



Causal Explanation is All There is to Causation

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Overview

- ❖ Aim: develop a suggestion of Michael Scriven's

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When we are looking for causes, we are looking for explanations in terms of a few factors or a single factor; and what counts as an explanation is whatever fills in the gap in the inquirer's or reader's understanding.



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 - ❖ a solution to the problem of absence causation

Causation by absences...

✧ ... is ubiquitous:

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- ✧ ... is ubiquitous:
 - ✧ in science

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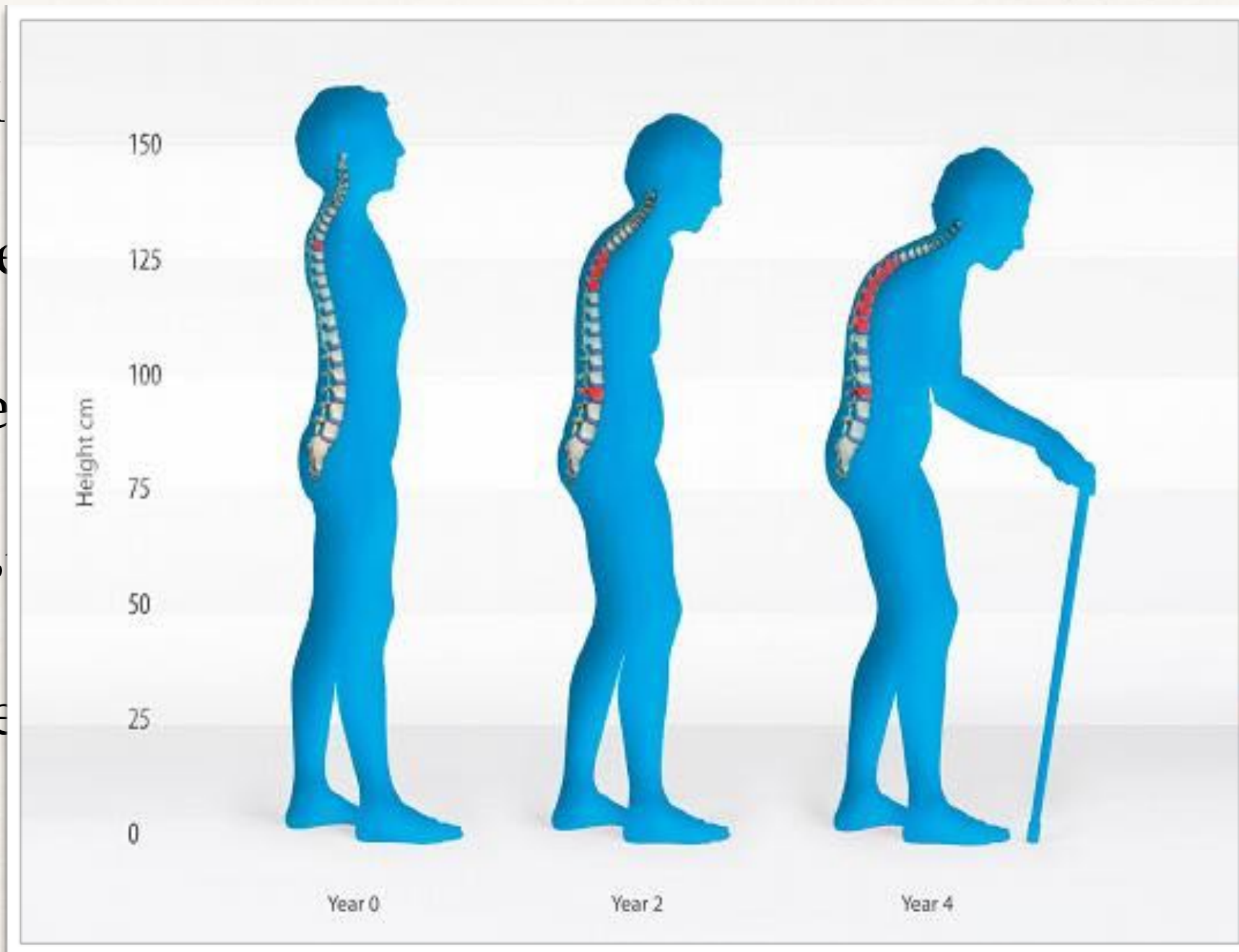
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Causation by absences...

