

A photograph of four chickens in a grassy field. On the left is a large white hen. In the center is a smaller black and white speckled hen. To the right of the speckled hen is another white hen, and on the far right is a larger white hen. They are all standing in tall grass with a line of trees in the background under a cloudy sky. The image has a semi-transparent dark overlay.

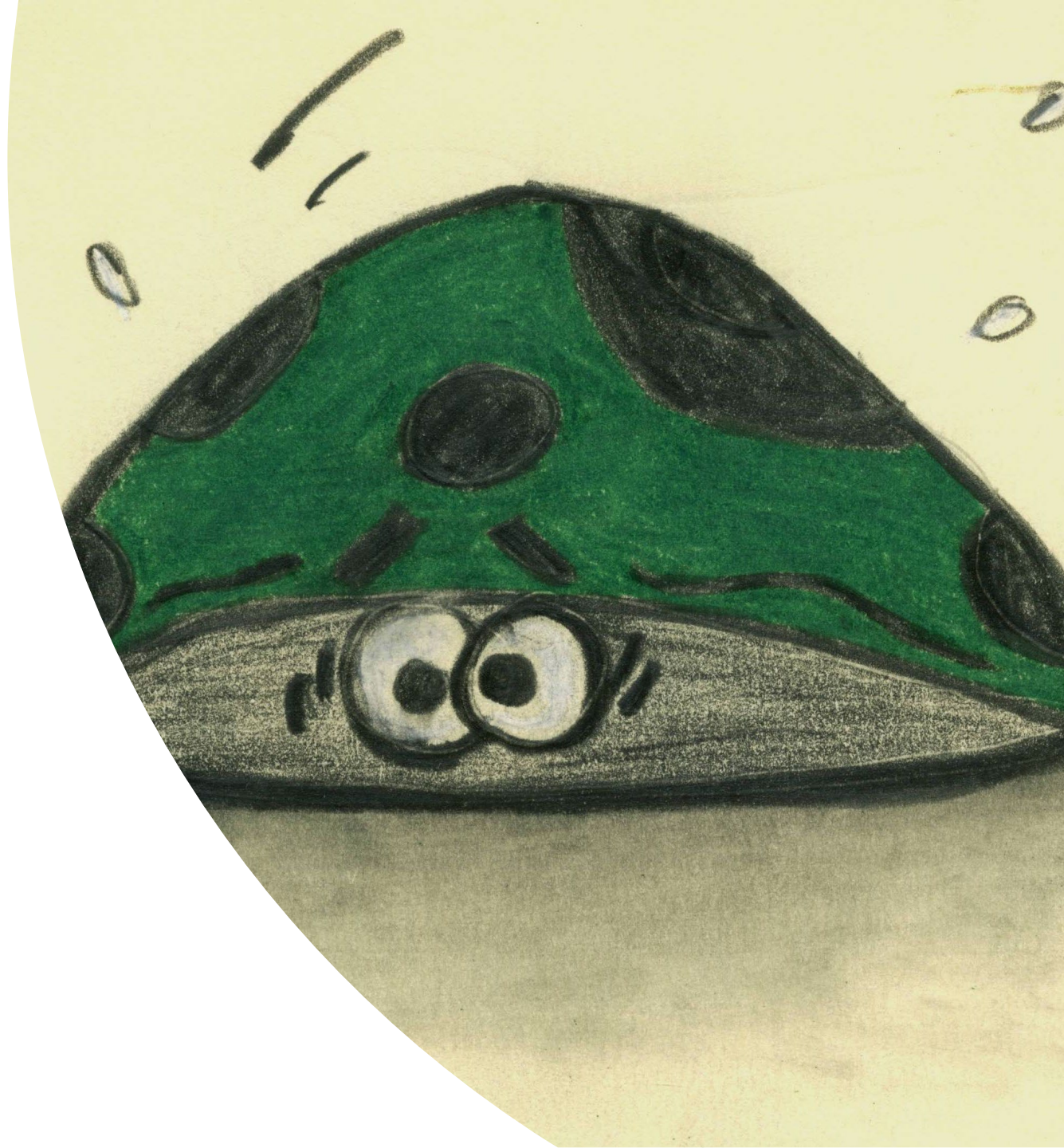
The Free Will Problem

Freedom, Determinism, and the Free Will Problem

- Freedom is taken to be an **important property** an individual can possess.
- In this unit, we will consider what **freedom** is and whether it is compatible with how we understand the **world**.
- However, before considering these types of metaphysical questions, it is worth pausing to consider **what value there is in having freedom**.

RAP

- Why do people take freedom to be something worth having? What is its value?
- What is so bad about living a life without freedom?



