



# Libertarianism and Indeterminism

# Review

- Let's assume that the **Consequence argument is sound** and so incompatibilism is true (determinism and freedom are inconsistent)
- This gives us a total of three different positions:


Let's suppose that the consequence argument is sound, so incompatibilism is true, this means that we cannot be determined and be free. This gives us three options:

Libertarianism	We are free but not determined
Hard determinism	We are determined but not free
Hard indeterminism	We are neither free nor determined

# Metaphysical libertarianism

**Metaphysical libertarianism** is the view that

1. Indeterminism is true
2. we are free



The general  
problem of free  
will: ascent  
and descent

The libertarian rejects determinism. The position is a form of indeterminism.

**Indeterminism:** The view that **not** every event is determined.

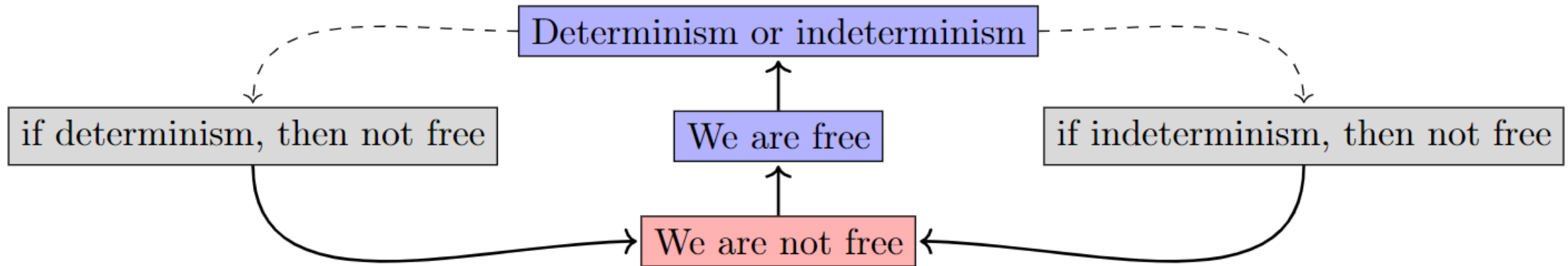
- Does not imply that every event is not determined (not living in a chaos universe where there is no order or regularity)
- Only implies that **some** events are undetermined (not determined by prior events + laws of nature)

The compatibilist faced the **narrow problem of free will: how can you be free and the world determined?**

The libertarian faces the **general problem of free will: how can you be free if the world is deterministic or indeterministic?**

# General Problem of Free Will

**The general problem of free will:** If determinism is true, then it appears we are not free. If determinism is not true, then indeterminism is the case. However, if indeterminism is true, then it also appears we are not free.





The libertarian solves the problem in two stages.

Stage 1: The  
Ascent  
Problem



Stage 2: The  
Descent  
Problem

The image features a large, dark, textured shape on the left side, resembling a splash or a piece of dark material. The shape is irregular and has a grainy, almost crystalline appearance. The rest of the image is white, with several small, dark, circular specks scattered across it, particularly in the upper and middle sections. The overall composition is minimalist and abstract.

# Ascent Problem

# Stage 1: Ascent problem

**Stage 1 (Ascent):** since libertarians accept the reality of free will, they must show that **free will is incompatible with determinism**. This is known as the **ascent problem for libertarians**.

I must **ascend** out of my naïve view that  
(1) the world is determined by science  
and (2) I am still free.



How can one **ascend** out of this situation?

**Option 1:** Use the consequence argument: determinism and free will are incompatible. Then, since you must give up one and it is better to give up determinism, you can argue for free will in an indeterministic world

Let's call this the **Consequence+Evidence Argument**.

## **Consequence+Evidence Argument**

- P1: The consequence argument shows that determinism and free will are incompatible.
- IC1: Since they are incompatible, they cannot both be true.
- P2: There is more reason to believe we are free than to believe that the world is determined.
- C: Therefore, we are free.