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Causation by absences...

Criminally negligent homicide

A person commits the crime of criminally negligent homicide if he or she causes the death of another person by criminal negligence.

13A-6-4(a) Code of Alabama

Joseph C. Kreps

Alabama DUI Defense Lawyer
(866) 348-2889

Causation by absences...

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- ❖ Philosophers of causation are, however, divided on the issue: difference-making vs connectedness accounts

Existing work on causation by absences...

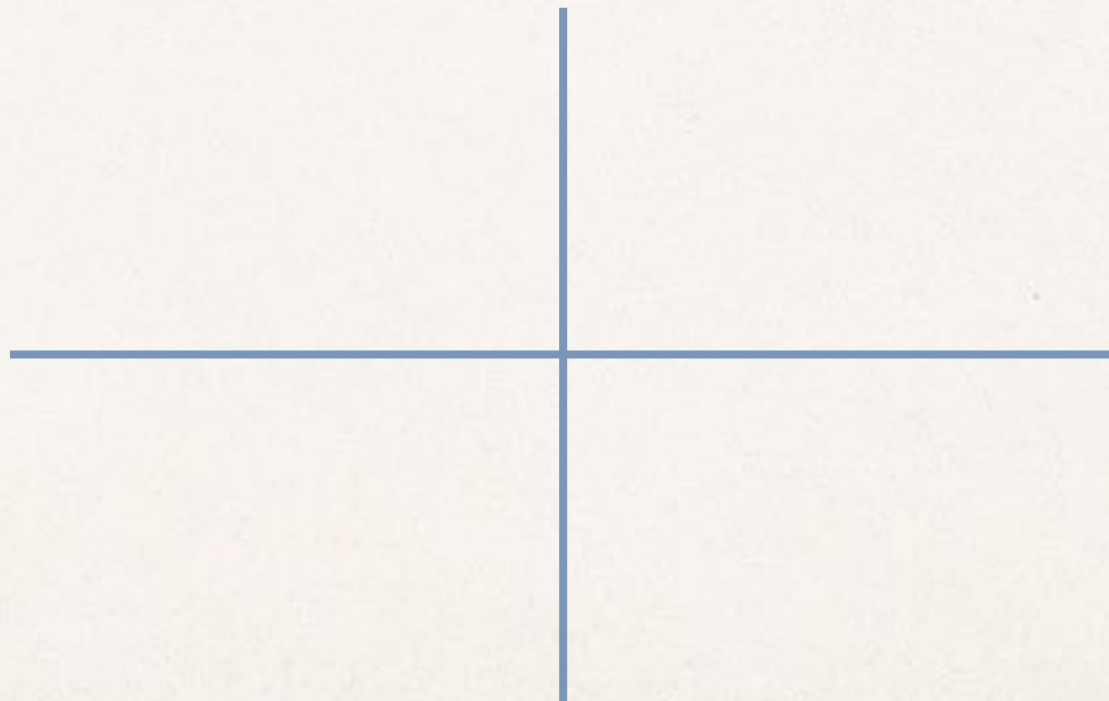
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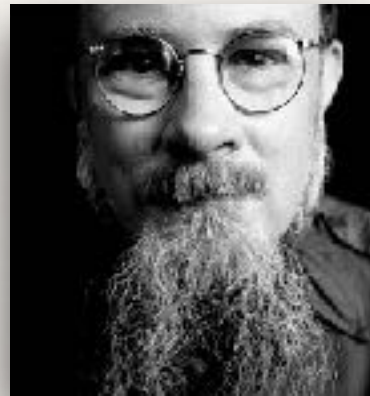
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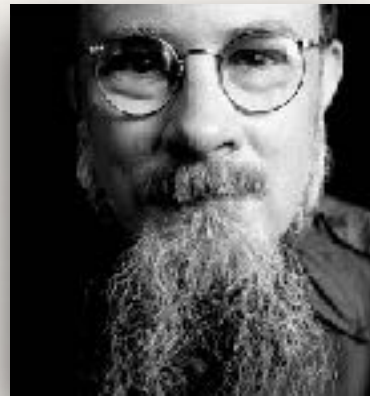