The problem of free will

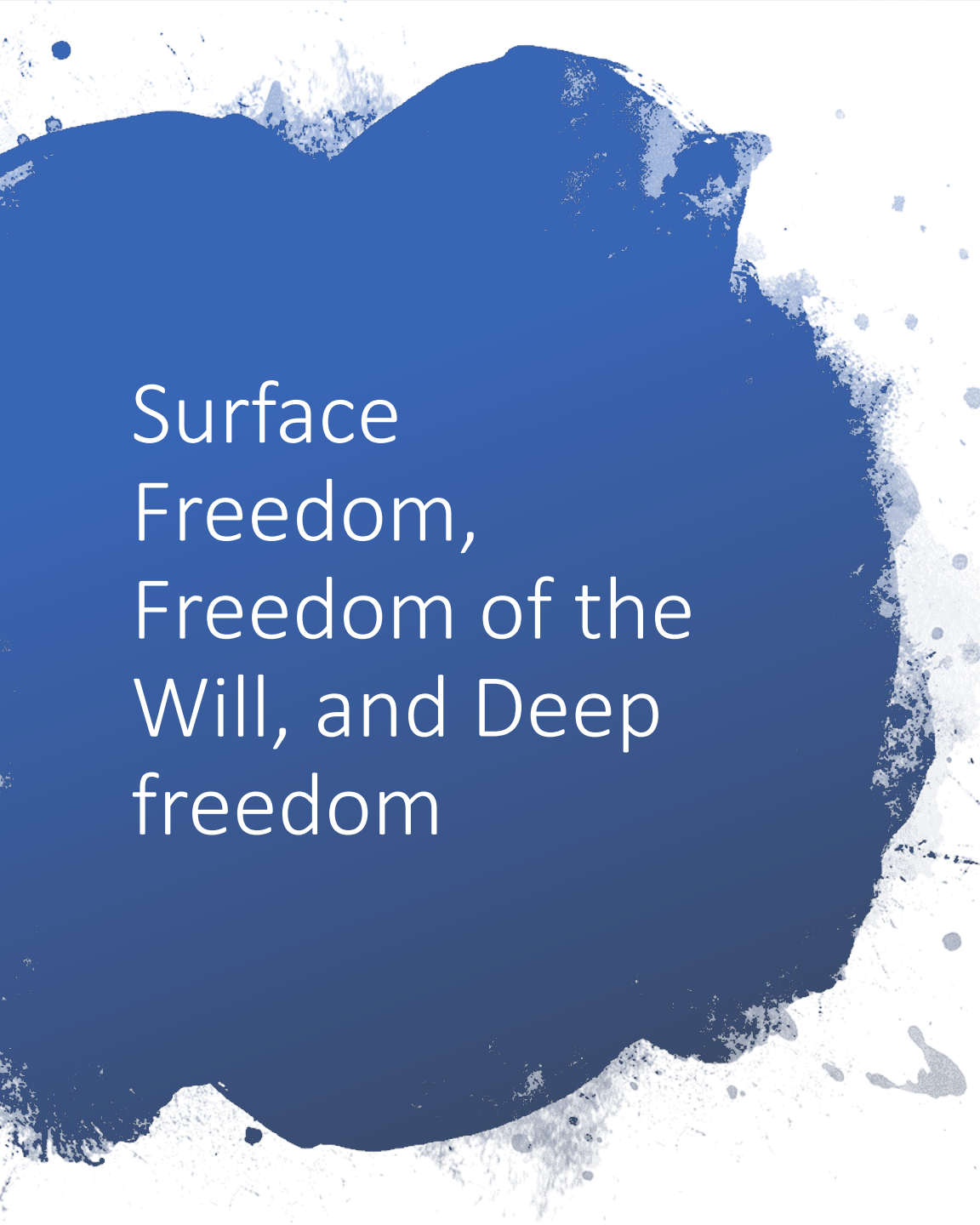
The problem of free will refers to a **metaphysical problem** rather than the many **political problems** associated with freedom.

- The metaphysical problem concerns whether there can be free will at all in the type of world that we live in
- Various political-legal problems of free will typically refer to governments placing certain restrictions on the legal permissibility of an action.

The problem of free will

The metaphysical problem can be formulated in a number of ways. To formulate this notion, we need a few concepts. These are:

- 1. free will
- 2. responsibility
- 3. determinism



Surface
Freedom,
Freedom of the
Will, and Deep
freedom

The problem of free will

First, let's consider the notion of freedom. Here we might consider a distinction between **surface freedom (freedom to act)** and **freedom of the will**.

The problem of free will

Surface freedom (freedom of action / choice): A subject S has surface freedom (freedom of action / choice) if and only if they can *satisfy their desires without interference*.

- Having surface freedom is the ability to satisfy your desires
- Example 1: If Tek wants X and Tek can acquire X without interference, then Tek has a free will.

Surface freedom might be thought of as a kind of **first-order freedom** or a freedom-to-satisfy-one's desires.

Example: Tek goes to the grocery store. He sees many different types of cereal. He wants Special K, and so he puts it in his grocery bin.

