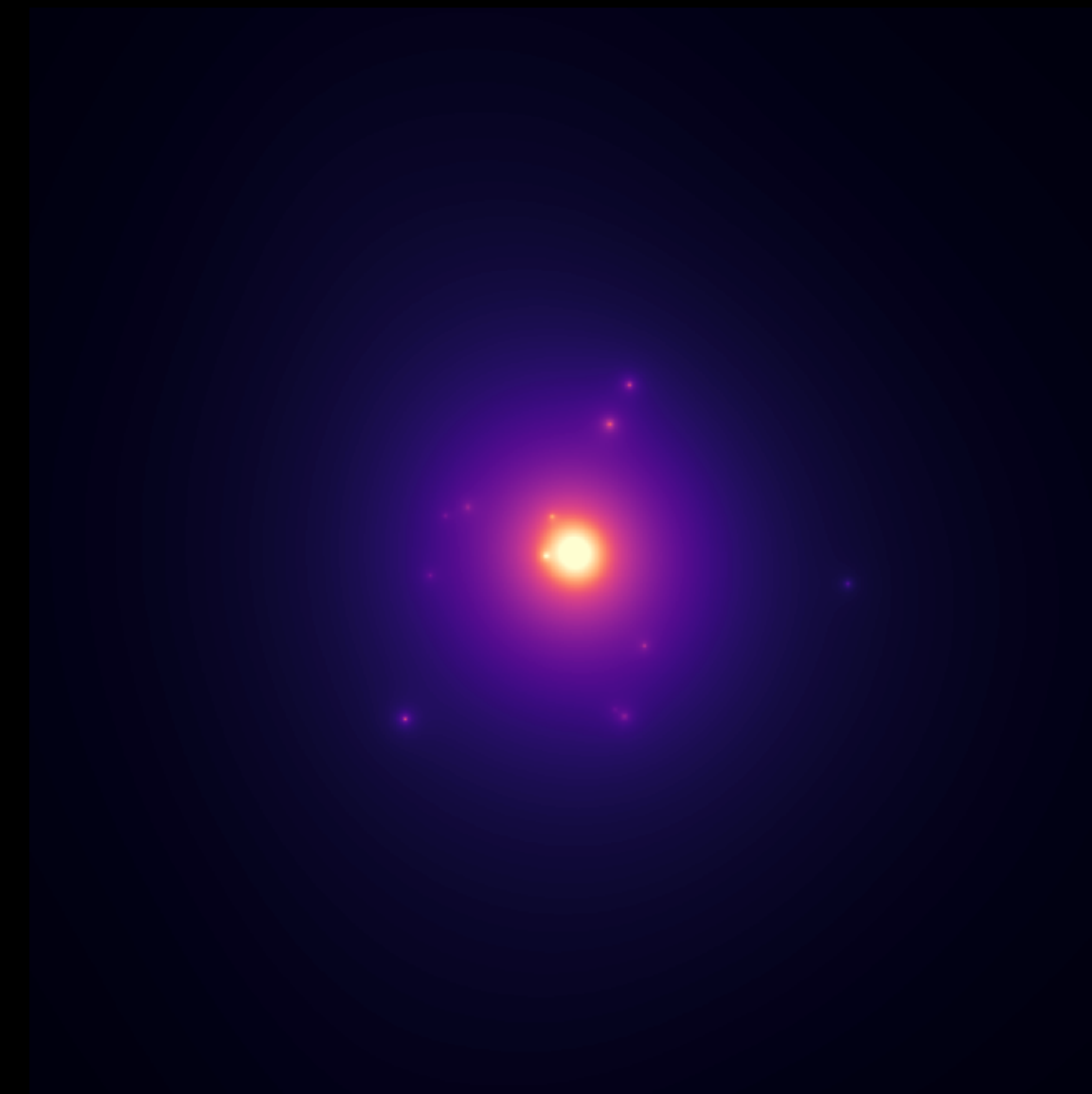
Model choice in high dimension is possible!



# Take home

**Model choice in high dimension is possible!**

Applications:

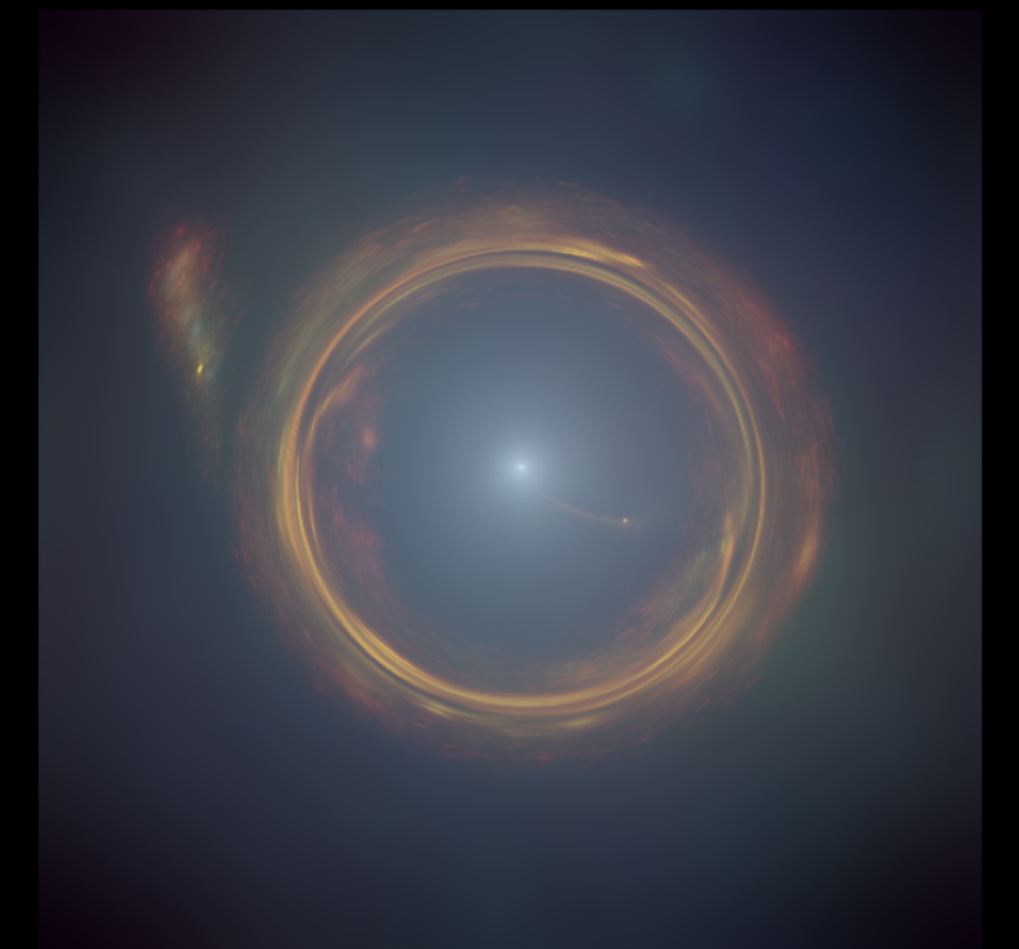
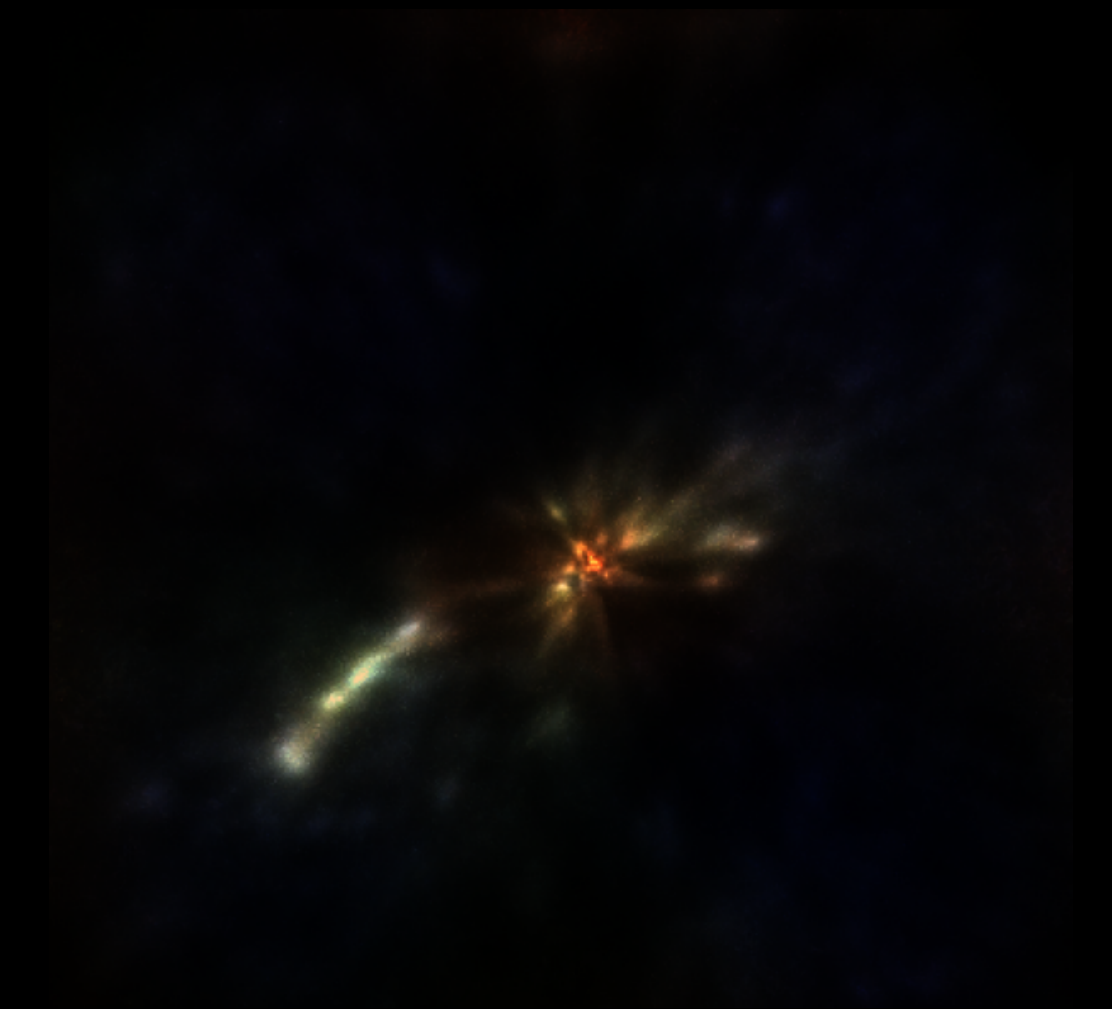