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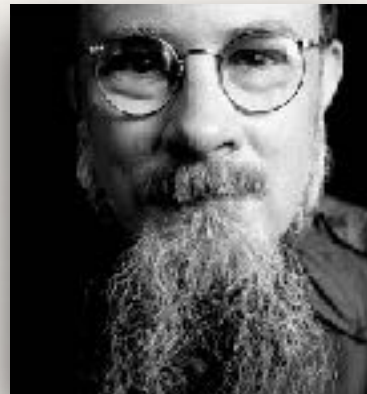


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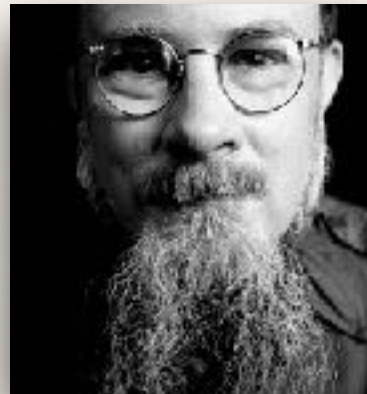
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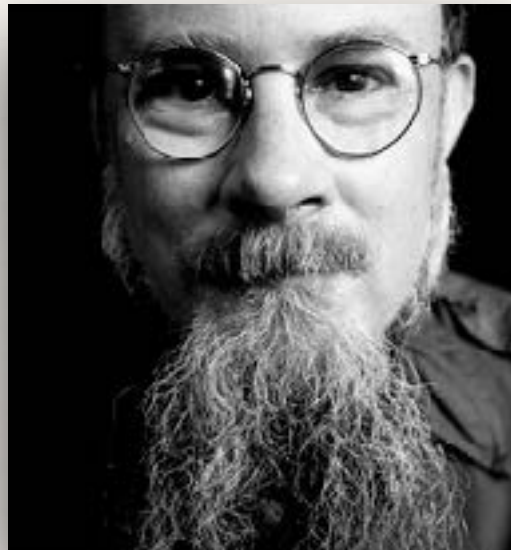
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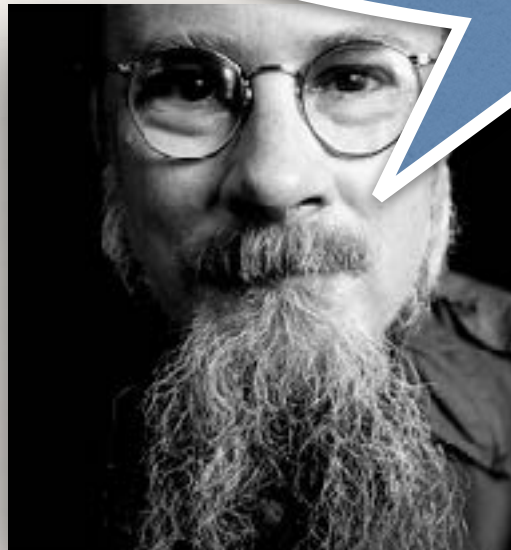


Existing world absences.

One reason for an aversion to causation by absences is that if there is any of it at all, there is a lot of it—far more of it than we would normally want to mention. At this very moment, we are being kept alive by an absence of nerve gas in the air we are breathing.

