HISTORICAL EXPLANATION

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This thesis is an attempt to determine whether or not there is specifically "historical" explanation. The idea that historical explanation makes implicit use of general laws and is, hence, logically similar to scientific explanation, is examined and criticized. In the process of working toward an answer to the main problem, the concepts "cause", "explain", and "explanation" are examined, particularly in respect to their use in everyday language. Also, an attempt is made to determine what the criteria are for saying that X "explains".

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I

INTRODUCTION

Patrick Gardiner opens his book, The Nature of Historical Explanation,[1] with the words, "'Explanation' is a vague concept."[2] If to ask what we mean by "explanation" as it is used in everyday speech presents a difficult problem, the problem of historical explanation is even more difficult. Difficult as it is, the problem of how we explain historical events is basic to, and an integral part of several other questions asked in the philosophy of history. The most interesting of these is probably the question of whether or not history is a science. At first glance such a question appears quite simple, but, in fact, it is not, for what exactly do we mean by "science"? I think it can be said that normally we know how to use the word "science". For example, most of us would agree that physics is a science. The question of whether or not history is a science, however, cannot be answered quite so clearly.

The reason it is difficult to answer the question of whether or not history is a science is that the question

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[1] Patrick Gardiner, The Nature of Historical Explanation, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961),

[2] Ibid., p.1.

itself contains an ambiguity. As the question has been phrased, "Is history a science?" this ambiguity is not noticeable. If, however, I were to consider that the word "science" implies laws and that, therefore, the question, "Is history a science?" can be reformulated by the question, "Are there historical laws?" the ambiguity to which I am referring would become clearer. If "historical laws" be understood in the sense of laws governing the process of history, then it should be clear that the "history" involved in the question, "Is history a science?" and the "history" involved in the question of laws governing the process of history, refer to two different things. The former refers to the subject of history or the study of history or the past, and the latter refers to the past itself. Thus there are two "histories", one which is studied and one which is the study itself. The reason this ambiguity passes unnoticed is probably because we are accustomed to thinking of "science" as a study and, hence, are led to attach the corresponding meaning to "history". This distinction might seem to be quite trivial once it has been made, but there are several points where the philosophers discussed in this thesis overlook the distinction and, therefore, I think, fail to see the issues in their proper perspective.

The problem of whether or not history is a science can partly be answered by attempting to determine whether or not historians and scientists treat their subject matter

in the same way. Part of the way in which they treat their subject matter falls under the problem of how they explain events and phenomena within the context of their respective disciplines. It will be the aim of this thesis to attempt to determine whether or not there is such a thing as historical explanation. If there is historical, as opposed to scientific explanation, if things are explained in a different way in history than they are in science, then it would seem that at least there is some ground for saying that history is not a science. If, on the other hand, historical and scientific explanations are in essence one and the same, there is at least some ground for saying that history is a science.

The problem, then, with which I shall deal in this thesis is that of historical explanation. I shall not attempt to determine whether or not history is a science, although any attempt to come to terms with the first problem should illuminate the latter. The two are closely connected, although it would seem that the latter is a much broader problem. Philosophers dealing with the problem of historical explanation often appear to prejudge the problem of whether or not history is a science, or should or should not be seen as a science. Thus, the philosopher who thinks history is, or can be, a science will <u>as a result</u> attempt to show that historical and scientific explanations do not, in essence, differ; in other words, that there is no such thing as

specifically "historical" explanation.

In attempting to see whether or not there is such a thing as "historical" explanation I shall first want to see what it means to explain something. I have chosen to begin with an examination of Carl G. Hempel's article, "The Function of General Laws in History",[3] because in claiming that all explanation, and, therefore, historical explanation, conforms to one pattern, he takes an extreme position. I shall then examine the arguments of one of his chief critics, William H. Dray, whose book, Laws and Explanation in History,[4] is an attempt to undermine the Hempelian position. Having looked at the arguments for and against the Hempelian account of explanation, I shall examine another common type of explanation - causal explanation. This will entail an analysis of what it means to say that something "causes" something else. This done, I shall proceed to analyze what it means to "explain" something, what we mean when we use the word "explain" in common discourse. As background material, I shall place heavy emphasis on a third work, The Nature of Historical Explanation,[5] by Patrick Gardiner. Finally, I shall attempt to determine whether or not there is such a thing as "historical" explanation and if there is, what it would mean. As a secondary and subordinate issue, I shall,

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[3] In Patrick Gardiner, ed., Theories of History (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1959), 344-356.