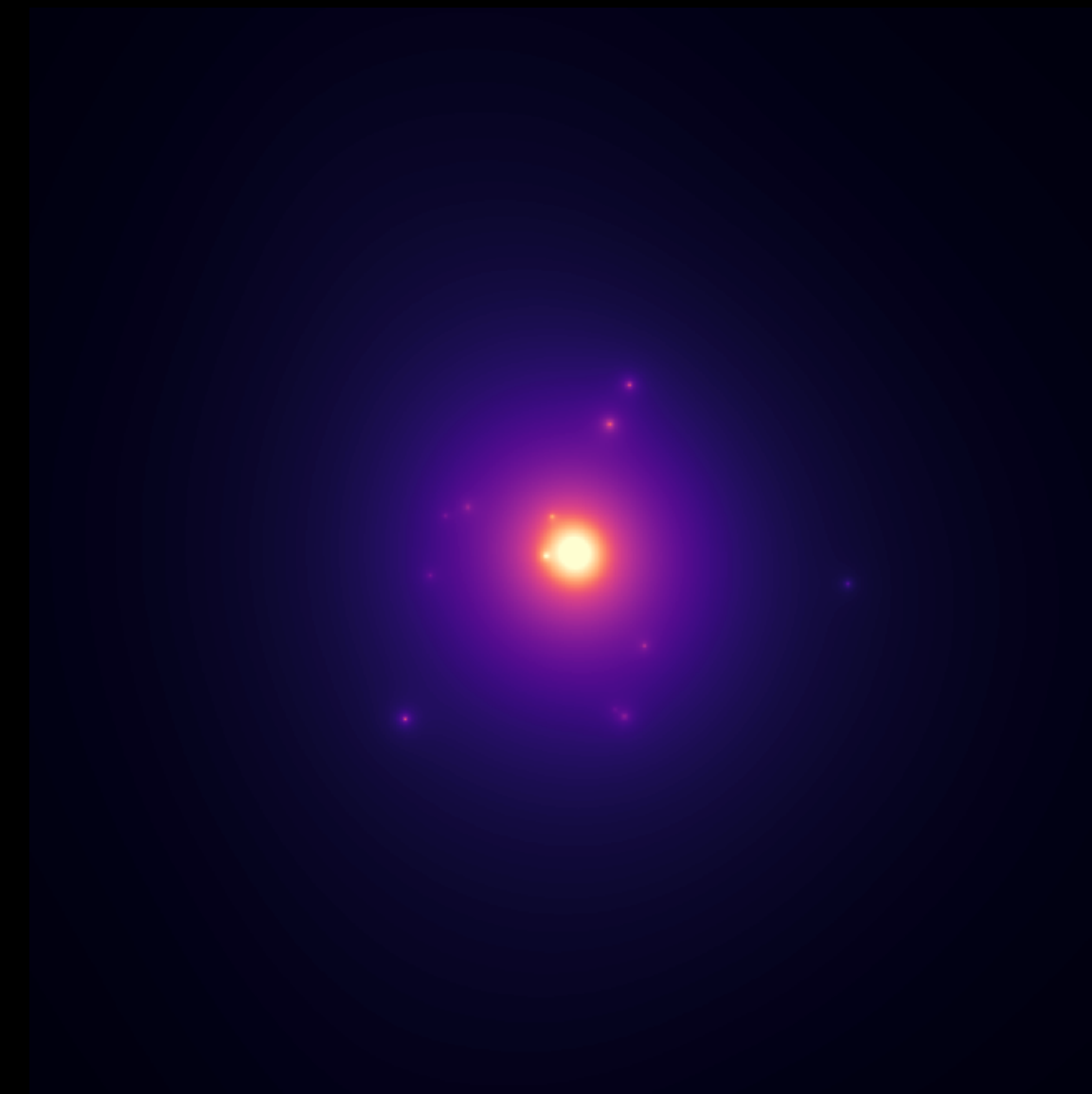