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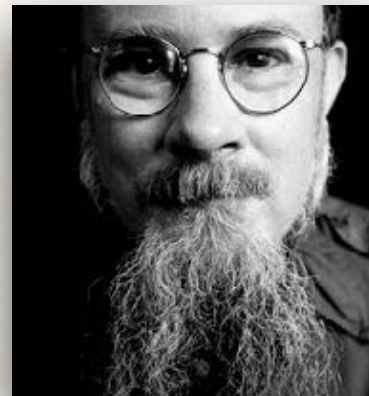
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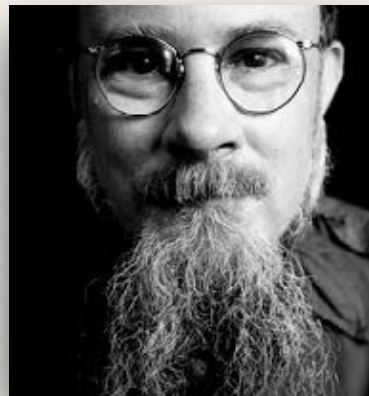
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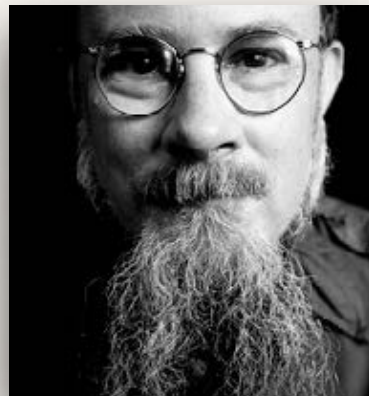
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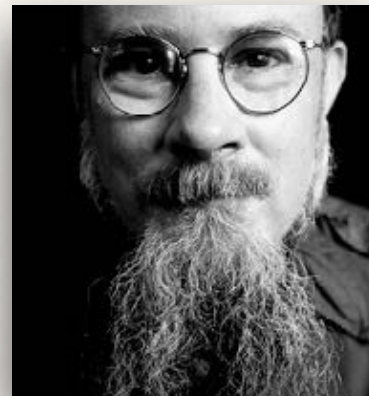
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- ❖ There is a difference between *kill* and *let die* but one that doesn't correspond to cause and quasi-cause

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- ❖ So we need to address the question: ‘What is an explanation?’ and, in particular, ‘What is a causal explanation?’