[4] (London: Oxford University Press, 1957).

[5] Op. cit.

in the process of attempting to solve the main problem, critically analyze parts of the three works mentioned above, in an attempt to glean from them what seems to me to be of value in answering the principal question.

II

HEMPEL'S POSITION

It is Hempel's purpose to show "that general laws have quite analogous functions in history and in the natural sciences, that they form an indispensable instrument of historical research, and that they even constitute the common basis of various procedures which are often considered as characteristic of the social in contradistinction to the natural sciences."[1] The word "indispensable" is of importance in respect to the criticisms of William Dray, who, as will be seen later, makes great issue of the necessity of laws in history.

Having stated his purpose, Hempel goes on to define a general law as "a statement of universal conditional form which is capable of being confirmed or disconfirmed by suitable empirical findings."[2] Since "law" suggests that confirmation has taken place, Hempel substitutes the term "universal hypothesis". Such an hypothesis would:

> assert a regularity of the following type: In every case where an event of a specified kind C occurs at a certain place and time, an event of a specified kind E will occur at a place and time which is related in a specified manner to the place and time of the occurrence of the first event. (The

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[1] "The Function of General Laws in History", in Patrick Gardiner, ed., Theories of History (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959), p. 345.

[2] Loc. cit.,

> symbols "C" and "E" have been chosen to suggest the terms "cause" and "effect", which are often, though by no means always, applied to events related by a law of the above kind.)
>
> The main function of general laws in the natural sciences is to connect events in patterns which are usually referred to as explanation and prediction.[3]

Next comes the section so often quoted in monographs on historical explanation:

> The explanation of the occurrence of an event of some specific kind E at a certain place and time consists, as it is usually expressed, in indicating the causes or determining factors of E. Now the assertion that a set of events - say of the kinds C_1, C_2, ..., C_n - have caused the event to be explained, amounts to the statement that, according to certain general laws, a set of events of the kinds mentioned is regularly accompanied by an event of the kind E. Thus, the scientific explanation of the event in question consists of
>
> (1) a set of statements asserting the occurrence of certain events C_1,..., C_n at certain times and places,
>
> (2) a set of universal hypotheses, such that
>
> (a) the statements of both groups are reasonably well confirmed by empirical evidence,
>
> (b) from the two groups of statements the sentence asserting the occurrence of an event E can be logically deduced.[4]

Having defined the terms "law", "cause", and "explanation" as he sees them, Hempel goes on to give an example. He then states three criteria of a scientific explanation. The determining conditions (C_1,..., C_n) and the explanandum must logically follow the explanans.

Scientific prediction has the same logical structure

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[3] Loc. cit.,

[4] Loc. cit.,

as the above scientific explanation. The difference is that in explanation the initial conditions are sought, whereas in prediction the "effect" is sought. Ideally, then, an explanation could in a different function serve as a prediction, but only ideally. Explanations are rarely stated so completely that a prediction could be made from them. This would require logical deduction from the explanans - in other words, criterion 2(b) of the above.

Hempel goes on to say that, "The preceding considerations apply to explanation in history as well as in any other branches of empirical science. Historical explanation, too, aims at showing that the event in question was not 'a matter of chance', but was to be expected in view of certain antecedent or simultaneous conditions."[5] Explanation in history, therefore, is logically similar to scientific explanation but it is seldom complete in the sense that the laws it presupposes are not explicitly stated. Hempel gives two reasons for this. First, the universal hypotheses used are considered familiar to everybody through everyday experience and, hence, to state them would only be superfluous. Second, it would be difficult in many cases to formulate these implicit laws in an explicit, precise form conducive to logical deduction and in agreement with all

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[5] Ibid., pp. 348-349.

relevant empirical data. What historians actually give instead of a full explanation is what Hempel calls an "explanation sketch". This sketch gives vague reference to laws and initial conditions and indicates possible direction for future research which will "fill it out", rendering it closer to the ideal form of explanation.

