

A flock of white birds, possibly egrets or herons, is shown in flight against a light blue, hazy sky. The birds are scattered across the frame, with some in the foreground and others further back, creating a sense of depth. Their wings are spread, and they appear to be moving in various directions. The overall tone is serene and natural.

# Extra-Factor Strategies, Dualism, Agent Causation

# Quick Review

Last time:

- **Ascent problem for libertarian:** how to show compatibilism is false and the libertarian position is plausible.
- **Criticism of libertarian position:** just because world is indeterministic, does not mean we can be free in such a world; random universe does not entail free action (source of ability to act otherwise is due to chance, not due to the agent)
- **Descent problem for libertarian:** how to show that freedom and indeterminism are compatible

# Three answers to the descent problem

In this lecture, we will consider three different ways to solve the descent problem:

1. Generic extra-factor solution
2. Libertarian Dualism
3. Agent causation



# Generic Extra Factor Solution

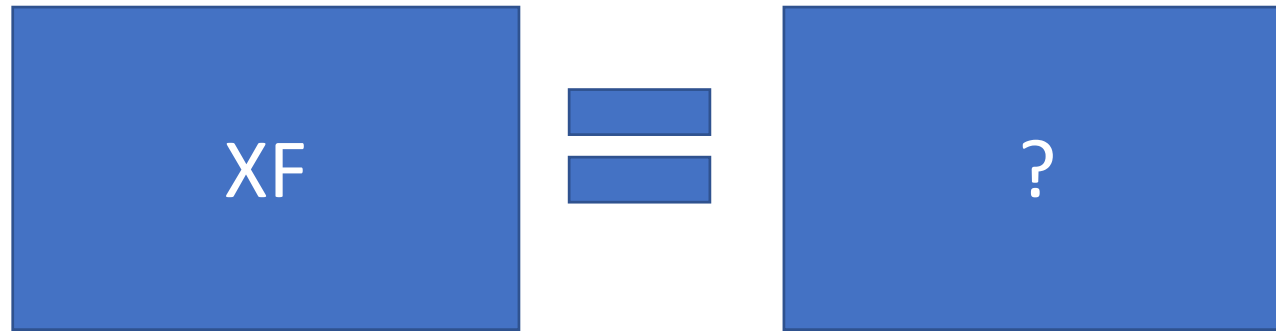
# Extra-factor strategy

Libertarians contend that there must be an **extra-factor** that is not found in the past or the laws of nature that accounts for the freedom of an act.

**Generic Extra-factor theory:** if agents can freely choose between E2 rather than E1 (with the same desires), then some **extra-factor XF exists** that is not in past events (physical world) + laws of nature. XF accounts for why S can (1) choose otherwise and (2) be the source of the choice.

# Objection: XF is undefined

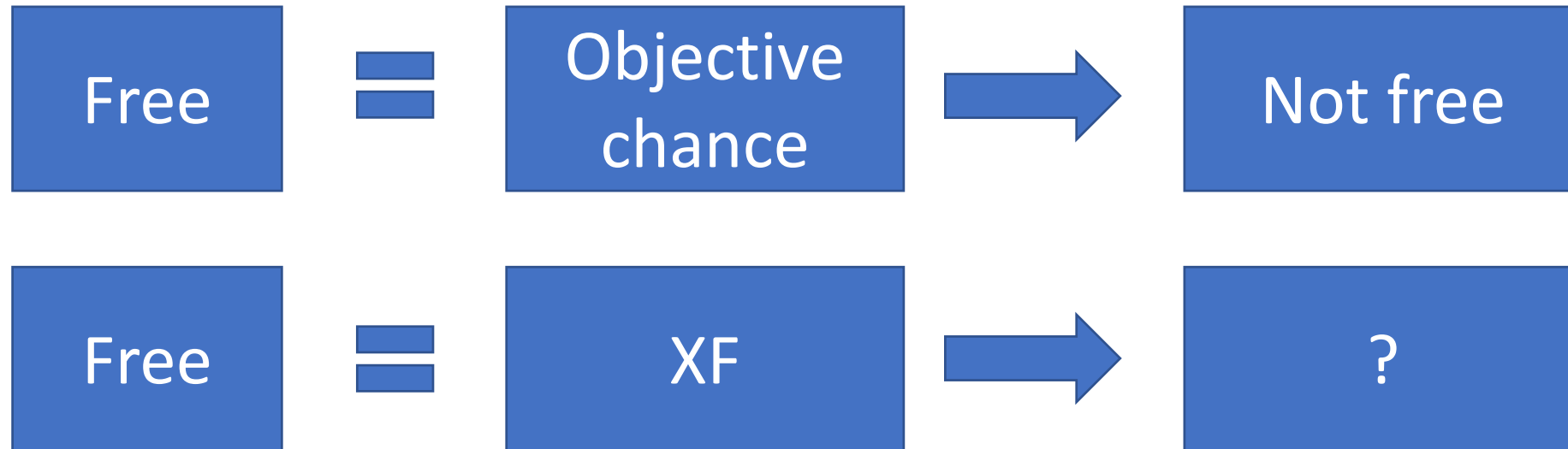
**The Undefined Objection:** this generic XF is undefined. In order to be a viable theory, there needs to be a specification of XF.