A theory of explanation

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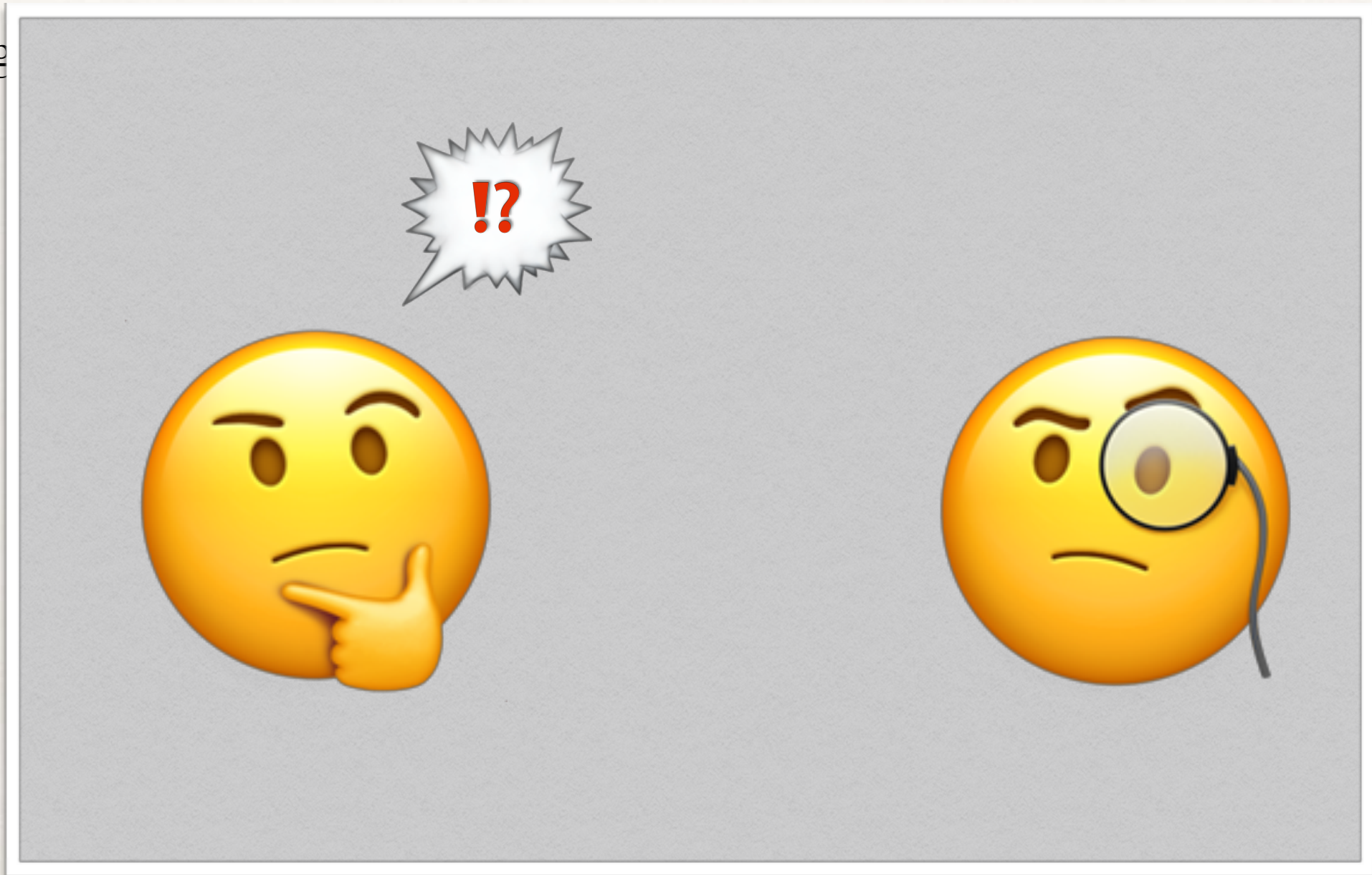
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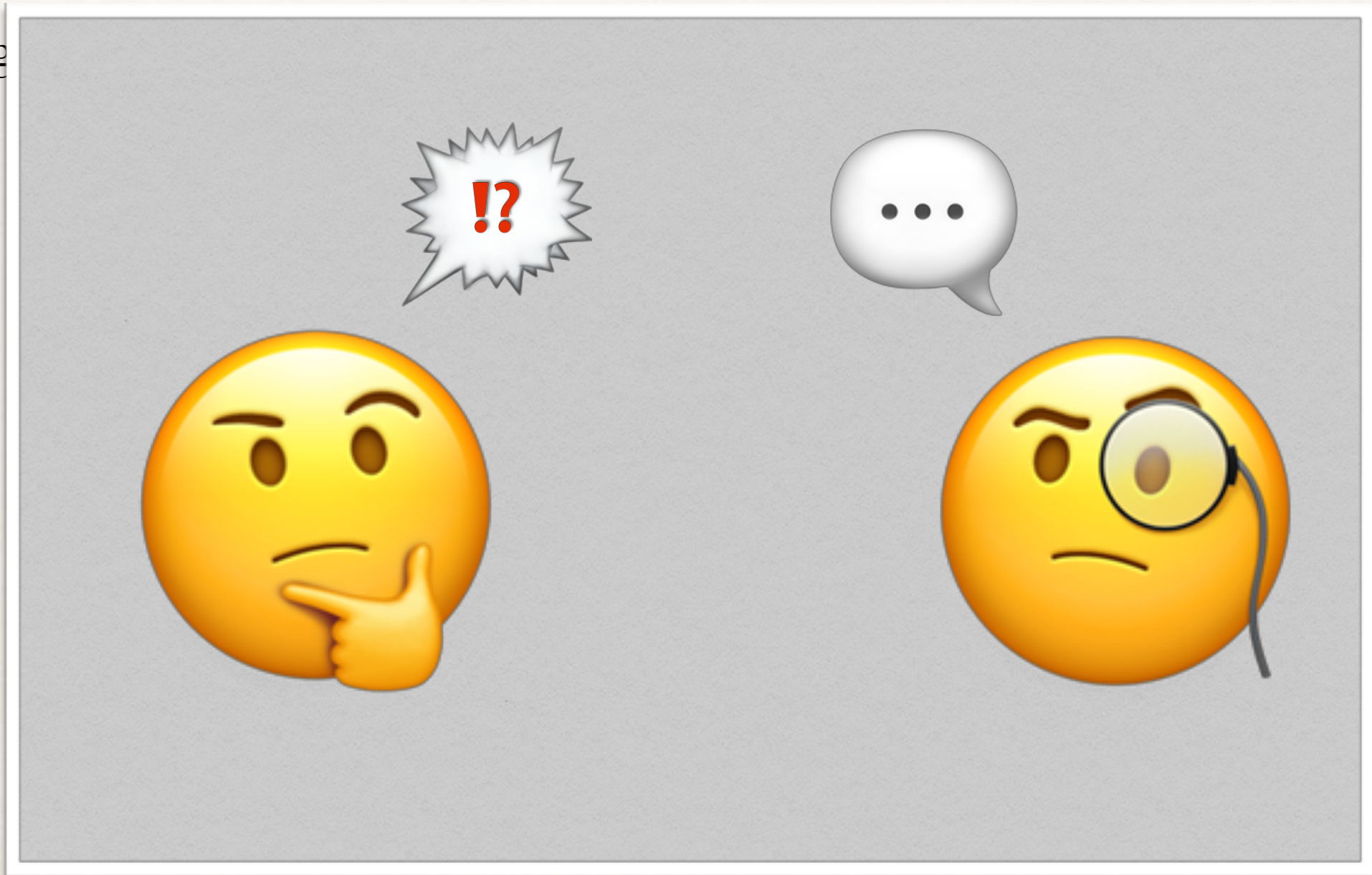