- He is free!



Surface freedom seems **problematic** since:

- we might have the power to act in a way that is in accord with what we want, but it is possible that **what we want is determined by some outside force.**
- We can act on our desires but we could not have desired otherwise.
- **Free to act (surface freedom) but not free to will (freedom to desire what we want)**

Outside forces



Desire



Act on
desire



Free?

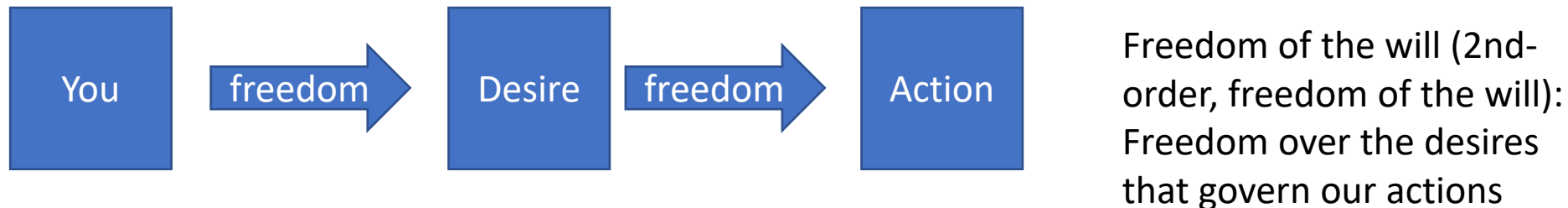
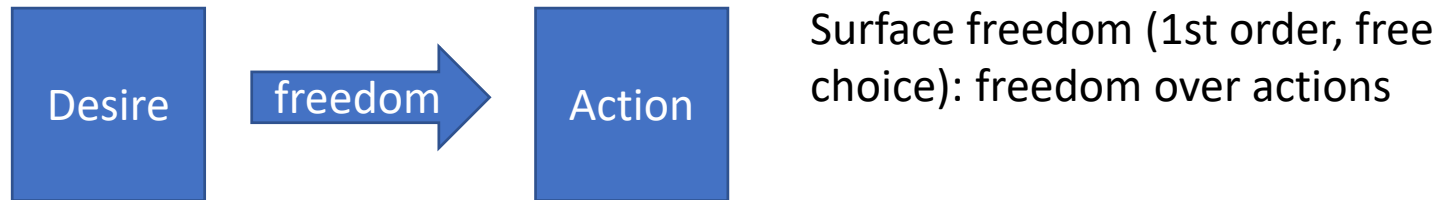
Example

- Suppose that Tek has been conditioned from birth to dislike pineapple.
- Tek is told that he doesn't like pineapple, that he shouldn't eat pineapple, and whenever Tek does eat pineapple, his parents subject him to continuous ridicule.
- Consequently, Tek forms a negative association with pineapple and has no desire to eat pineapple.
- As an adult, whenever he is asked if he would like to eat pineapple, he declines the offer.
- Tek is free to act on his desire not to eat pineapple (surface freedom), but not free to formulate his own opinion on pineapple.