# Take home

**Model choice in high dimension is possible!**

Applications:

- Astrophysics

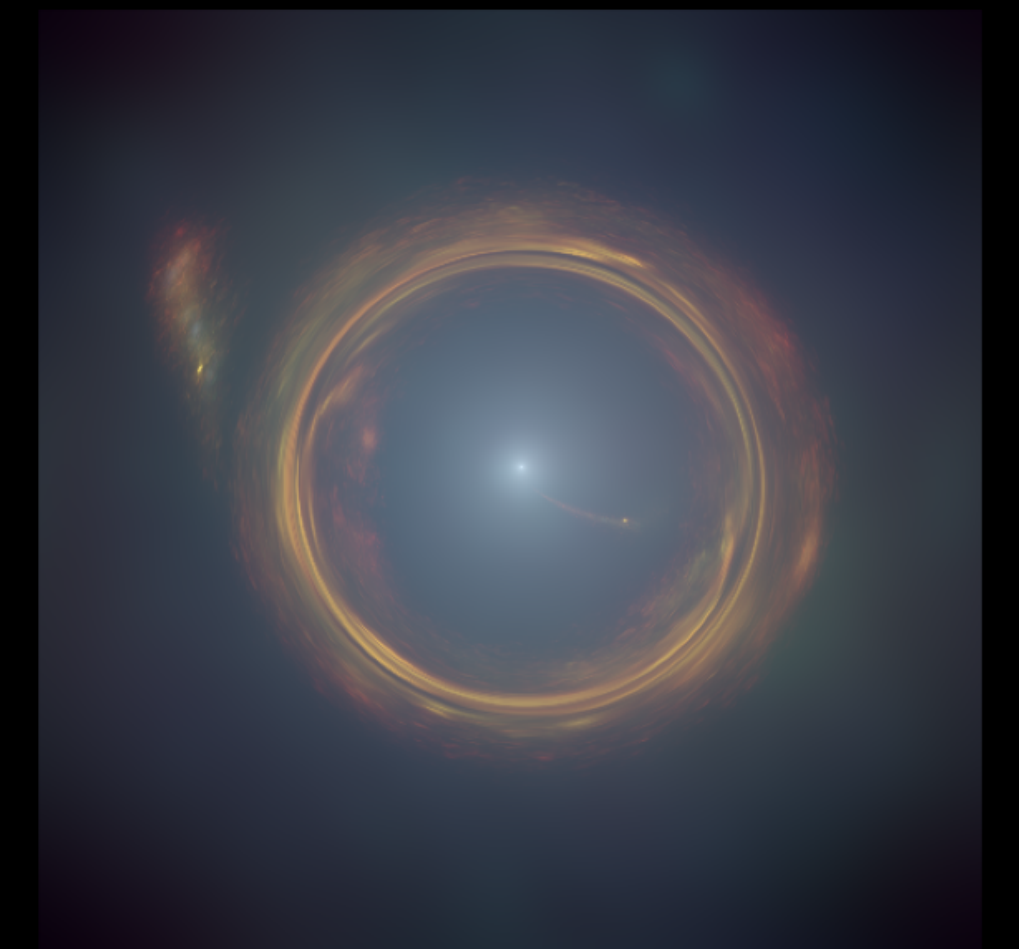
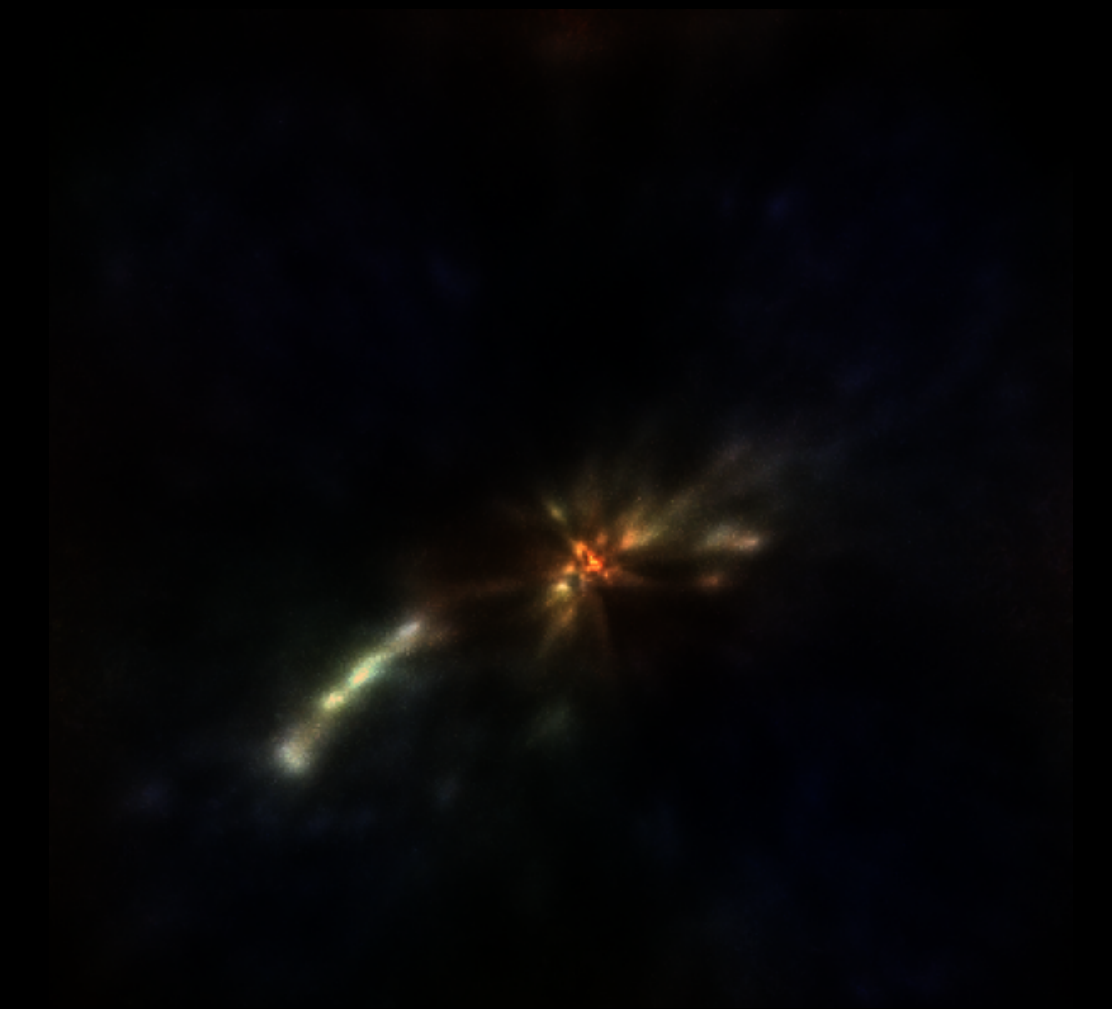
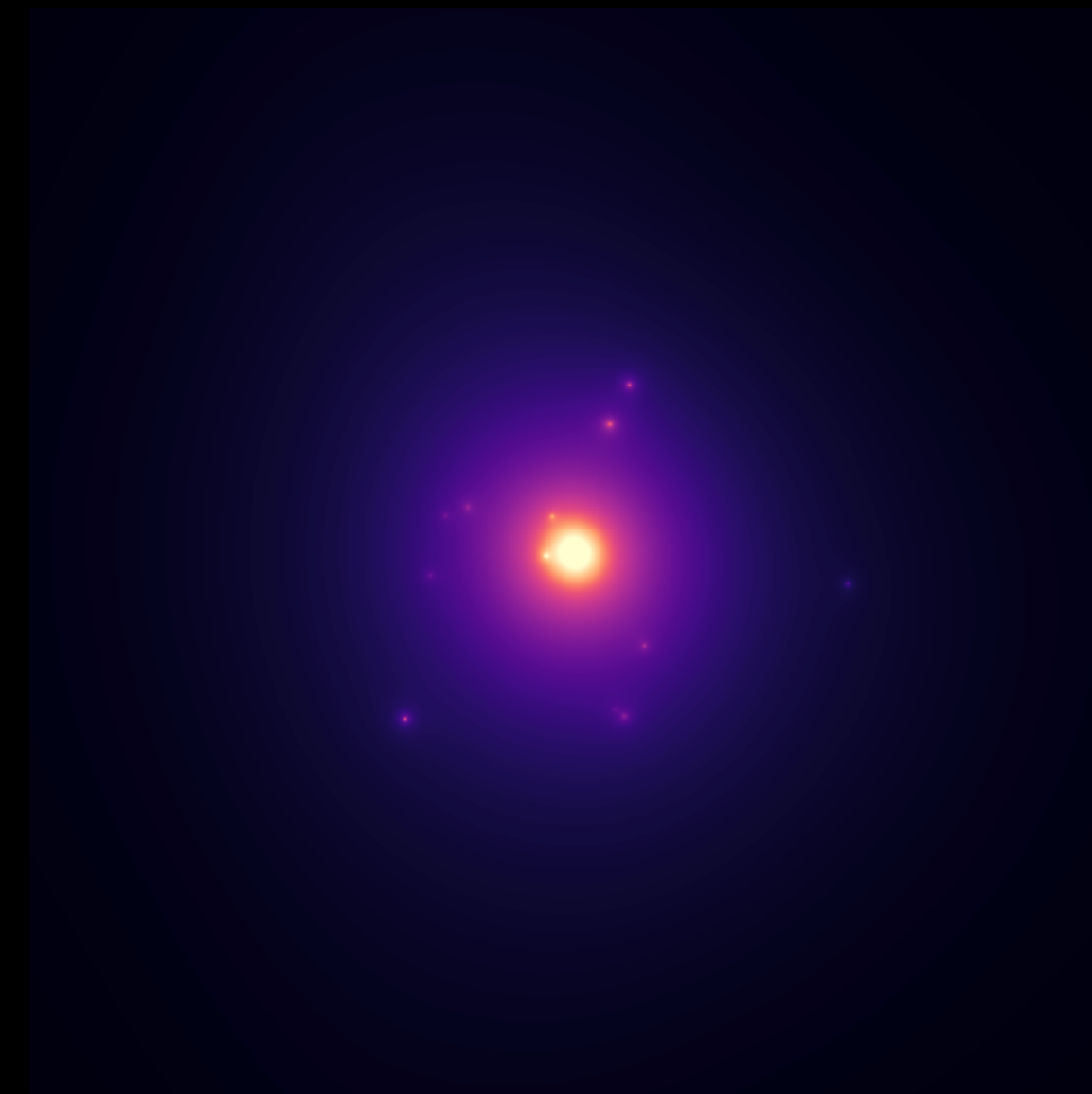