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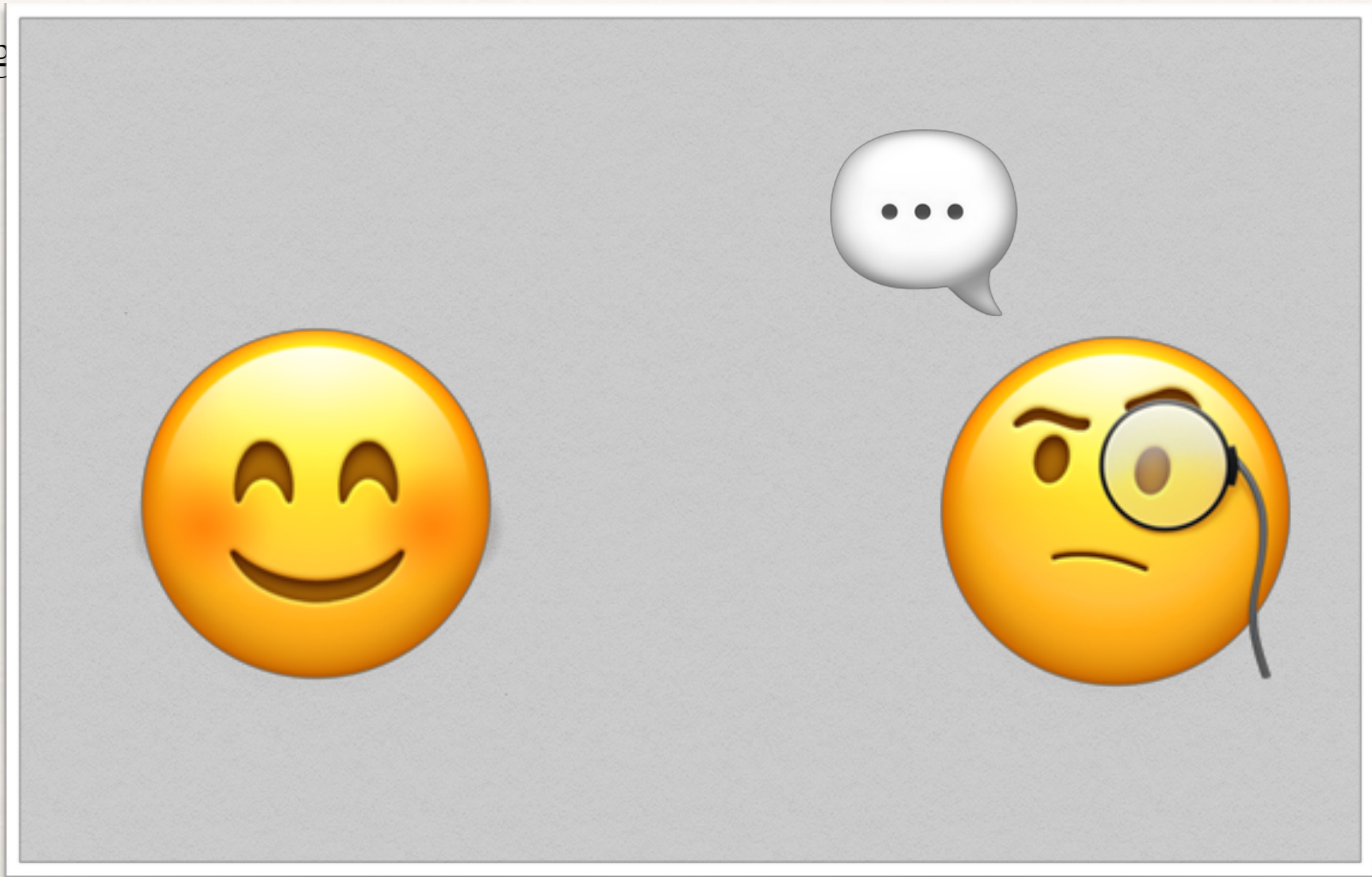
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- ❖ Inferences can be formal or material; in science and everyday life, usually the latter