The controversial premise is P2. How can we argue for it?

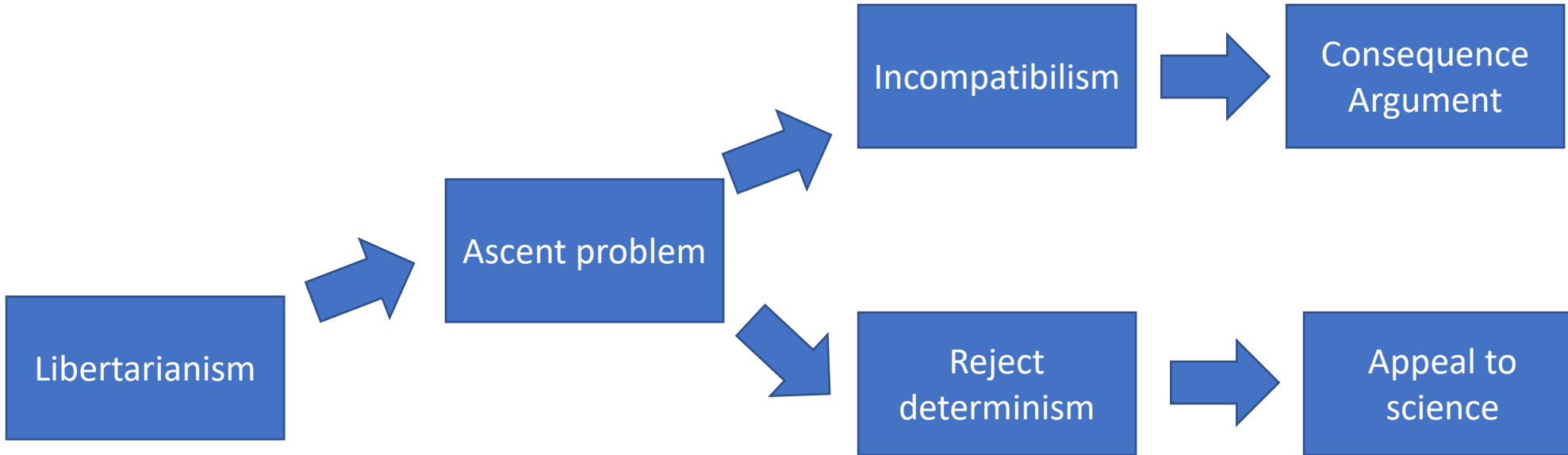
- **P1: Intuitions.** Many of my actions seem to me to be made freely.
- **P2: Illusion claim.** The claim that humans are not free implies that human beings are under an illusion (they have false beliefs).
- **P3: Burden of proof claim.** The claim that humanity is under an illusion is controversial, and so the supporter of this claim bears the burden of proof.
- **P4: Lack of argument claim.** There is no good argument in support of determinism (the best science tells us that the world is indeterministic)
- **C:** There is more reason to believe we are free than to believe that the world is determined.

A more straightforward option for solving the ascent problem is to say that even if it is logically consistent to say we can be free in a determined world, the position is materially inconsistent.

It is materially inconsistent because **determinism is false**.