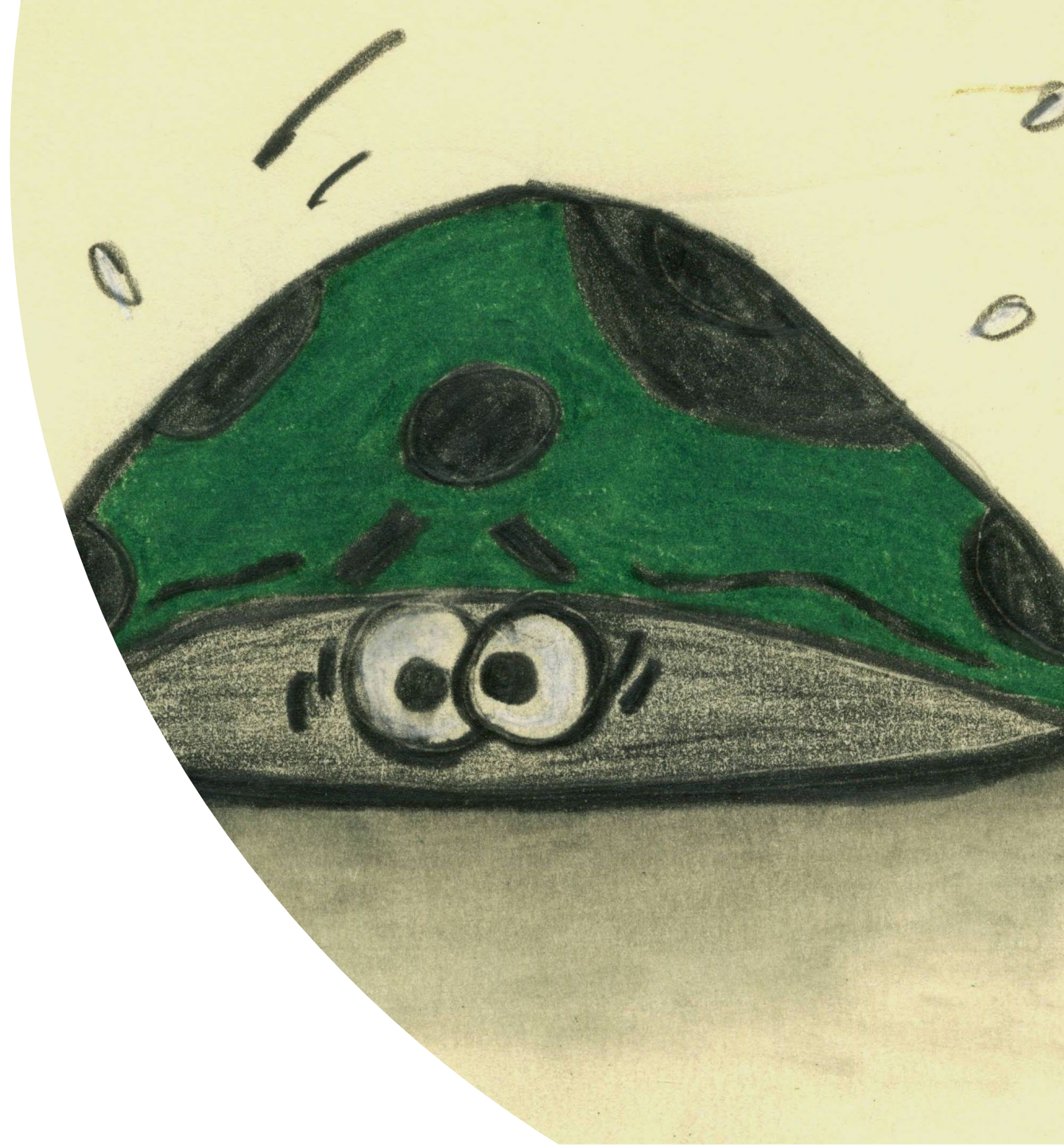
- Assuming the conditioning is significant enough, we may wonder which decisions in our life are our own and which are put there from outside sources.
- An individual may be able to do whatever they want, but **what they want is not determined by them.**
- We may wonder whether we only have **surface freedoms** (freedoms to act on our desires) or we have **any freedom over our desires** (freedom over our will)

Freedom-of-the-will might be thought of as a **second-order freedom**. It is not the **freedom to act on our desires** but a **freedom over our desires**



RAP

- What are some outside forces that conditioned, manipulated, controlled, determined people's desires (will)?
- To what extent are our desires controlled by these outside forces?





Responsibility
and Deep
Freedom

- If someone has free will, they have **some** control over their desires (their desires are not completely fixed by outside forces)
- But it might seem unreasonable to say we have **total control** over our desires.
- Instead, we need to formulate a way to say that an individual has **enough** control over their desires such that they could reasonably be held morally responsible

Let's consider the notion of **moral responsibility**.

- Suppose Tek kills Liz. We see the evidence before us and are trying to determine whether Tek is responsible for Liz's death.
- In doing this, we are trying **not merely** to determine whether Tek's act **caused** Liz to die (this is beyond dispute).
- We are trying to determine whether Tek is deserving of blame and/or punishment (in the moral sense).

Example 1: Car Accident

- Suppose that Tek is driving a car. As Tek approaches a red light, a rare malfunction happens to the brakes and Tek cannot stop.
- Tek's car collides with Liz and she dies. Here Tek's initial act of accelerating the car (along with inertial motion) **caused** Liz to die, but we do not think Tek is morally responsible.



Example 1: Car Accident

- We intuitively don't take Tek to be morally responsible for Liz's death.
- Tek doesn't appear blameworthy because (1) Tek made sure his car was well-maintained, (2) he made an active effort to prevent Liz's death, (3) no one could have reasonably predicted the malfunction to occur and Liz's death to result
- Liz's death is the result of **chance**