At this point Hempel spends considerable time in demonstrating that in many cases in which it appears that laws are unsuited to the type of explanation, laws are actually indispensable. He concludes by stating that he is "entirely neutral with respect to the problem of '_specifically historical laws_'".[6] He openly admits that the use of laws from other fields of research is prevalent but that this is not to say that there are not laws of historical as opposed to sociological value; nor, of course, is this to imply that there _are_ such laws. It is Hempel's purpose in this paper neither to prove or disprove their existence, nor to demonstrate a way of distinguishing historical from sociological laws should there exist such laws.

In general, then, Hempel sets out a model of the logic of explanation as it is found in the physical sciences and claims that historical explanation is logically similar and can be made to approximate the model asymptotically as

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[6] _Ibid._, p. 355.

the implicit laws are made explicit. It is important here to note that logical similarity is what is important to Hempel. That Hempel considers the logical form of historical explanation to be similar to that of his scientific model does not imply that the purposes of history and science are the same. Both, Hempel would claim, use laws to explain, but, whereas the primary purpose of history is to explain individual events, the primary purpose of science is to search for general laws. This distinction between logical form and purpose is not as obvious as it might seem.[7]

May Brodbeck has this in mind when she writes, "Controversies over whether or not history is a science typically fail to distinguish two different questions. The first is whether or not the historian seeks to establish laws; the second is whether or not the historian utilizes laws."[8] This distinction would appear to be an obvious one. There is a brief passage in Hempel's article, however, which is difficult to interpret in the light of this distinction:

> It is a rather widely held opinion that history, in contradistinction to the so-called physical sciences, is concerned with the description of particular events of the past rather than with the search for general laws which might govern those events. As a characterization of the type of problem in which some historians are mainly interested, this view probably cannot be denied; as a statement of the theoretical function of general laws in scientific historical research, it is certainly unacceptable.[9]

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[7]Cf. Maurice Mandelbaum, "Historical Explanation: the Problem of 'Covering Laws'", History and Theory, I (1961), 229-242.

[8]May Brodbeck, ed., Readings in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 338.

[9]Op. cit., pp. 344-345.

The word "search" here causes some difficulty. Does Hempel suggest that historians ought to attempt to establish laws, or does he want us to understand that historians merely utilize laws? Throughout the remainder of the article he emphasizes the implicit use of laws by historians. If "search" is connected with the utilization of laws, then Hempel must be using it in the sense of searching for the appropriate laws which are applicable to the instance in question.

It is because of this distinction that we should not accuse Hempel too strongly of trying to make history into a science. Scientists search for laws. Historians, to Hempel, only use them. The historian can become more of a scientist as he makes his explanations approximate more closely to the model. It would seem, then, that here the historian has a criterion by which he can judge the explanatory power of his work. This criterion, however, may tell him only how closely his explanation approximates to the scientific model. The question is still open as to whether there can be other criteria for explanation. The very fact that Hempel outlines a model implies that we can define "explanation". In other words, there is only <u>one</u> type of explanation. It is impossible to explain anything other than scientifically. One has a strong feeling that Hempel is imposing his model on us, that he is defining what explanation should be rather than

observing the instances of "explanation". The very fact that he does not use the word "model" but rather that it is used by his critic, William Dray, might indicate that Hempel is not entirely aware of the fact that he is giving a stipulative, rather than a reportive definition (stipulative with respect to fields of study other than physical science, although, perhaps, reportive for the physical sciences). What Hempel actually does is to abstract a definition of "explanation" from the physical sciences and generalize its usage.

III

WILLIAM DRAY'S CRITIQUE OF HEMPEL'S POSITION

William Dray refers to that type of theory proposed by Hempel as the "covering law model".[1] He gives this theory the adjective "covering" "because it makes use of the notion of bringing a case under a law, i.e. 'covering' it with a law"[2]; that is, "explanation is achieved, and only achieved, by subsuming what is to be explained under a general law."[3] It is his primary aim in his book, Laws and Explanation in History, to "argue that if we are to produce a helpful account of the logic of explanation in history, more is required than a mere 'loosening up' of the covering law model. This model is in fact, so misleading that it ought to be abandoned as a basic account of what it is to give an explanation."[4]

Dray starts his attack on Hempel's model by writing, "The contention I want to examine is that an explanation somehow requires a law, that it is not complete unless the law in question has been verified by an appropriate empirical procedure."[5] In other words, Dray wants to show

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[1] Laws and Explanation in History (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 1.