# Objection: XF is undefined

Thus, the libertarian is thus caught in a dilemma:

1. all free acts are chance events (in which case they are not free) or
2. all free acts are caused by an undefined XF







# Libertarian Dualism



- To address the objection that the XF is undefined, unspecific, or mysterious, the libertarian needs to specify what XF is.
- Let's do this!

# Dualism

**Metaphysical Dualism** is the ontological theory that there are two basic types of things (substances)

The most popular form of dualism is mind-body dualism

- **Mind / soul:** substance that takes psychological (mental) properties *is thinking, is perceiving, is calculating, is intuiting*
- **Matter / body:** substance that takes physical (spatial) properties *is extended, is moving, is solid*

# Dualism

Metaphysical dualism contrasts with **metaphysical monisms**

**Metaphysical Monism** is the ontological theory that there is only one basic types of thing (substance)

- **Metaphysical Idealism** is the ontological theory that there is only one basic types of thing: *mind*
- **Metaphysical Materialism** is the ontological theory that there is only one basic types of thing: *matter*

# Dualism

Dualism *by itself* does not entail libertarianism. One form of dualism is the theory of preestablished harmony.

**Preestablished harmony (PH):** the ontological theory that mental and physical events (1) have no causal interaction, (2) are perfectly coordinated, and (3) are established at the outset by God.



# Libertarian dualism

The type of dualism we need is one where

- Physical world is indeterministic
- The **activity of the mind** can influence indeterministic events to the degree that it can account for why E1 happened rather than E2.

Let's call the conjunction of these theses: **libertarian dualism (LD)**



# Objections to libertarian dualism

# Objection 1: Interaction problem

One objection to libertarian dualism stems from the fact that it **is a metaphysical dualism**.

- **Interaction problem:** if the mind is immaterial and the body is material, how does the mind influence the body?
- **Location problem:** Assuming the mind does interact with the body, where does the mind influence the body?

The general problem then is that even if the theory can account for freedom, it comes at the **cost** of positing an implausible account of the world (a world where immaterial and material things *inexplicably interact*)



# Response

- The libertarian might respond that this is the cost that we must pay to explain free will
- Yes, dualism has its problems but this is the only way to explain free will.

The problem is that even if we ignore the problems of dualism, LD itself is problematic.

# Objection 2: Transference Argument

## **Transference Argument against libertarian dualism (LD)**

- P1: If LD is true, then S's free choice cannot be determined by physical world (prior brain state) + laws. *Otherwise, determinism!*
- P2: If LD is true, then S's free choice also cannot be determined by mental world (prior mental state) + laws. *Otherwise, determinism!*
- IC: Therefore, S could have chosen otherwise given the exact same physical and mental circumstances.
- P3: If S's choice is not determined by S's physical or mental states, then S's choice is irrational, inexplicable, arbitrary.
- C: Therefore, LD is not true.

# Objection 2: Transference Argument

The key premise is **P3**: If S's choice is not determined by S's physical or mental states, then S's choice is irrational, inexplicable, arbitrary.