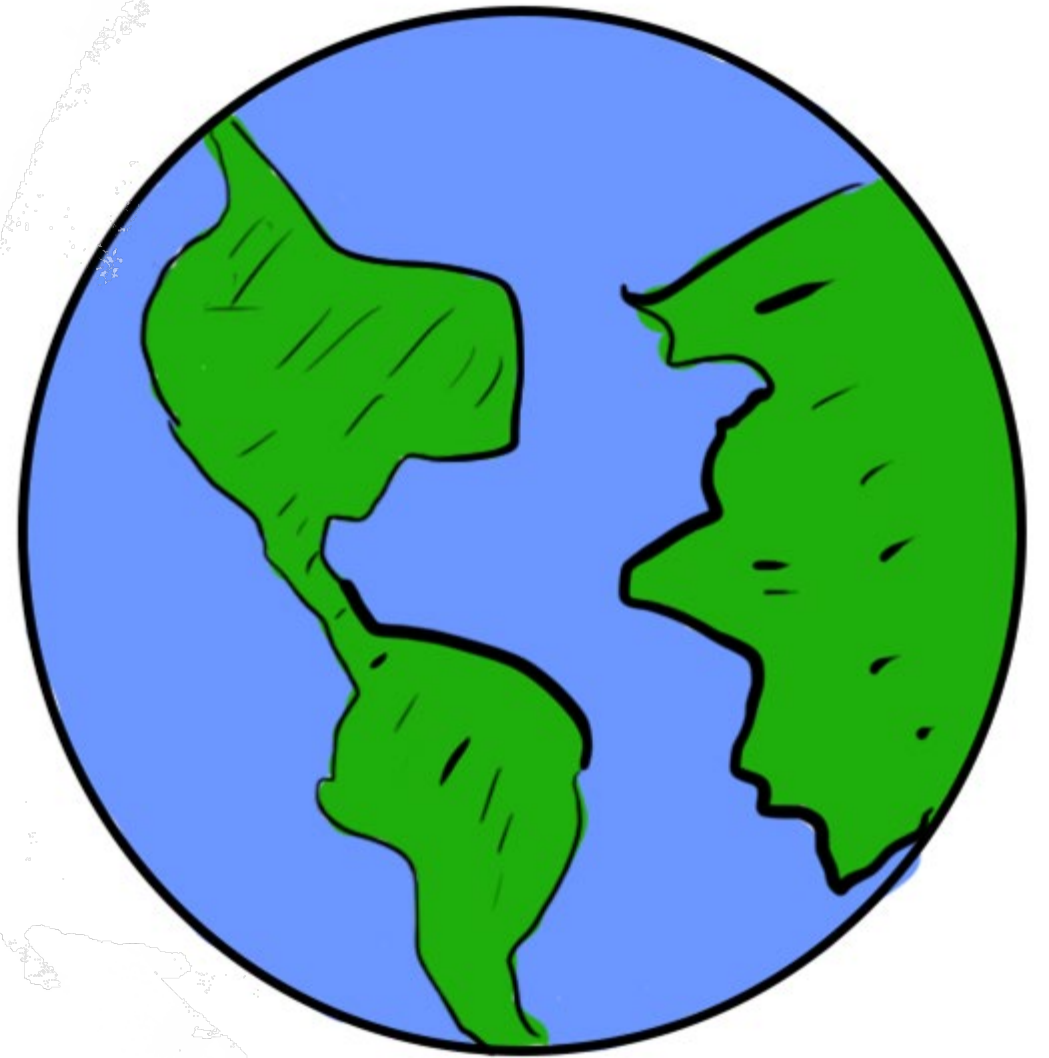
Example 2. Child Abuse / Mental Illness

- Suppose that Tek stabs Liz. Liz survives and testifies that Tek walked up to Liz and thrust the knife in her stomach.
- Several case-workers, psychologists, and family members of Tek testify that Tek had been horribly abused as a child and that his parents would wake Tek up every day and force Tek to stab a dummy (that bore a striking resemblance to Liz) repeatedly.
- The experts testified that Tek was never sent to school and spent much of his time homeless.
- They contended that Tek never fully developed a variety of cognitive and social skills.

Example 2. Child Abuse / Mental Illness

- We might question the degree to which Tek is **morally blameworthy**.
- Tek appears to be **totally conditioned** to do a particular act and to have no control over Tek's desires
- Tek has no more control over his willingness to do an action than a dead tree has in standing up straight as it is falling
- While no one prevented Tek from acting on Tek's desires, Tek's decision to desire to stab Liz appears to be fixed by Tek's parents.

Freedom and responsibility
together give us a workable notion
of what we can
call **deep freedom** (or freedom of
the will, or cosmic freedom).

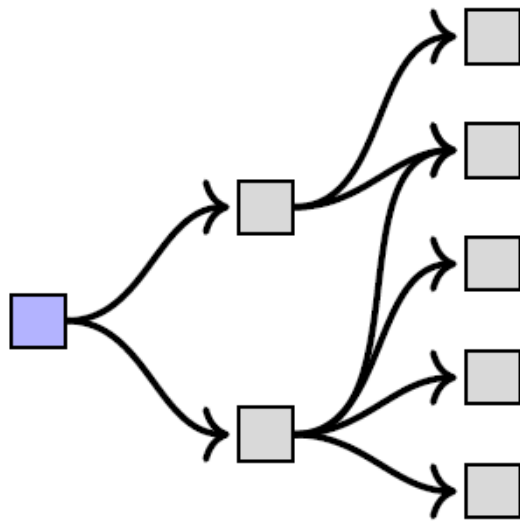


Deep freedom

Deep freedom: A subject S has deep freedom if and only if the following two conditions are met:

1. S could have acted otherwise
2. the ultimate source (cause) of the action is found in S (and not something independent of S) to the degree that S is morally responsible for the act

Garden of forking paths



- The two conditions of deep freedom give rise to the idea of the garden of forking paths
- If S has deep freedom, then there are at least two different ways that you could act and that the source of deciding between the two different acts is **ultimately determined by you.**

This gives us three different notions of freedom:

- **Surface freedom:** freedom to satisfy our desires
- **Freedom of the will:** freedom to control our desires
- **Deep freedom:** freedom to (1) act otherwise and (2) freedom to control our desires / actions to such a degree that it would be reasonable to hold us morally responsible for our act.