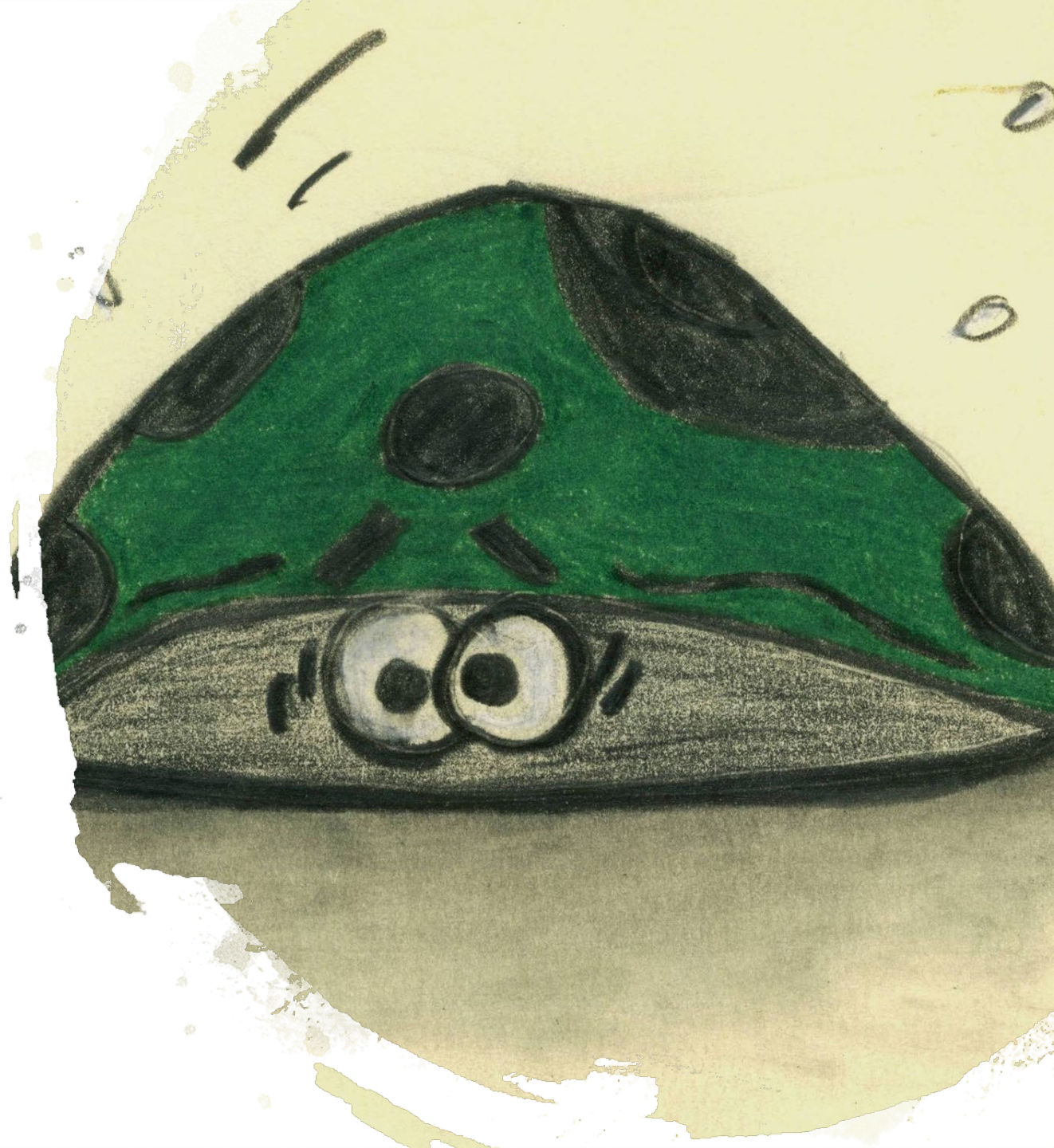
Option 2: Appeal to science: determinism is clearly false. Quantum physics tells us so! So, we are not free in a determined world.

# Ascent Problem





- How do you understand the ascent problem?
- Has the libertarian given you a plausible explanation for how to solve the problem?



A dark, textured, organic shape, possibly a silhouette of a creature or a piece of rock, is positioned on the left side of the image. The shape is dark blue/black with a grainy, mottled texture. The background is white with scattered dark specks and a faint, larger-scale texture. The text "Descent Problem" is overlaid on the dark shape.