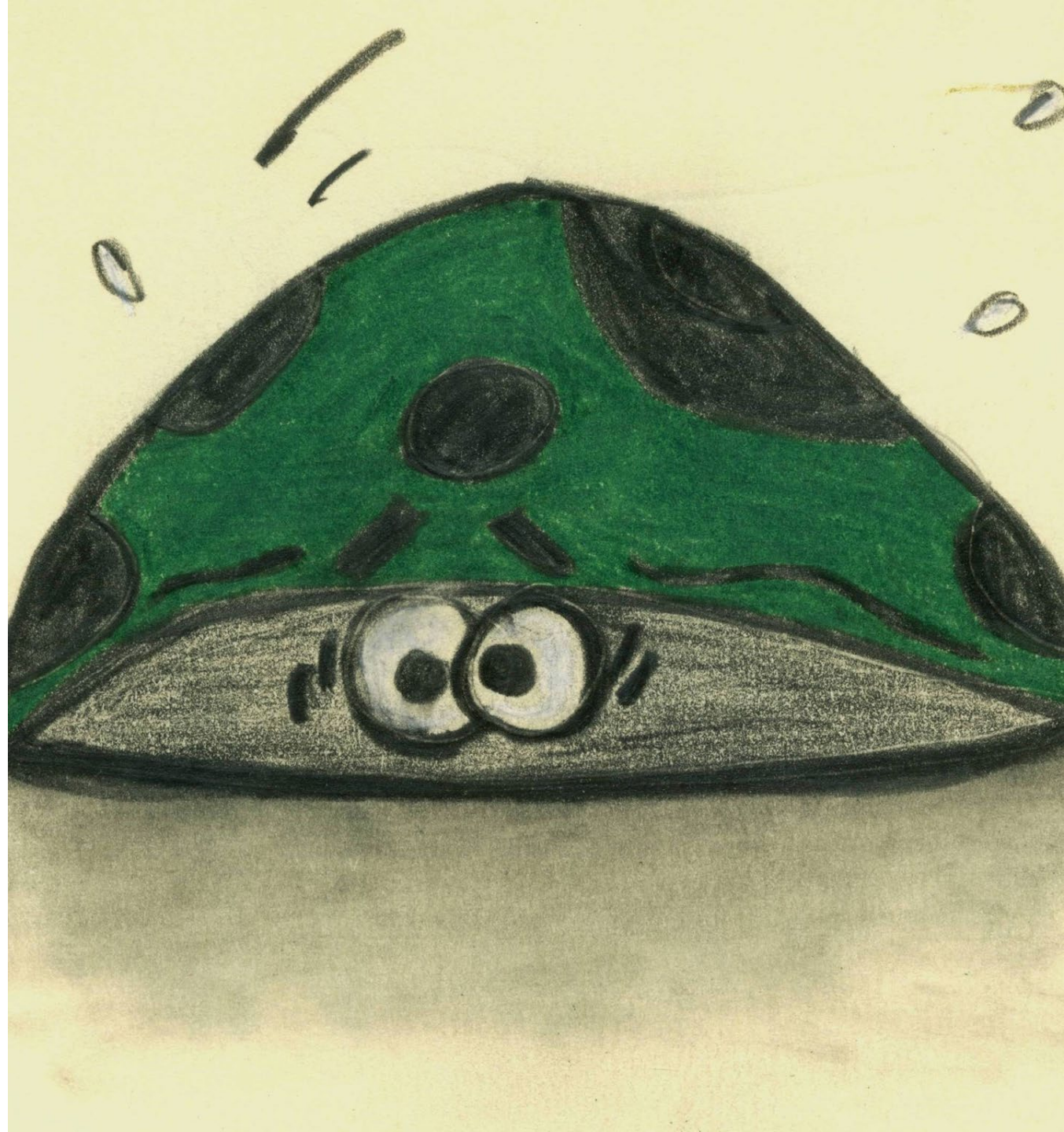
- If choice is not determined by mental or physical states, then nothing explains the choice
- The choice is random (it is like flipping a coin)
- But if it is **random (coin flip)**, then the **choice is not free**.

# Objection 2: Transference Argument

The objection then is that LD simply transfers the problem to the mental world.

- Free choice cannot be explained by random physical events (early problem with libertarianism)
- Free choice cannot be explained by random mental events (problem with LD)

- What is the libertarian dualist (LD) position?
- How plausible is this position?  
That is, do you find the objections to LD compelling or not?





# Agent Causation

# Agent Causation Theory

- In normal cases of causation, the relata (things in the cause-effect relation) are **events** or **states of affairs**.
- Let's call this type of causation: **event causation**