Perhaps none of us our **morally responsible** for any of our actions (a generalization). There are a wide range of outside forces that we have no control over. Some of these include:

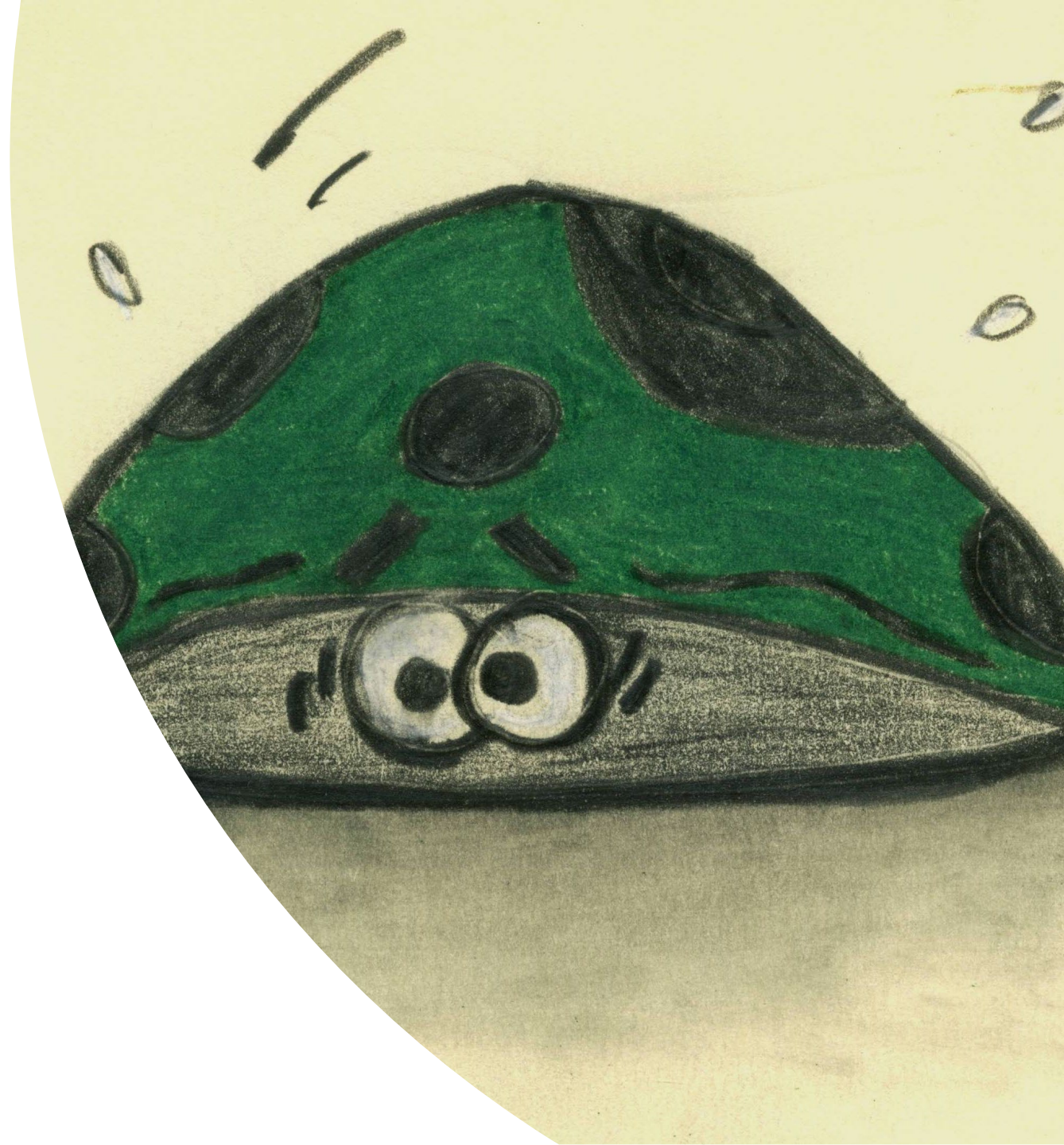
1. Genetics
2. Physical laws
3. The food we eat
4. The culture in which we are raised
5. Our parents (or lack of parents)
6. The school system we attend
7. The country in which we were born

Perhaps all our desires to act are determined in a way analogous to Tek.