# Descent Problem

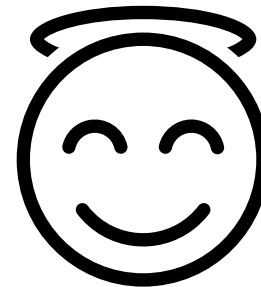
# Stage 2: Descent Problem

**Stage 2:** show how free will is compatible with indeterminism.

I must **ascend** out of my naïve view that  
(1) the world is determined by science  
and (2) I am still free.



**I HAVE ASCENDED!** Now it is time to show  
how I am free and the world is  
indeterministic!



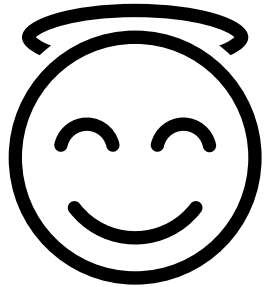
# Stage 2: Descent Problem

The theory might be said to be **intuitively true**.

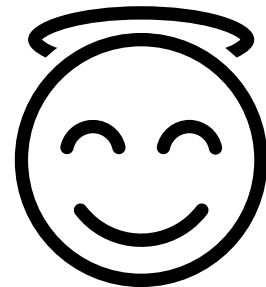
- Belief: People believe in free will
- Belief: The world is not determined and so is indeterministic (science tells us so)
- Therefore, libertarianism is the intuitively true position and critics (aka haters) bear the burden of proof!

# Stage 2: Descent Problem

**I HAVE ASCENDED!** Now it is time to show how I am free and the world is indeterministic!



**I HAVE ASCENDED!** Libertarianism is intuitively true. Prove me wrong!





# Objections to Libertarianism

# Three step refutation

The critic of libertarianism will show the theory is flawed in the following way:

- Step 1: Explain what the libertarian means by saying the world is indeterministic
- Step 2: Explain what the libertarian means by saying we are free
- Step 3: Show that in such an indeterministic universe, it makes no sense to say people are free.

# Step 1: Libertarian indeterminism

Let's suppose an event E is **not determined** by prior events or the laws of nature. Even an omniscient being could not deduce E from the prior events and the laws of nature.

What would it mean to say that E is not determined?