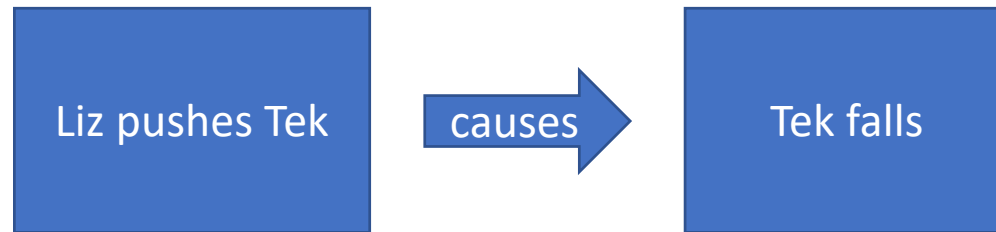




# Example: Event causation

E1: Liz pushes Tek

E2: Tek falling

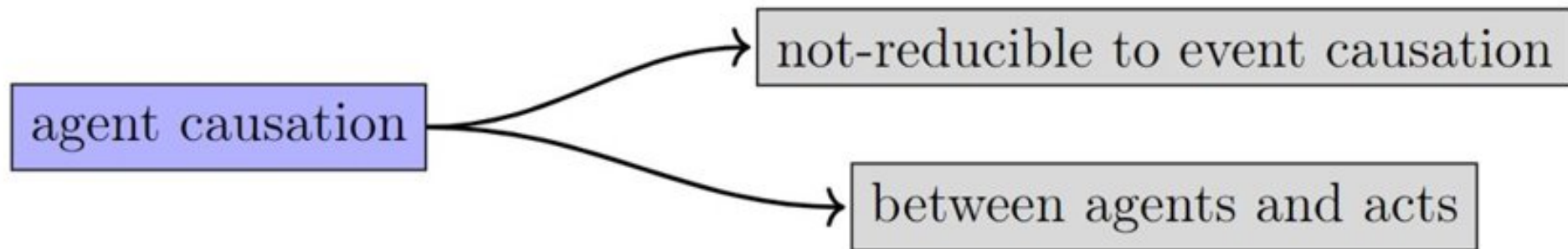


# Agent Causation Theory

The agent-causation theory posits a **unique type of causation** alongside the typical **event causation**.

In agent causation:

1. the relation in agent-causation is between **agents** and **acts**, rather than **events** and other **events** but also
2. the relation is **non-reducible** to event causation (that is, it cannot be explained in terms of relations between events: whether these be mental or physical events).



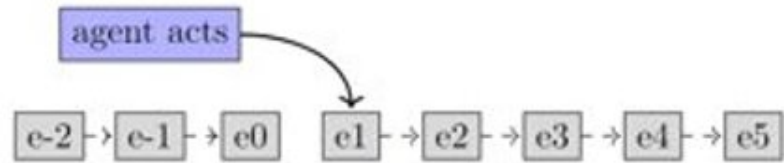
# Agent causation theory

**Agent causation theory (ACT)** is a libertarian position that asserts (1) the world is indeterministic, (2) we are free, and (3) free acts are explained by agent causation.