RAP

Given the number of outside forces that might influence our desires (our will),

- Do we have freedom of the will? (any control over what we desire)
- Do we have deep freedom? (is our control over those desires to the degree that it would be reasonable to hold us morally responsible for those acts)





Determinism

Three freedoms (a review)

We have distinguished between:

- **Surface freedom:** free choice, freedom to act in the way you want, a first-order freedom, the ability to act on your desires without interference
- **Freedom of the will:** not merely the ability to act on your desires but to choose what you desire (second-order freedom), to exert some measure of control over your habits, decide your principles, to guide your desires
- **Deep freedom:** given that we are influenced by outside forces, the degree of freedom of the will required to be held morally responsible for an action (implies the capacity to do otherwise)

The World

- We have clarified three different senses of freedom
- We now need to clarify the world we live in
- The most problematic feature of our world is that it seems to be that *all events* are **determined by something outside of our will or control**

What it means to be determined

Let's consider what it means for an event (E) to be **determined**. There are at least two ways to think about what it means for an E to be a determined E:

- Physically-determined
- All-things-considered determined

Physical determined event

Physically determined event: an event E is determined iff the prior **state of the world** plus the **laws of nature** are sufficient to deduce E.

- An E is determined provided the prior state of affairs + physical laws of nature logically entail a single event E.
- Intuitive understanding: E is determined iff E is predictable with 100% accuracy by an individual with perfect knowledge of the present state of world (and the laws of nature) and perfectly reasoning powers

Laplace's Demon

Assuming an event E at t2 is physically determined, a being like God would be able to predict at t1 that E occurs. God would reason as follows:

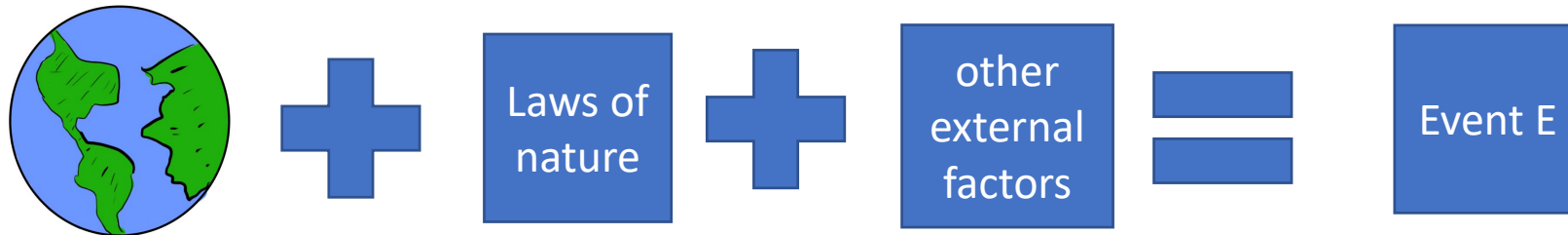
1. Let me look at the state of the world at time t1
2. Now let look at the laws of nature
3. I can use both to determine event E at time t2



All-things-considered determined event

All-things-considered determined event: an event E is determined iff the prior **state of the world** along with physical laws and other factors outside of our control are sufficient to bring E about

- Intuitively, we think that an event E could come about, not merely because of the laws of nature, but also because it is determined by **psychological laws, or societal conditions, or other external factors.**