# Step 1: Libertarian indeterminism

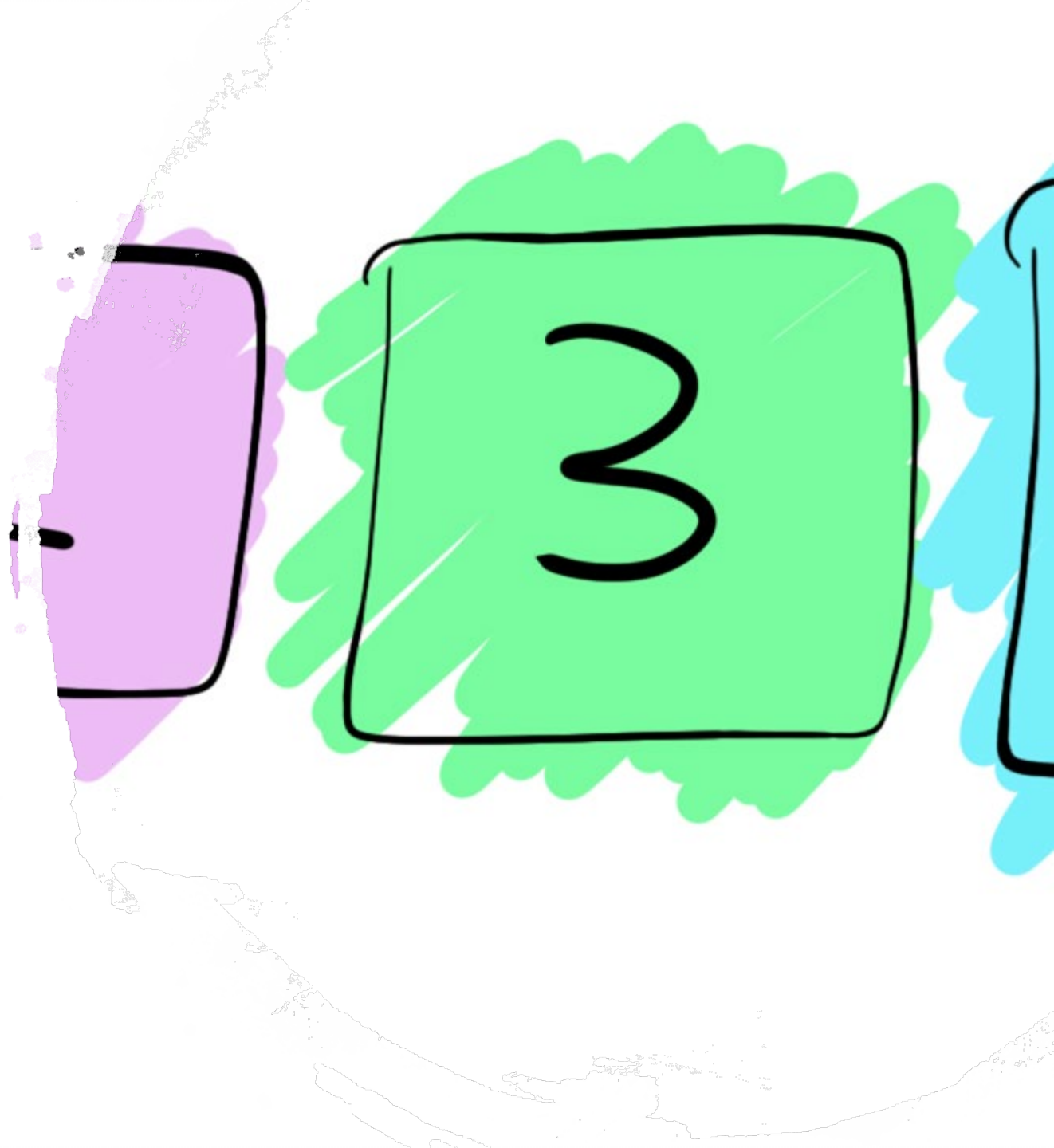
**Epistemological uncertainty:** E is not known or knowable by S due to cognitive limitation on the part of an agent

- Two types: subjective epistemological uncertainty and objective epistemological uncertainty
- Subjective epistemological uncertainty is relative to a subject (S)
- S does not know P because S lacks information about P.
- One can remove subjective epistemological uncertainty by an increase of information

# Example 1

I am thinking of a number between 1-1,000,000. What is it?