**Agent causation is real**

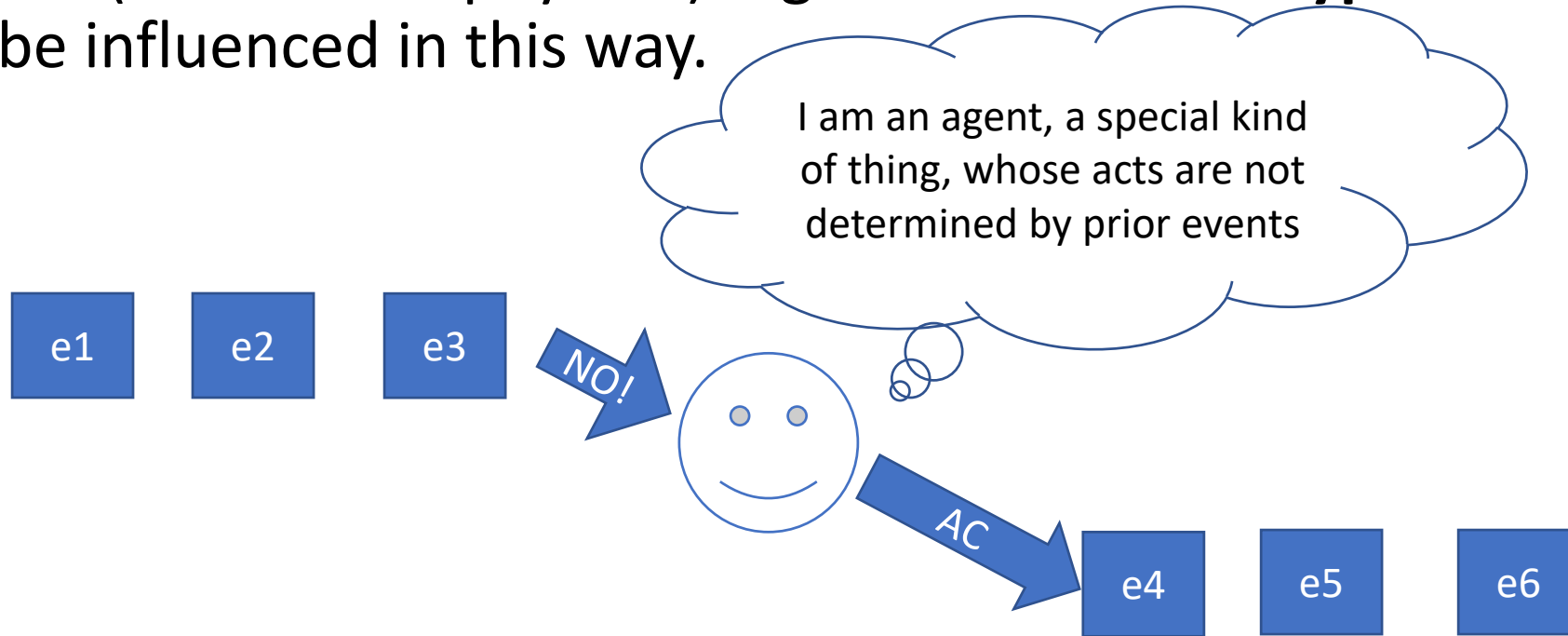
# Agent causation: more notes



1. Free acts **cannot be completely uncaused**. *Otherwise, they are just due to chance.*
2. Free acts **cannot** be caused by the prior state of **events** (mental or physical states). *Otherwise, it is event causation of the deterministic or indeterminist variety.*
3. ACT posits a **unique type of cause** that is not between **events** but between an **agent** (not an event) and an **event/act**

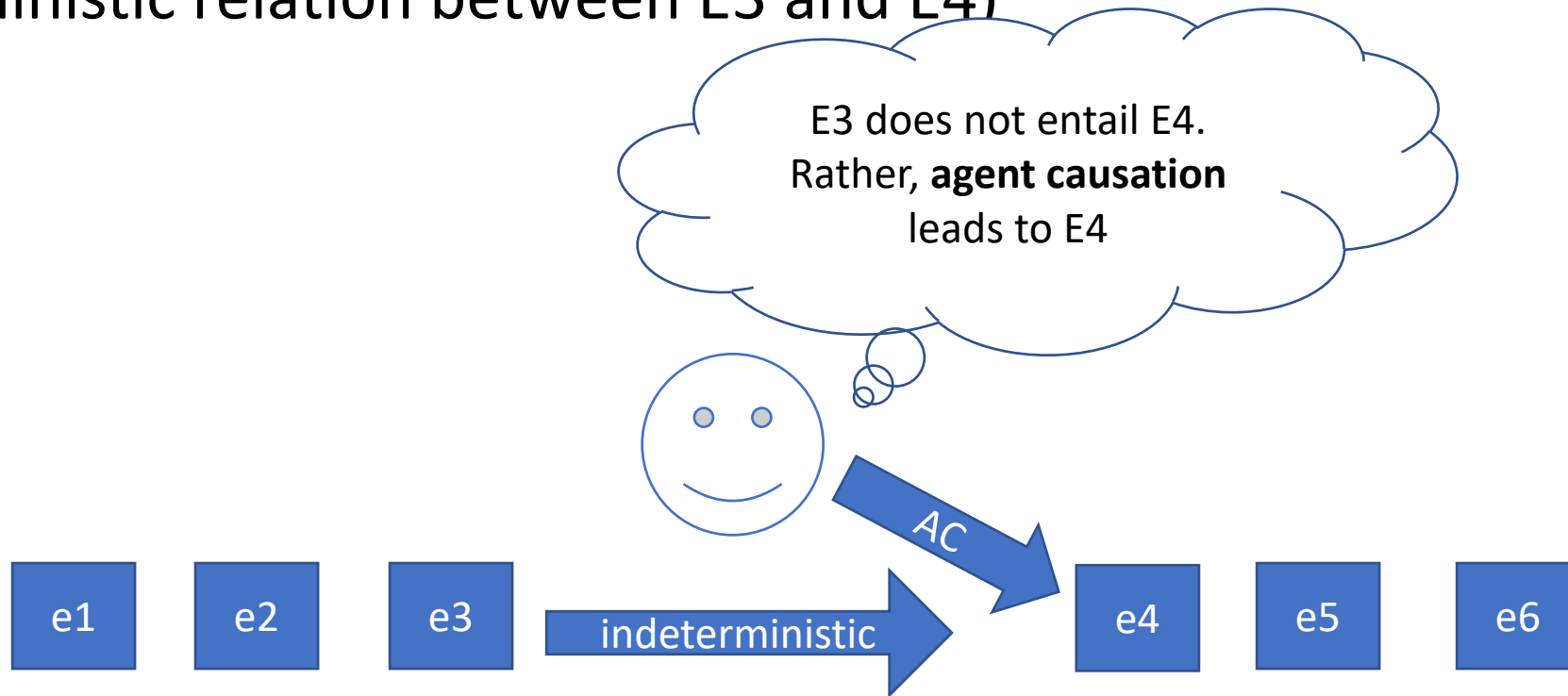
# Note: Agents not determined by prior events

ACT contends that an agent's action is not determined by the prior events (mental and physical). Agents are **not the types of things** that can be influenced in this way.



