

Simple Indeterminism



Simple Indeterminism

Recall that the **problem** for libertarianism is the following:

1. If an **event (E) is determined / caused**, then it is **not free** since it is not due to the subject (S) but the past state of world and laws of nature
2. But, **if an event (E) is undetermined / uncaused**, then E is also not due to S since E is random (objective chance) so it is irrational or arbitrary to say that *E was the act of the subject (S)* because *E is not due to anything in the subject S*

Argument against libertarianism

P1: Suppose libertarianism is true and E is a free act by S.

P2: If E is true, then E cannot be caused by S (agent causation doesn't work so there is no causal explanation for why E is due to S).

P3: But if there is no causal explanation for E, then there is no account of *why* E came about (purely random).

C: But if there is no account of why E came about, then the libertarian account of freedom is **irrational and arbitrary** since it says that E is due to S (caused by S) but also not caused by S.

So what the libertarian needs to do is:

State that

(1) an event E can be uncaused / undetermined (this preserves the indeterminism)

And explain why **even if E is uncaused,**

(2) it is not irrational to say that E is due to the subject S.

In this lecture, we will look at a theory called **simple indeterminism** (SI)

Before stating the theory, we have a little preliminary work to do:

1. State what it means to explain something
2. Assert that reasons are not causes
3. Distinguish between mental acts and mental events



Explanations

Explanations

Explanation: any answer to a *why* question.

Explanations

Examples

- *Why* do some birds migrate south? **Explanation:** Because they are in search of alternative food sources.
- *Why* be moral? **Explanation:** Because it is good for you.
- *Why* do I have to take humanities courses? **Explanation:** Because education is not simply about job training but developing you are a person.

Explanations

In an explanation, there are two parts: (1) what is being explained (explanandum) and (2) the laws, reasons, facts, causes that do the explaining

- **Definition 1 (explanandum)** The explanandum is a *sentence describing what is to be explained*: phenomena, experience, observation, event, occurrence, law
- **Definition 2 (explanans)** The explanans are the sentences that explain the explanandum

Explanations

An explanation need not be true to count as an explanation. When the explanans is irrelevant, we simply say that someone has given a **bad explanation** or hasn't *really* explained the explanandum

Suppose a man is on birth-control and a child asks a nurse why that man isn't pregnant:

- **Explanandum:** the non-pregnant state of the man
- **Explanans 1:** "Because the man is on birth control"
- **Explanans 2:** "Because the man is a man, and men cannot become pregnant"

Explanations

The nature and structure of explanation is a big topic in the philosophy of science. For our purposes, we will simply assert that there are two different types of explanations

1. **Causal explanation:** an *explanans* for why an event E occurred (the explanandum) that involves the citing of what **caused** E to occur
2. **Explanations-by-reasons:** an *explanans* for why an event E occurred (the explanandum) that involves the citing of the **reasons**, purposes, desires for why someone behaved the way they did

Example: Why did that house burn down?

Explanandum: the house catching fire and burning down

- **Causal explanans:** The striking of the match along with the gas-filled room is why (*caused*) the house caught fire and burned down
- **Explanans involving reasons, purpose, desires:** The owner wanting the insurance money is why (the *reason*) the house caught fire and burned down