[2] Loc. cit.

[3] Loc. cit.

[4] Ibid., p. 19.

[5] Ibid., p. 22.

that the covering law model is not a necessary condition of giving an explanation.

Dray invents a case of a positivist trying to convince an historian that he does use laws even though he may not be immediately aware of it. After the historian has rendered his explanation, the positivist will make explicit what he considers to be implicit in the historian's explanation. The historian, on hearing this implicit-rendered-explicit law, Dray claims, would probably hedge at being committed to such a specific form of law. Dray cites Hempel's example of the Dust Bowl farmers,[6] where the historian would probably refuse to admit a law such as, "Farmers will always leave dry land when damper areas are accessible." The positivist would then make the law a more general one in the hope that the historian would concede. In the case cited this might be, "Populations will tend to migrate to regions which offer better living conditions." Dray claims that the historian would continue to hedge until a point is reached where it becomes difficult "to conceive of anything which the truth of the law would rule out."[7]

Here it is important to note what, I think, is the issue that would make historians baulk at Hempel's version

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[6] Ibid., p.28.

[7] Ibid., p. 29.

of explanation - namely, the problem of the universality of of his laws. Hempel has done more than merely move to a higher level of generality when he passes from "Farmers will always leave dry land when damper areas are accessible"[8] to "Populations will tend to migrate to regions which offer better living conditions." The important words in these statements are respectively, "always" and "tend". The meaning of "always" is quite straightforward but "tend" is more complex. "Always" implies universality. The historian might be quite happy to concede the first statement if the word "always" was deleted and replaced by reference to a tendency. I do not think Hempel used the word "tend" without good reason. He must have realized that it was the type of word the historian would use if pressed to state a law. That is, the historian might agree to a law with the word "tend", but not containing "always". This is because "tend" implies non-universality. This can be seen if we contrast "I always tend to ..." with "I sometimes tend to ...." The former makes sense but the word "always" seems unnecessary. The latter expression appears to be all right but it certainly is not commonly used. For instance, I might say, "I sometimes eat too much rich food", or, "I tend to eat too much rich food." The first expression states a fact, sums up what

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[8]Hempel did not actually make this statement, but I shall assume he would agree that historians would not accept it.

happens when I am at a party where there is a great quantity of rich food available. The second statement may refer to the same situations but places the emphasis on a characteristic of mine - that I have a tendency to eat too much rich food. Since a tendency is a characteristic of mine, it can be seen as something relatively stable. I do not have a tendency to do A one day and not to do A the next day. When I say that I tend to eat too much rich food, this would be translated as saying that I like rich food to the point where I will make myself uncomfortable by eating too much of it. "Tend" is often used to replace "usually". "Sometimes" and "usually" do not have the same meaning, quite obviously. "Sometimes" would mean "once in a while", perhaps "less than fifty per cent of the time". "Usually" would mean "most of the time". Thus, to say, "I sometimes tend to ...", would be translated as "I sometimes usually ..." which makes no sense.

Thus in Dray's example of the historian's moving from statements of lesser to statements of greater generality, he is quite right. The historian probably would only stop at a level of generality where the statement of the law would be no more than a triviality, provided all the statements were universal. In the example he has used, however, I think the historian would stop at the second statement - that "Populations will tend to migrate to regions which offer better living conditions". The reason why the historian

would accept this statement is basic and crucial to the whole issue of whether or not the Hempelian position can be maintained. He accepts it because there is always a way out. He can always say, providing he makes his explanation rest on the statement about populations tending to do A, that in the particular case they may not actually do A. In other words, the historian, if he is to grant the use of laws, will mean by "law" some statement of a probabilistic nature as opposed to a universal statement.