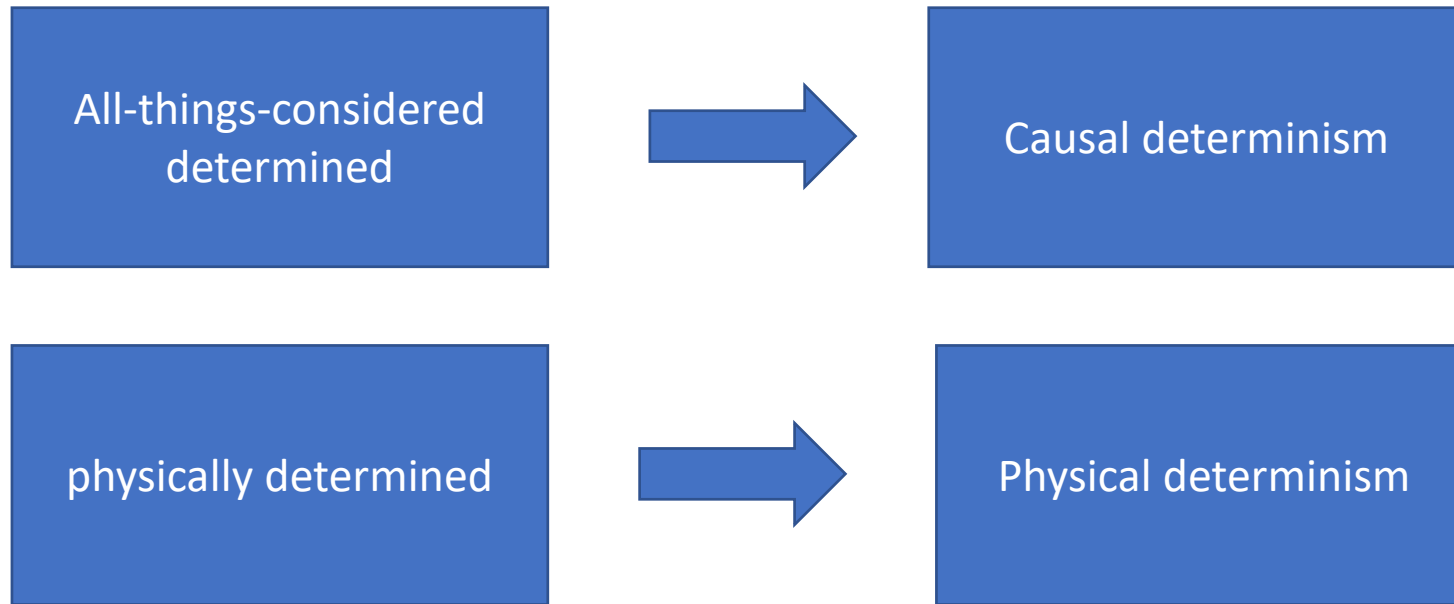


Causal determinism

Causal determinism: the position that every event e (except for perhaps the first event) is an all-things-considered determined event.

- A determined event here is taken to be caused by some external factor (anything outside of the will)
- That external factor can be a law of nature but also psychological laws, cultural forces, a friend's action, etc.


Two types of determinism



Causal determinism entails no forking paths

- In contrast to the garden of forking paths, determinism gives us a different model of events
- If every event is determined, at least at first glance, the agent **could not have acted otherwise**.
- And so one of the key aspects of deep freedom (to act otherwise) is not present.





The narrow
problem of
free will stated

Narrow problem of free will

The **narrow problem of free will** asks how free will is possible in a world where every event is determined?

- How can causal determinism and deep freedom both exist?
- If every event is all-things-considered determined, how is deep freedom possible?

The general problem is that it seems that **determinism and free will cannot coexist.**

Narrow problem of free will

What makes the narrow problem of free will a problem is that intuitively:

1. Deep freedom exists (I can exert some choice over what I desire to the degree to which I can be held morally responsible) yet
2. It cannot exist if determinism is true



Is determinism
true?

Is determinism true?

Determinists contend that some form of determinism is true. There are good reasons to accept determinism.

Total Coverage Reason: we might accept that **physical determinism** is true because science has *complete explanatory coverage* over everything that happens.

For any given event E, there is an explanation of how E occurred using only physical laws.

Objection (Contemporary quantum physics shows that determinism is false)

- The main problem with determinism is that it appears to conflict with the best science about microphysical particles
- Modern quantum physics shows that every event E is not determined (quantum indeterminacy)
- Let's consider several responses to this objection.

Response 1: while standard interpretation of quantum physics is indeterministic (the Copenhagen interpretation), some non-standard interpretations exist. *Yes, but these are non-standard!*

Response 2: while it is acknowledged that determinism does conflict with the dominant interpretations of quantum physics, it may be possible that *some more general physical theory* exists that is deterministic. *Speculative!*

Response 3: indeterminism only applies to the quantum level. Quantum physics does not entail that events on the **macrolevel** are indeterministic.

- In fact, science seems to be moving in an **increasingly deterministic direction**
- Example: pharmaceutical products to regular mood
- Example: Better accuracy about predicting weather patterns
- Example: Better understanding of the relation of genetics to disease

Response 4 (Irrelevance): Assume that there is an intuitive preference for an **indeterministic** interpretation of quantum physics.

- The introduction of indeterminism from contemporary quantum physics does not straightforwardly entail the existence of free will.
- Suppose an event E is undetermined, the result of chance, uncontrolled.
- This does not entail that the cause of this indeterministic event is due to a human agent.
- An objectively random microphysical event is also an external factor outside of your control.

The general problem of free will

The **general problem of free will** asks how free will is possible in a world where every event is either determined or not determined (undetermined)?

- Assume causal determinism is true, this seems to exclude freedom?
- Assume causal determinism is not true, how is freedom possible?

The general problem of free will says that no matter if the world is determined or undetermined, there is no room for freedom either way.

- If **world is deterministic**, then all events are determined by all-things-considered external factors and so there is no room for freedom
- If **world is indeterministic**, then events are either (a) determined by all-things-considered external factors and so there is no room for freedom or (b) chance events and so there is no room for freedom

RAP

- What is the difference between causal and physical determinism?
- Is either determinism true?
- State the **general** problem of free will in your own words?