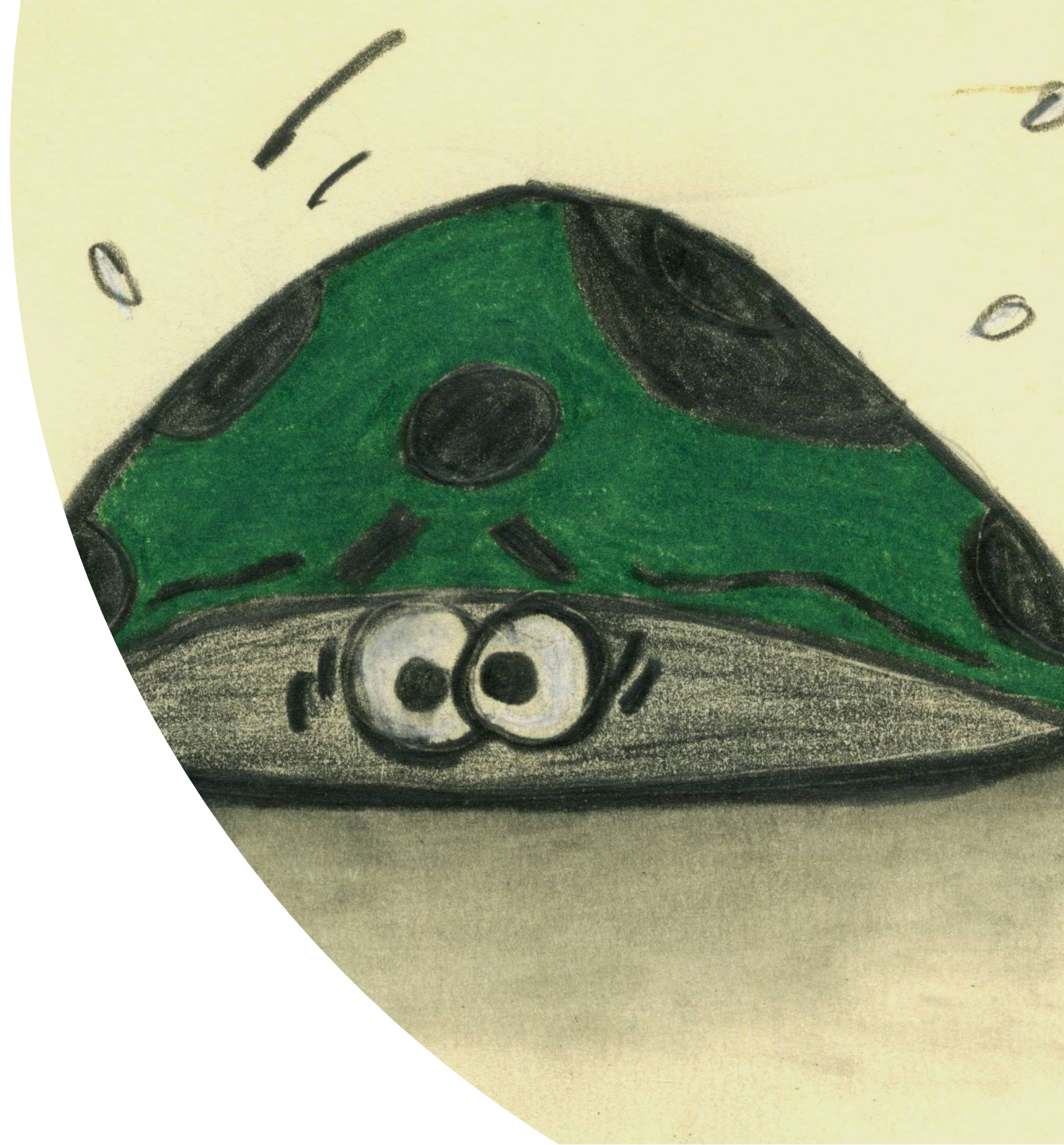
The key point here is that we can explain why some event occurred in two ways:


- We can explain why it came about by stating what CAUSED or DETERMINED it
- We can explain what it came about by stating the REASON it came about

In a small group, on a piece of paper, consider the following explanandum:

why you came to class today (the explanandum)

Now give a causal explanans and an explanans involving reasons





Reasons are
not causes
claim

Reasons and causes

The two types of explanations are **not the same**: one explains through **causation** while the other through **purposes/reasons** of an agent



Reasons and causes

Reasons-are-not-causes claim: Reasons are not causes

Example 1

- What **caused** the fire was the match being struck in gas-filled room
- The **reason** for the fire was that the owner wanted the insurance money

The reason did not cause the fire.



Acts vs events

Acts and events

Let's distinguish between an **act** and an **event**.

Simple Indeterminism

A **mental act** occurs when the following occurs:

1. **we have a volition:** a mental experience of wanting to do X (a desire, a willing)
2. we do X or try to do X
3. **we have a control experience:** We have the **experience** that the volition and the act are *something we are doing* rather than *something that is happening to us*

Something is a mere **mental event** when it fails to meet the above conditions

Example: Mental event

Suppose Tek walks down the street and thoughts pass through head.

1. I see a turkey
 2. I had a turkey as a pet as a child
 3. Oh I like turkeys
 4. Oh! The sky is blue!
- No volitions (no wanting, desiring, aiming, etc.)
 - No control experience (thoughts determined by what is seen, by previous ideas, etc.)



Example: Mental acts

Liz has an important meeting later in the day.