# Agent causation determines events

And the event the agent causes is not determined by prior events  
(indeterministic relation between E3 and E4)







# Argument for agent causation

# Argument from unexplained events

- P1: Every act/events needs/has a cause
- P2: Some causes can be explained by prior events (event causation)
- P3: But, some causes/events cannot be explained by prior events (not event causation) and can **only be explained by agent-causation**
- C: Therefore, there is reason to believe in agent-causation

The key premise is **P3**. What event cannot be explained by event-causation and can only be explained by agent-causation?

**Answer:** the **first event** in a sequence of events.

# Example: Liz pushes Tek

Suppose that Liz pushes Tek and Tek falls to the ground.

- We ask ourselves what caused Tek to fall?

Tek falls -> Tek loses balance -> Liz pushes Tek -> Liz moves toward Tek with arms up -> Liz raises arms -> Brain activity in Liz *wishing to push Tek* -> **?!?!?!?!?**

- **We need to explain what caused the event in her brain to occur.**
- Assuming the brain event is indeterministic, an **Explanation!** Is that it is due to another kind of cause: **one initiated by the agent (Liz)**

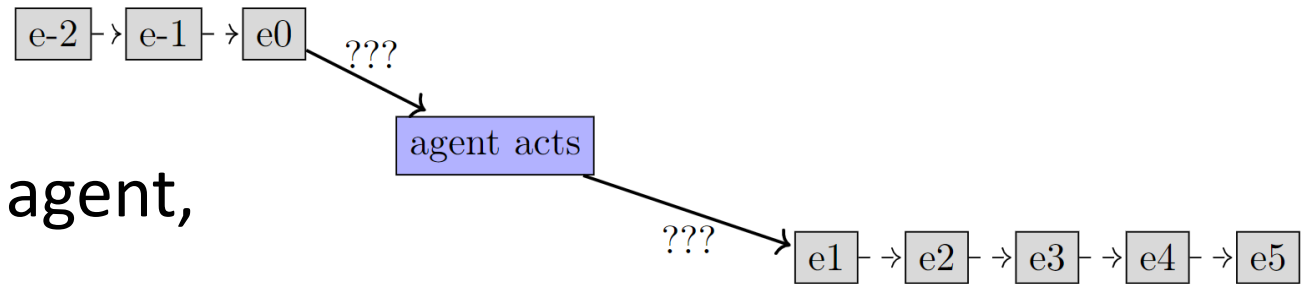
Tek falls -> Tek loses balance -> Liz pushes Tek -> Liz moves toward Tek with arms up -> Liz raises arms -> Brain activity in Liz *wishing to push Tek* -> **AGENT CAUSATION**

# Objection 1: P3 is false

Brain activity in Liz be determined by a **prior brain event (event causation)**. No reason to think otherwise.

Tek falls -> Tek loses balance -> Liz pushes Tek -> Liz moves toward Tek with arms up -> Liz raises arms -> Brain activity in Liz *wishing to push Tek* -> **Prior event**

# Objection 2: Agent causation the result of prior events



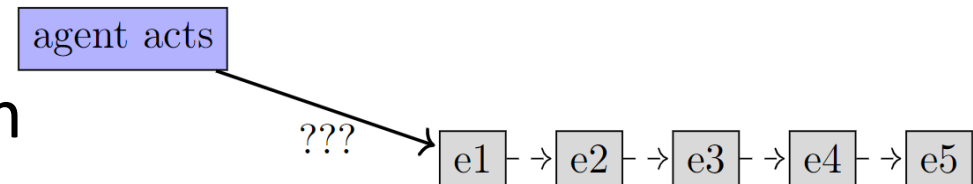
- Even if the event is caused by the agent, **what caused agent causation?**
- If **characteristics in the agent**, then the agent's choice is determined (determinism)
- If the agent's choice is undetermined, the choice is arbitrary random (random act does not give you freedom)



# Objection 3: No miracles argument

If libertarianism is true, then agent-causation may be the best way to explain how an agent (1) could have acted otherwise and (2) the action can be attributable to the agent.

But, the mechanism of agent-causation seems miraculous.