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- ❖ The norms of causal reasoning include methodological, ethical and conceptual norms
- ❖ Other kinds of explanations — mathematical, aesthetic — follow different norms

A neo-Humean theory of causation

❖ Hume's two theories

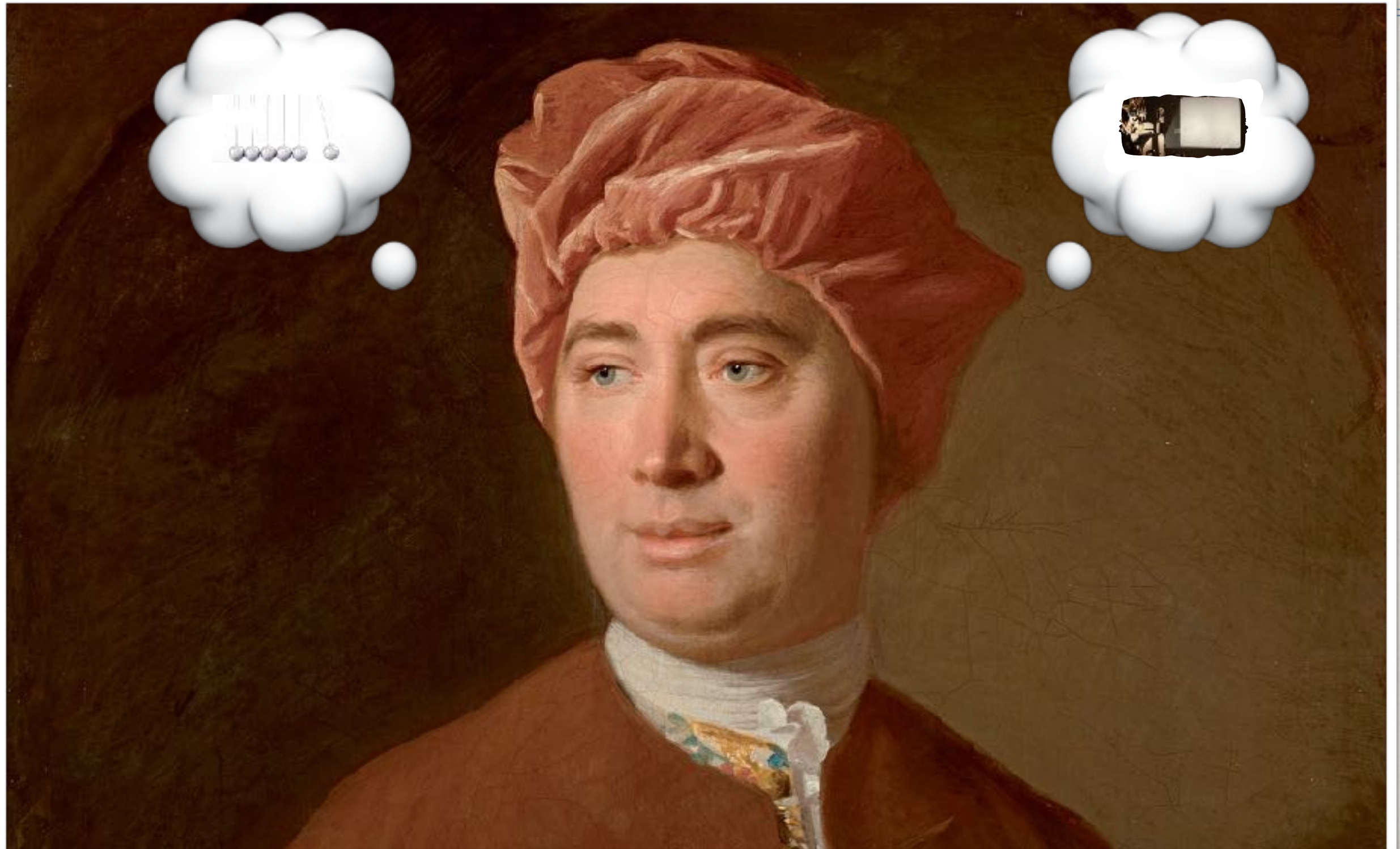
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- ❖ (Truth conditions may be formulated in terms of *ideal epistemic situations*.)