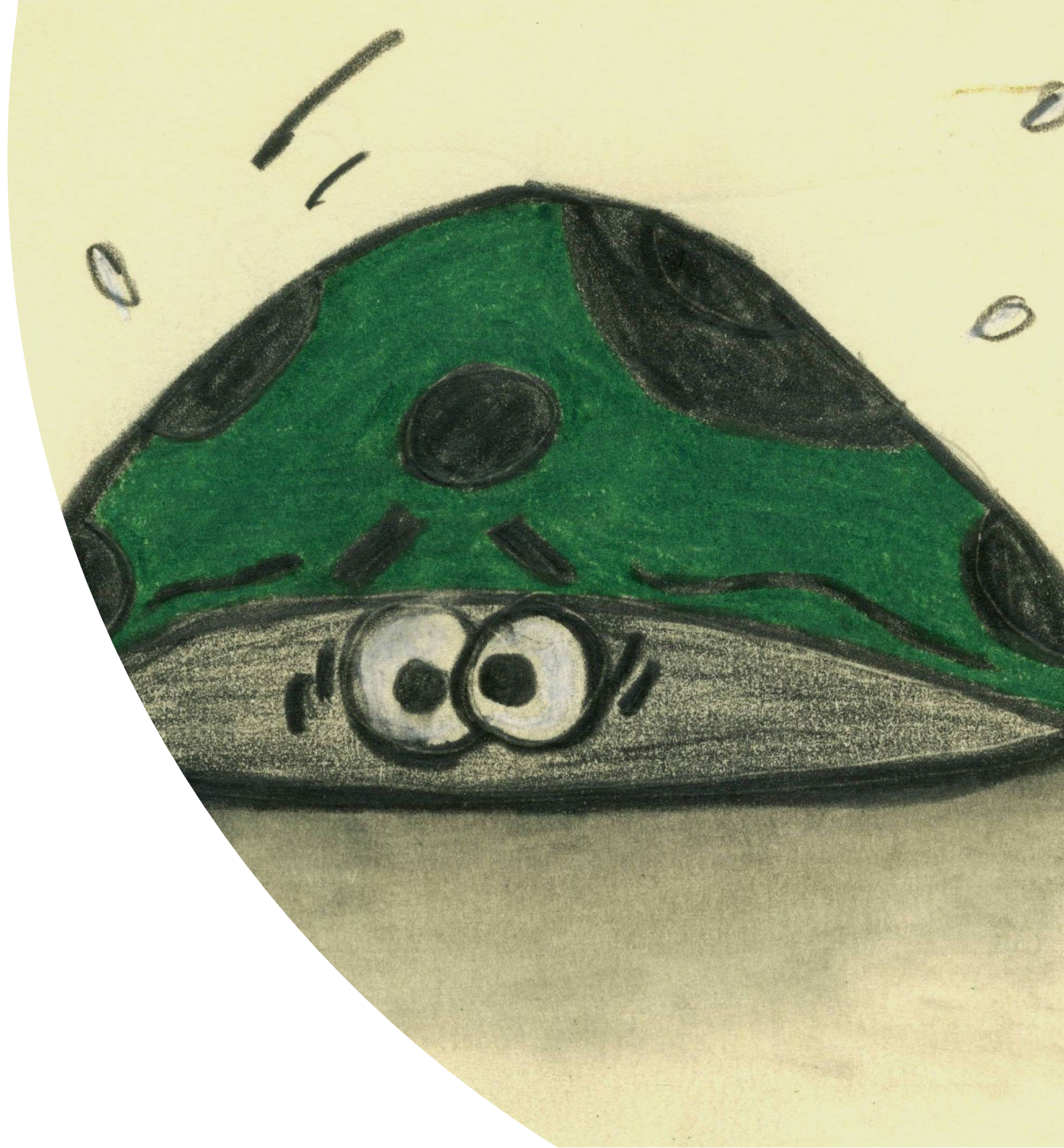
1. I will set my alarm *because I don't want to miss my meeting.*
 2. [Sets alarm]
- Volitions: the wanting to not miss the meeting, the aiming to prevent this by setting the alarm
 - Control experience: the feeling that the setting of one's alarm is one's doing, not happening to her




Mental acts involve the "control experience"

- Having a volition to do X and doing X is not sufficient for a mental act. I also need the control experience.
- Suppose I want to lift my arm and then I lift my arm
- But also suppose the lifting of my arm was electrically stimulated by a machine (so no control experience)

Give one example of a mental event
and mental act





Simple Indeterminism (the theory)

Simple Indeterminism

We've done the preliminary work!

1. Stated what it means to explain something and pointed out how there are two types of explanations
2. Asserted that reasons are not causes.
3. Distinguished between mental acts and mental events

Time to state the theory!