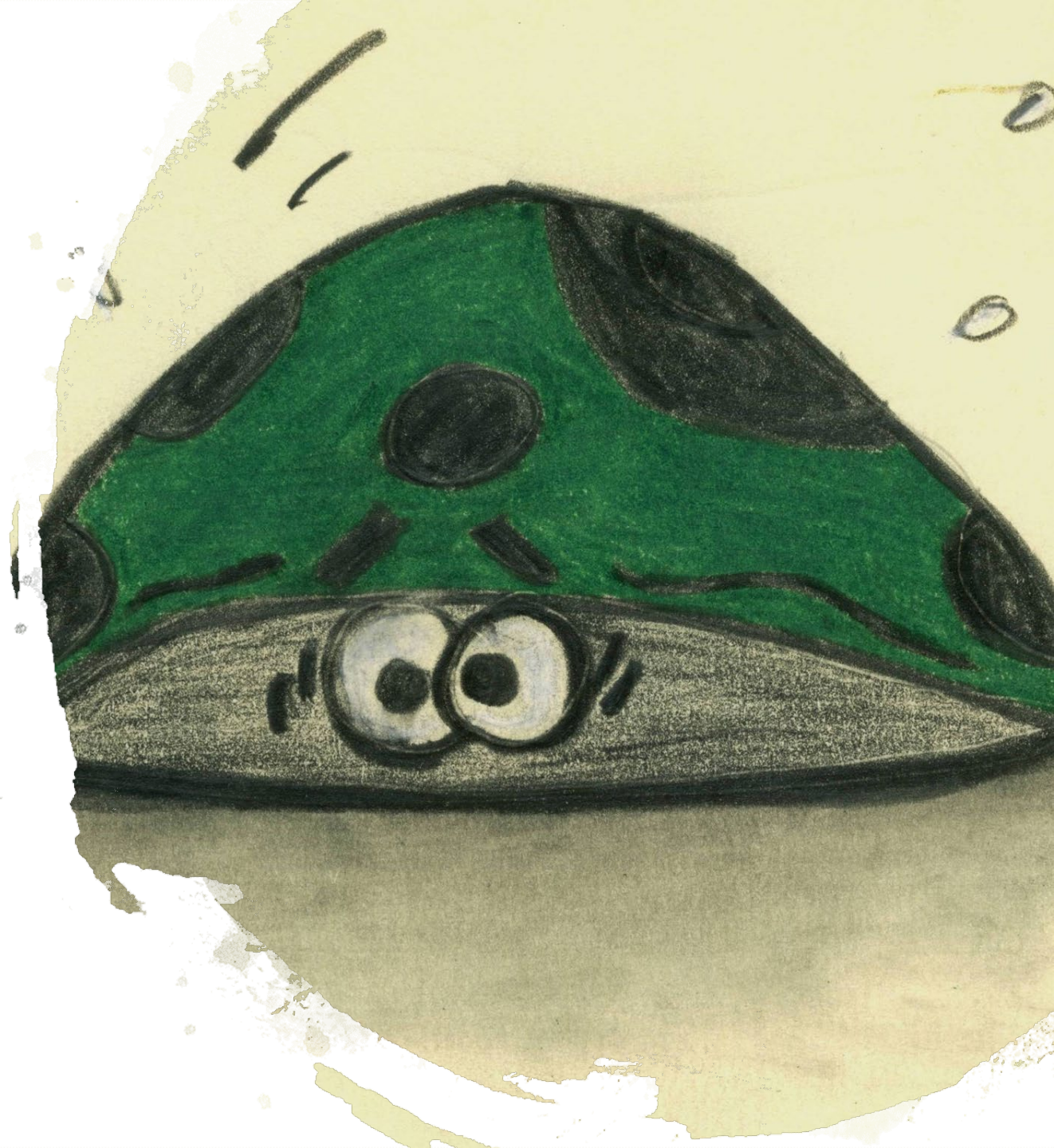


*Immaterial thing, **independent of the physical and mental world**, acts on the physical world on just those indeterministic events to bring about events of its choosing*

# No Miracles Argument against Agent Causation

- P1: If agent-causation is true, then agent-causation is miraculous.
  - P2: There are no miracles.
  - C: Therefore, agent-causation is false.
- 
- P1 is supported by the fact that agent causation is completely outside the scope of science or rational explanation (cannot explain agent causation using science or the characteristics in the agent, e.g. mental traits)
  - P2 is taken to be intuitively true

- Is ACT true?
- Consider the no miracles arguments against ACT. Is this argument a convincing refutation of ACT?