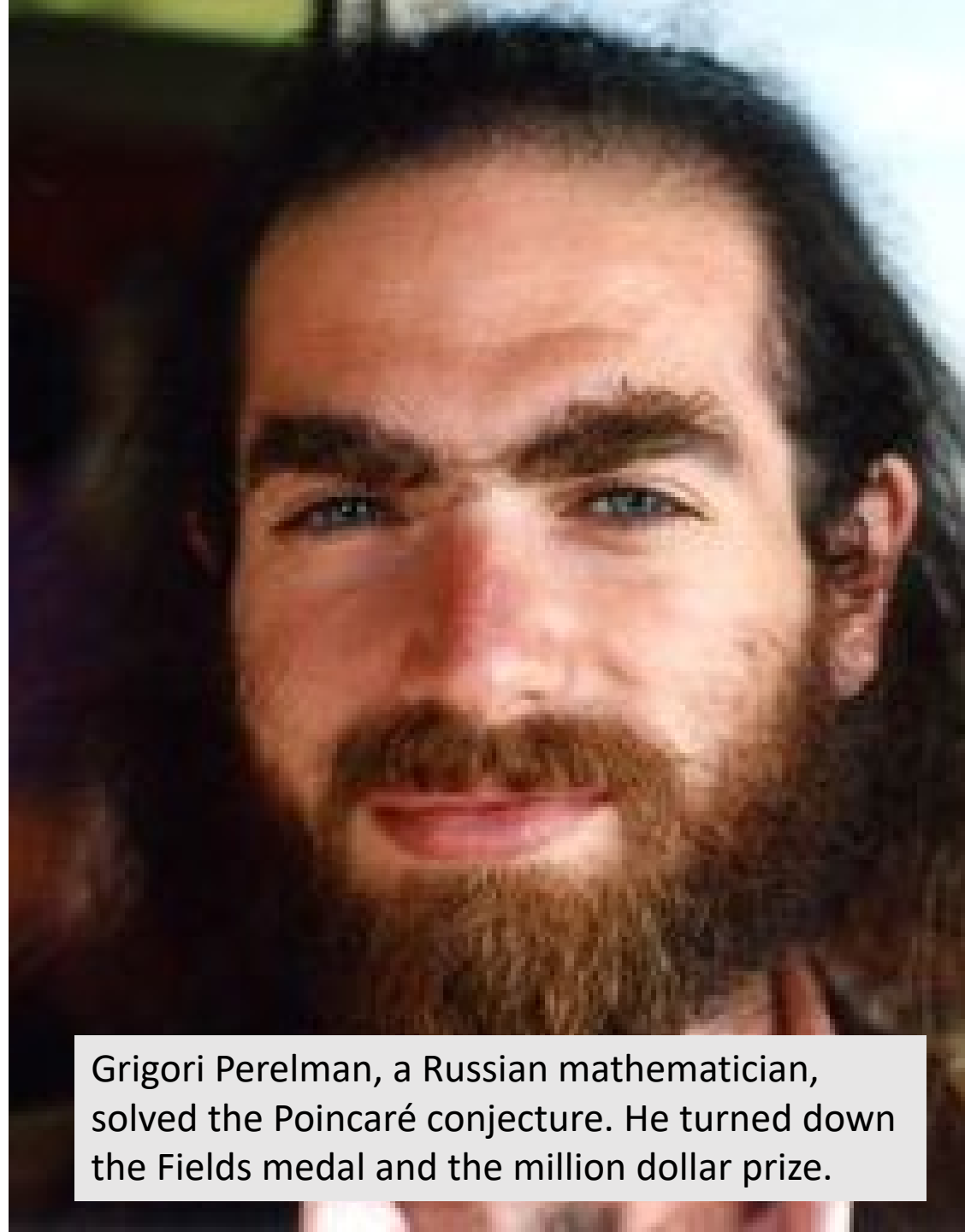
- You lack information so you don't know the number.
- If you guessed it correctly, this wouldn't count as knowledge (you were just lucky)
- If you had access to my mind (more information), you would know the answer.



# Example 2: The Millennium Prize Problems

There are seven millennium prize problems. Let's suppose they are solvable. A solution to any of these problems comes with a prize of 1 million dollars.

1. P versus NP problem
2. Birch and Swinnerton-Dyer conjecture
3. Hodge conjecture
4. Navier–Stokes existence and smoothness
5. Poincaré conjecture (solved)
6. Riemann hypothesis,
7. Yang–Mills existence and mass gap.



Grigori Perelman, a Russian mathematician, solved the Poincaré conjecture. He turned down the Fields medal and the million dollar prize.

# Step 1: Libertarian indeterminism

Subjective epistemological uncertainty does not entail that an event E is undetermined.

- E may be determined but we simply don't know it is determined
- If we had more information, then we would see E is determined.

**Libertarian does not mean we simply don't know how E was determined (they don't mean subjective epistemological uncertainty)**

# Step 1: Libertarian indeterminism

**Objective (metaphysical) uncertainty:** the uncertainty of E is due to the features of the world (objective chance, completely unpredictable, purely random event).