Simple Indeterminism

Simple indeterminism: the theory that (1) indeterminism is true, (2) there are free actions, (3) a free action is an act that (a) is **uncaused**, (b) not irrational as it can be given an **explanation-by-reason**, and (c) involves a mental act.

We've seen part (1)-(2) before; part (3) is aimed at making sense of how an event can be uncaused but that it is not irrational to say the event is an act of S (due to S).

Free action	Explanation
(a) is uncaused / undetermined	The act is not caused by prior events and laws of nature (indeterministic). No causal explanation!
(b) can be given an explanation-by-reason	<p>It is not irrational to say that the act E is due to S even though S is not the cause of E since we can say why the act occurred in terms of the agent's desires, reasons, wants, wishes.</p> <p>We can make sense of the claim: E is an act of S.</p>
(c) involves a mental act	Involves S having a volition to do X, doing X, and a control experience

Simple Indeterminism

Actions can be uncaused (not determined by prior laws of nature)

Yet, there is a **rational explanation** for **why** the action is free and attributable to the agent

Argument against libertarianism

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C: But if there is no account of why E came about, then the libertarian account of freedom is **irrational and arbitrary** since it says that E is due to S (caused by S) but also not caused by S.

Reject P3. Just because there is **no causal explanation for E** does not entail there is **no rational account of why E came about**.

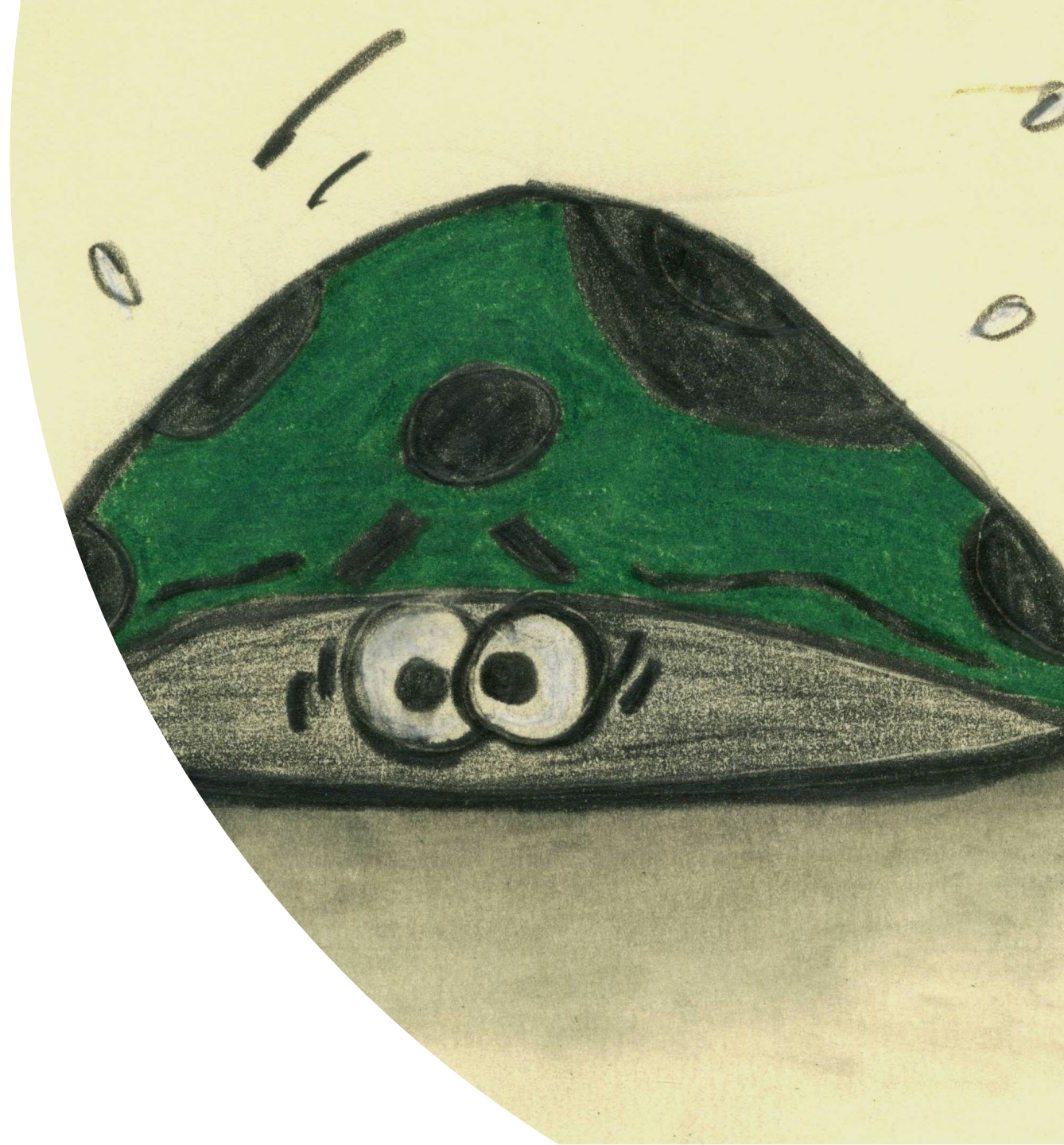
There is an account of why E came about. The explanation is by an explanation-by-reasons.