# Take home

**Model choice in high dimension is possible!**

Applications:

- Astrophysics
- Causal inference

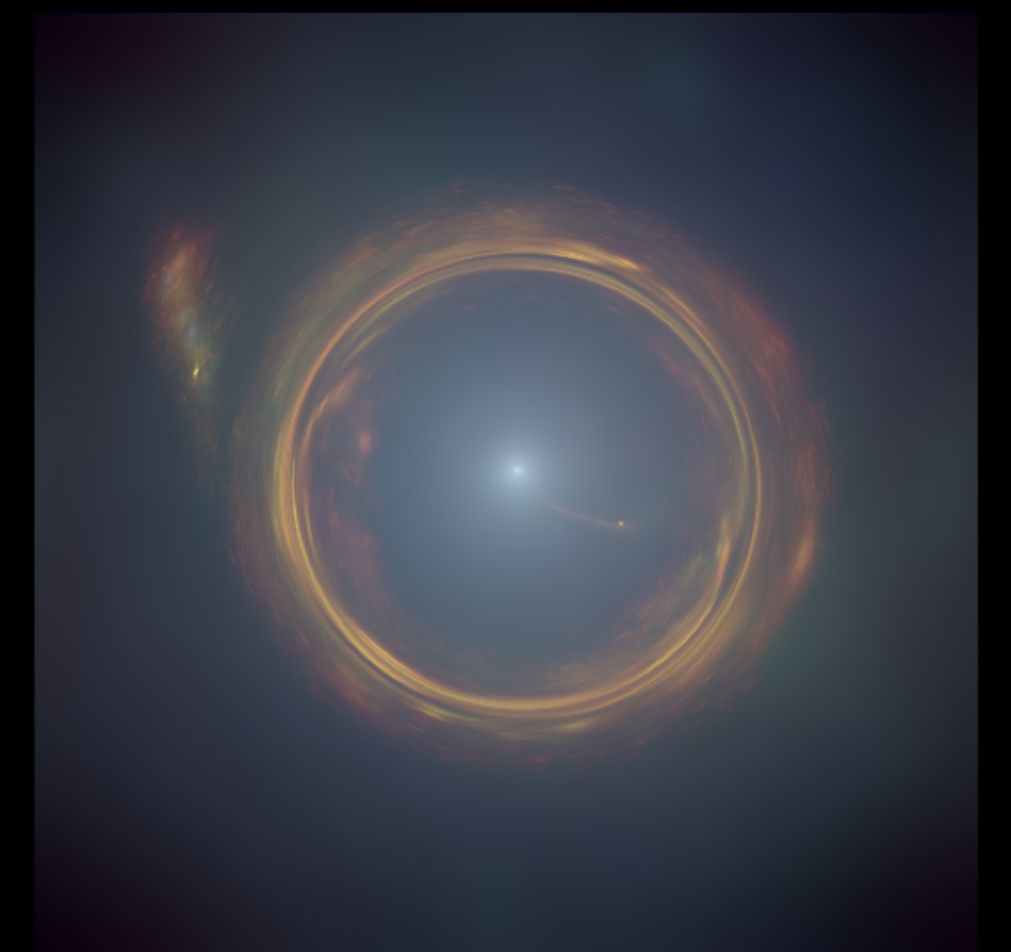
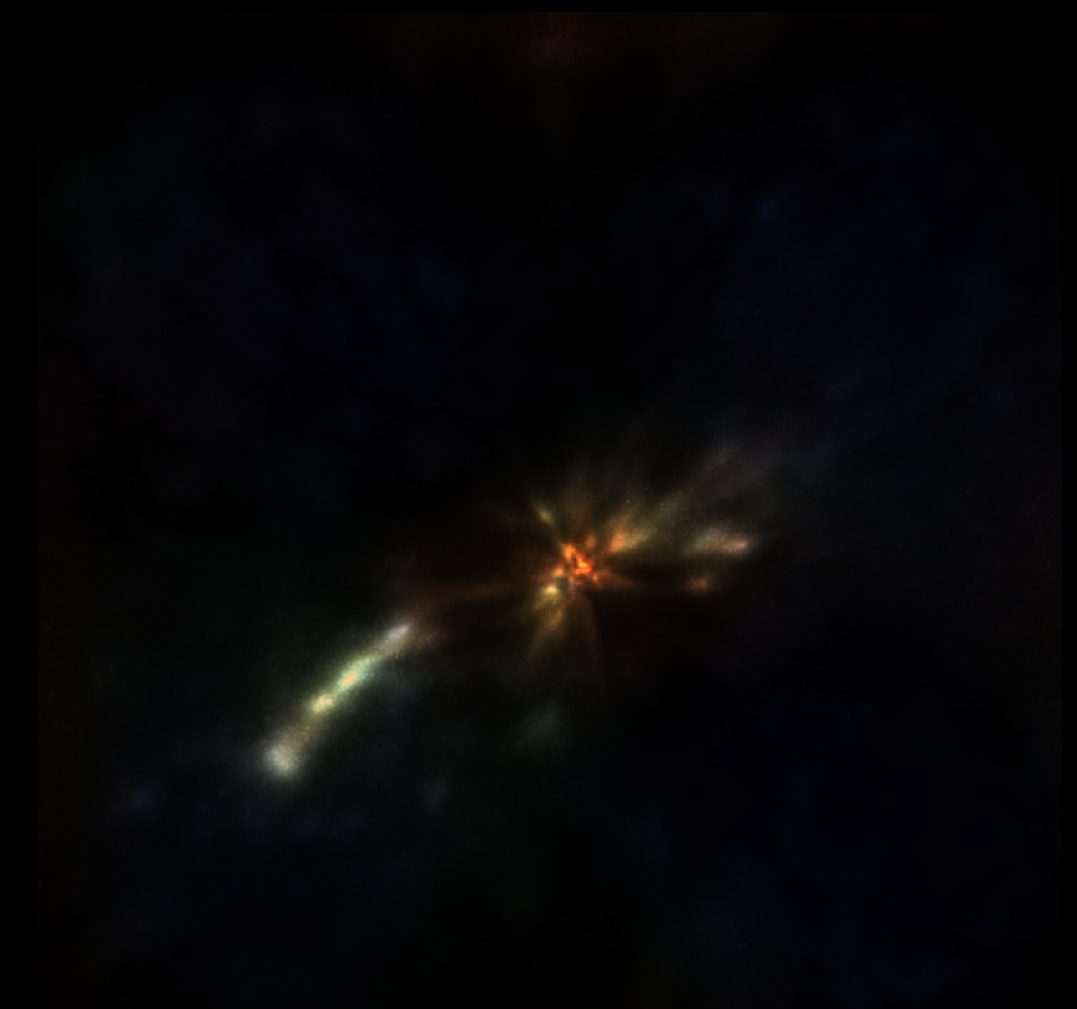
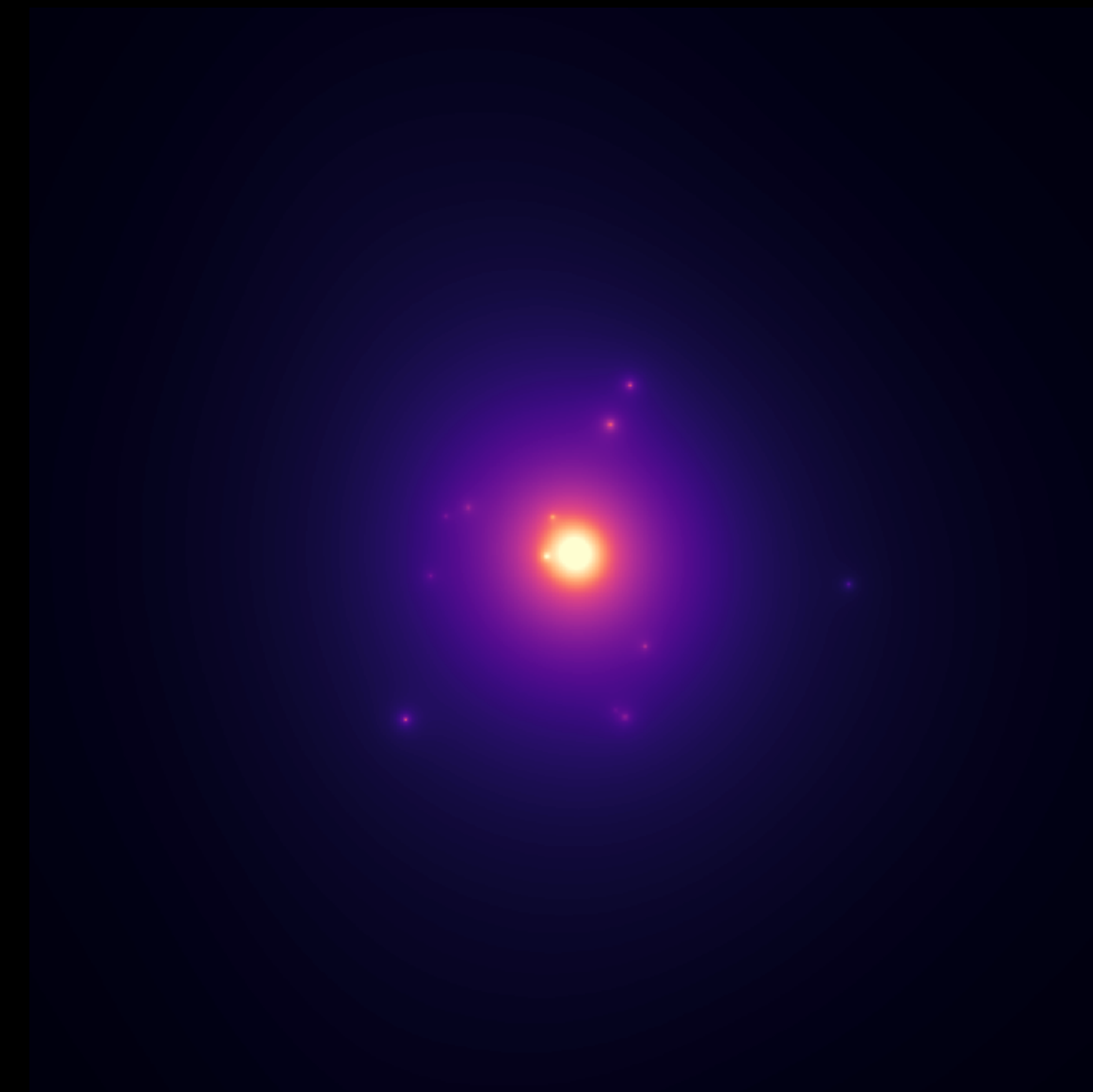


# Take home

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Applications:

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- Causal inference
- ...





# Some advertisement...

- **NIFTy (Numerical Information Field Theory)**  
High-dimensional inference & Gaussian processes + ELBO



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Sky models & astronomical instrument responses



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<https://github.com/NIFTy-PPL/NIFTy>

<https://github.com/NIFTy-PPL/J-UBIK>



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<https://github.com/NIFTy-PPL/NIFTy>

<https://github.com/NIFTy-PPL/J-UBIK>



<https://gitlab.mpcdf.mpg.de/ift/lenscharm>



# Thank you!

[matteani@mpa-garching.mpg.de](mailto:matteani@mpa-garching.mpg.de)

MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE  
FOR ASTROPHYSICS