- Reality itself contains a spontaneity or randomness to it
- Objective uncertainty implies objective epistemological uncertainty (no amount of increase of information or knowledge will allow us to predict E)
- Not even God could know

# Step 1: Libertarian indeterminism

**Libertarian's Indeterminism Claim:** if determinism is false, then E is objectively (metaphysically) uncertain

- E is due to random chance
- We could not know E would happen based upon prior events and the laws of nature no matter how much of an increase of information we received
- Again, not even God could know E

# Three step refutation

- The critic of libertarianism will show the theory is flawed in the following way:
  - **Step 1: Explain what the libertarian means by saying the world is indeterministic. Complete!**
  - Step 2: Explain what the libertarian means by saying we are free
  - Step 3: Show that in such an indeterministic universe, it makes no sense to say people are free.

## Step 2: Libertarian Freedom

**Libertarian freedom is deep freedom:** a subject S has **deep freedom** if and only if they could have acted otherwise and the ultimate source (cause) of action is found in S to the degree that S could be held responsible for that act.

- The act thus needs to be due to S
- The act cannot be out of S's control
- The act needs to come from S to the degree that S can be held morally responsible for that act



# Three step refutation

- The critic of libertarianism will show the theory is flawed in the following way:
  - Step 1: Explain what the libertarian means by saying the world is indeterministic. **Complete!**
  - Step 2: Explain what the libertarian means by saying we are free. **Complete!**
  - Step 3: Show that in such an indeterministic universe, it makes no sense to say people are free.

## Step 3: Chance and free will conflict

- The world is indeterministic and so E is due to objective chance (features of the world itself)
- This implies that if S acts, S could do otherwise (same past could equally different futures)
- However, the reason S could do otherwise is **due to objective (metaphysical chance)** -- the randomness in the world -- and **not due to S's control**
- S does not control the random nature of the universe

## Step 3: Chance and free will conflict (example)

- Suppose Tek lifts his arm (E) and that E was undetermined.
- Since E is undetermined, it was not determined by the laws of nature and the prior state of events.
- The undetermined nature of E is due instead to the randomness that is found in the universe itself

Therefore, given that Tek's lifting of his arm was simply a random/chance event, then it is not due to factors within Tek's control.

## Step 3: Chance and free will conflict

The random, spontaneous, arbitrary, or chance feature of free acts seems to become more apparent when we wish to assign **moral praise or blame**.

# Step 3: Chance and free will conflict

- Suppose two subjects Tek and Liz
- Suppose they are identical in every way.
- Now suppose they both face the same scenario:
  1. kill David for evil gain
  2. save David at personal cost

## Step 3: Chance and free will conflict

Suppose that

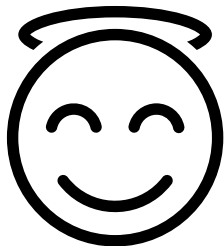
1. A random event occurred due to the indeterministic nature of the universe and this led Tek choosing to kill David. Hard to **blame** Tek since it was not in his control to choose. It was cosmic chance!
2. A random event occurred due to the indeterministic nature of the universe and this led Liz choosing to save David. Hard to **praise** Liz since it was not in her control to choose. It was cosmic chance!

Since the choices were not determined by features in Tek or Liz, running the scenario again might yield different outcomes.

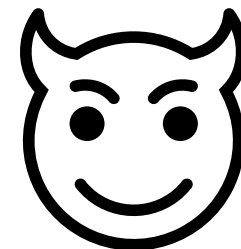
# Step 3: Chance and free will conflict

- The libertarian argued that the critics of libertarian bear the burden of proof.
- Here we have given a three step argument showing that once indeterminism and free will are clarified, we see that indeterminism and free will conflict.

**I HAVE ASCENDED!** Libertarianism is intuitively true. Prove me wrong!



**Not intuitively true. You can't be free in an indeterministic world.**



- What is the three-stage objection against metaphysical libertarianism?
- How can the metaphysical libertarian make sense of there being free will in an indeterministic universe?