Example

- Tek at t_2 desires to lift his arm, lifts his arm, and experiences that this was his doing (full mental act)
- **Explanandum:** Tek lifting his arm
- **No causal explanation:** nothing in Tek's body or psychology determined / caused him to lift his arm: relation between t_1 and t_2 is indeterministic
- If there is no causal explanans for this, then it is irrational or arbitrary to say it is due to Tek's free choice.
- **But there is an explanans:** Tek wanted to lift his arm (explanation-by-reasons) and acted to lift his arm
- Reasons are not causes and so while the reasons did not cause the event, they do explain why the event is due to Tek

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1. To your neighbors, articulate the simple indeterminist view the best you can.
 2. Discuss whether you find this view plausible.

You don't need to include this part on your paper.





Objections to simple indeterminism

Control Argument against SI

Recall that SI asserts that

1. a free act is an uncaused act yet
2. it is not **irrational** to say that the act is due to someone because we can explain that act in terms of their reasons, motivations, beliefs, etc.

One objection against this view is that **any act that is uncaused** cannot be said to be free.



Control Argument against SI

- P1: If SI is true, then free acts are **uncaused** by prior events.
- P2: If free acts are uncaused by prior events, then it is irrational to say they are **caused** by me
- P3: If they are not caused by me, then they are not under my control.
- P4: If they are not under my control, then there are no free acts.
- C: Therefore, if SI is true, then there are no free acts.

Control Argument against SI

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- P4: If they are not under my control, then there are no free acts.
- C: Therefore, if SI is true, then there are no free acts.

One response might be to reject **P1**.

- But this would mean that free acts are caused.
- And so we would have to say how they are caused
- And this takes us back to the problems of simple libertarian, libertarian dualism, or **agent causation theory**.

- Stop here!

Objection: the illusion of control

The simple indeterminist relies upon the distinction between a **mental event** and a **mental act** in order to articulate their notion of free action.

- Mental acts involve volitional action (an experience of deliberate action or willing).
- Mental events involve no such volitional action (an experience of deliberate action or willing).

- The agent causation theorist will argue that if an intention/willing/volition is the relevant mental
- state that helps distinguish actions from events (Agent A intends to do X, and so acts X), then, in order for this intention to be attributable to the agent, it must be caused by the agent. And so, the
- best way to explain this without lapsing into determinism is by positing a special kind of causation
- (agent causation).

P1: Volition action (e.g. wanting, desiring, willing) is determined or undetermined by prior events

P2: If SI is true, then volitional action must be undetermined by prior events for if they were determined, then indeterminism would be false.

P3: If volitional acts are undetermined, then there is nothing about the agent that determines them.

P4: If there is nothing about the agent that determines them, then it makes no sense to say that the agent has any “control” over those volitions (they are random, uncaused) events.

P4: If it is not under the control of the agent, then it cannot be a mental act.

Reduction argument against simple indeterminism

- Objection 17 (theory reduces to agent causation) A further problem with simple indeterminism
- is that it seems to assume (with saying so) a kind of agent causation as it assumes that there
- are some mental acts that are under our control. It isn't clear how they can assume this without
- either (a) lapsing back into determinism or (b) positing some form of agent causation (in which
- case it will suffer from all of the problems with agent causation).

Extra Factor Strategies

- Generic XF strategy
- Libertarian Dualism
- Agent Causation

Reason vs. Causes Strategies

- Simple Indeterminism

Irrationality Claim: If E is an undetermined event, then it is irrational to say that E is due to S .

If we could explain how E is due to S without causing E , then the irrationality claim would be false.