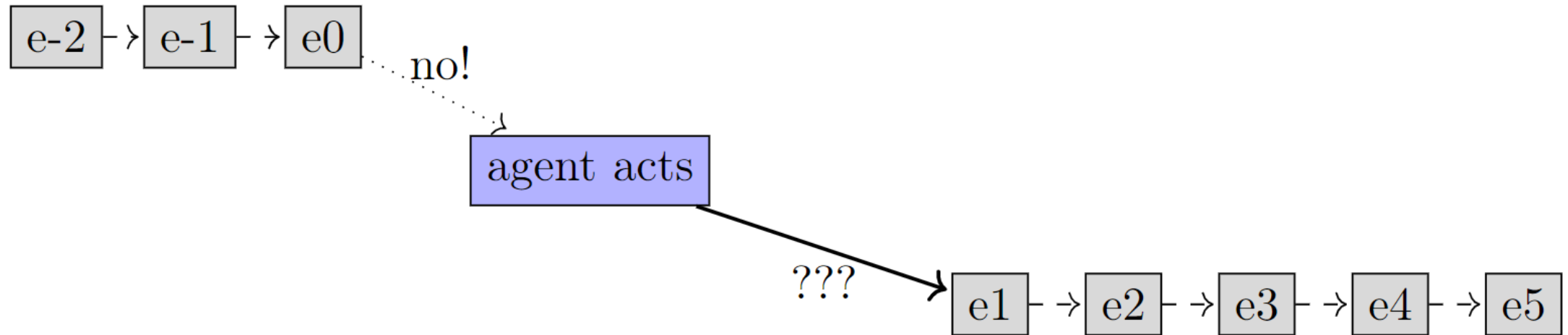
- Stop here!

# Further problems

- However, let's suppose (for the sake of argument) that agent's actions are not determined by prior events. That is, agents are unconditioned by prior events. Thus, agent causation would not be determined by prior events but the agent.

- Objection 12 (agent-causation is just as random as chance) If agent-causation is not determined by prior events and the laws of nature, but the agent's choice or the agent's action, then it seems that the agent's decision seems no different from mere chance. That is, on what grounds would the agent be choosing one option over another if not on the basis of their desires, thoughts, deliberations, prior experience, prior conditioning, etc. The same is true for cases involving assigning moral praise/blame for if there is nothing about the agent's powers, capacities, beliefs, prior experience, etc. that is responsible for the choice for one act over another, then the fact that an agent acted in one way rather than another seems completely spontaneous.

- Assumption that prior events does not exert a causal influence sufficient to eliminate agent causation

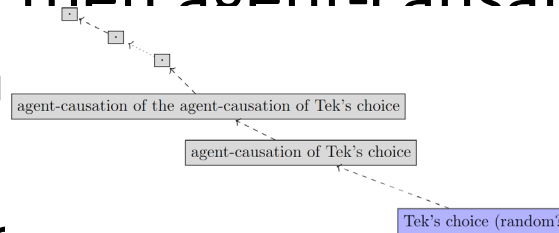




- The agent-theorist can respond by saying that there is a difference between events that are mere chance vs. those that are the result of agent causation. 1. in the case of chance, the event could be caused by anything. That is, if we say that an event is not determined by the prior state of affairs or the laws of nature, then it could be determined by anything! 2. in the case of agent-causation, the event was not caused by anything. It is instead caused by the agent, and this type of event is not explainable using the laws of nature nor the prior state of affairs.

- Thus, in the case of moral praise and blame, it isn't mere luck that an individual chooses to do good rather than evil. If Tek has the choice between selfish gain or self-sacrificing charity, Tek's decision to choose one over the other is the No: choice is result of agent-causation sation. That is, Tek's choice is caused by agent Tek's choice (random?) ce it is caused by the agent, it is not caused by anything (random).

- Objection 13 (leads to infinite regress) While Tek's choice may not be random because it is due to agent-causation, if agent-causation is not determined by anything, then agent-causation is random. And were the advocate of agent-causation is itself caused by that instance of agent-causation, then again there would be the question of whether the agent-causation of the agent-causation is random, ad infinitum.



- A final response to this is to say that agent-causation is a special kind of causation that doesn't need to be caused or influenced by prior events in order to be non-random. Objection 14 (solution to the problem by stipulation) Kane (p.51) notes that libertarians solve the assorted problems of free will by making up a type of cause that solves the problems: 1. "[i]n response to the objection that for all we know immanent agent-causation might be determined by hidden causes, they insist that agent-causation is not the sort of thing that could in principle be caused or determined by prior events or circumstances"
- [i]n response to the randomness and luck objections, they add that the agent-causal relation is not the sort of thing that could in principle occur randomly or by chance either, since it is the agent's consciously controlling something