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- ❖ It is also possible that existing norms are jointly indeterminate (symmetric overdetermination)

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- ❖ Thus, the neighbour's failure causally explains — and causes — the demise of the dough

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- ❖ Irrelevant absence causal claims are therefore not assertible in my account

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- ❖ These explanations will be satisfactory if they improve an individual’s reasoning capacity; and information about the mechanism will certainly do that — for instance by improving the reasoner’s ability to intervene
- ❖ Once an explanation fills a gap in an explainee’s understanding and improves his inferential abilities, there is nothing left for an account of causation to do

Conclusions

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- ❖ The explanationist account of causation is the only account currently on offer that adequately deals with causation by absences
- ❖ Because claims of causation by absences are ubiquitous in science, legal practice, history and everyday life, it would be a good idea for an account of causation to provide an adequate treatment...

Conclusions

- ❖ The explanationist account of causation is the only account currently on offer that adequately deals with causation by absences
- ❖ Because claims of causation by absences are ubiquitous in science, legal practice, history and everyday life, it would be a good idea for an account of causation to provide an adequate treatment...
- ❖ The cost the explanationist has to pay is that his account makes causation relative to epistemic situations, and epistemic situations can involve false beliefs about particular facts, generalisations, norms etc.

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- ❖ But I would argue that this is a small price to pay; what matters is inferential success; and as long as the inferential practices are successful, who cares whether they issue in beliefs that are literally true?

Conclusions

- ❖ The explanation that adequately accounts for the absence of the only account currently on offer
- ❖ Because of the ubiquity of causal claims in practice, it would be a good idea for an account of causation to be able to handle the fact that his account makes causation ubiquitous in science, legal and economic situations can involve false claims, norms etc.
- ❖ The cost to the account of causation relative to the cost of the beliefs about causation that it would require to pay; what matters is inferential success; as long as the practices are successful, who cares whether the account is really true?



Conclusions

- ❖ The explanation that adequately accounts for the data is not the one that offers the best causal account.
- ❖ Because of the prevalence of causal practices, it would be a good idea for an account of causation to be able to account for the success of these practices.
- ❖ The cost to the account of causation of being able to account for the success of these practices is that his account makes causation in economic situations can involve false assumptions, norms etc.
- ❖ But I would not be able to pay; what matters is inferential practices are successful, who cares whether the world is really true?



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is not knowledge
but action.*

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