Dray is not satisfied with leaving the problem here. Positivists are quite willing to go this far.[9] A probabilistic statement still comes under the general heading "law". At this point the Dray-Hempel controversy appears to be linguistic. It appears that what is at stake is whether or not probabilistic statements are "laws". There is also some ambiguity in the term "probabilistic". If this is to mean "if C, then there is X per cent chance of E" the historian is again likely to baulk. For one thing, he does not have such figures at his fingertips and so it is quite obvious that he cannot be using them to give an explanation. If "probabilistic" means just something other than "if C, then always E", such as "if C, then usually E", the historian may admit that he does use such "laws" but was not aware that

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[9] Hempel in William H. Dray, ed., Philosophical Analysis and History (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 100ff.

he did until the question had been brought forward. Dray seems willing to grant this point, but, although it is now "more difficult for the historian to repudiate any particular candidate [law], yet it does not make it impossible. It is still open to him to make nonsense out of the claim that he is logically committed to anything of importance by insisting that the qualification of the law be increased from 'usually' to 'often', or from 'often' to 'sometimes'".[10] Here, however, I think Dray is not really refuting anything. Instead, the historian is merely substituting the "often" law for the "usually" law. Dray might not be willing to grant this. In any case, his next point is sufficient to refute the positivist:

> Does the "law", "Whenever C then usually E", really explain the fact that in this case an E followed a C? Would not the same "law" have "explained", in the same sense, the non-occurrence of an E as well? ... its explanatory force does not extend to particular occurrences falling under it.[11]

One must admit that here Dray has put his finger on a weakness in any type of probabilistic law. To say that because we have the law that fifty per cent of all coins flipped end up tails does not explain in the sense of "if C then E" why the coin in front of us when flipped landed tails. Even a law having ninety-nine per cent probability does not

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[10] Laws and Explanation in History (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 31.

[11] Loc. cit.

"explain" the event subsumed under it. The event to be explained might have been of the remaining one per cent.

Here Hempel's claim of the logical similarity between prediction and explanation would appear to break down. It seems as if the ninety-nine per cent statement would explain but not predict. This is true as far as the individual event is concerned. As May Brodbeck points out, statistical statements have reference to classes of individuals and as such can predict "only a so-called mass event, that is, the frequency with which an attribute will be distributed in the given class."[12] Thus, Brodbeck claims, a statistical law is just as "universal", when its terms of reference are considered, as is the type of law that usually goes by that name. Once these terms of reference or applicability are understood, it is readily seen that Hempel's statement of logical similarity between prediction and explanation is correct. Brodbeck gives an example[13] to show that although this similarity is not apparent, it is the case. In this example we can explain why certain animals survive a flood (because animals which can swim are more likely to survive) but we could not have predicted that they would survive. The error here is in singling out particular

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[12]"Explanation, Prediction, and 'Imperfect' Knowledge", in May Brodbeck, ed., Readings in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 377.

[13]Ibid., pp. 377-378.

animals. We cannot explain why an individual animal survived but can state that more animals that can swim survived.

Statistical laws, then, even for a positivist like Brodbeck, do not explain individual occurrences on the positivist model. Here Brodbeck and Dray are in agreement. In the above quotation from Dray the "Would the same 'law' not have 'explained', in the same sense ..." is important. Dray is not saying that the "law" does explain but only that if it does explain for the positive case, it does likewise for the negative case. The positivists, however, are likely to claim that statistical laws only indicate our ignorance of the set of universal laws that when combined in a specified manner would yield the statistical result. For the positivist, for example, it should theoretically be possible to predict the side on which a coin will land, when flipped, if all the initial conditions are given. The laws of mechanics would give the position and angle of inclination of the coin at any time from the initial conditions, so one would merely calculate the angle of inclination the coin would have after an elapsed time when it has returned to the hand. This would be an immensely complicated procedure, however, and would require accurate and detailed measurement of many factors. The statistical law will tell that the coin has a fifty per cent chance of landing on either side no matter what the initial conditions were. For this reason statistical laws may appear to be just summaries of observations. What is

happening here is that the positivist is allowing the statistical law to stand until he can substitute it with a set of detailed universal laws. This is why Dray is so adamant in his refusal to accept any type of law, even a vague probabilistic law of the "if C, then usually E" type. The "usually" is made to suffice by the positivist for a statistical law, which in turn is made to suffice until a set of universal laws is available. The "usually" , in a way, holds open the position in the model for universal laws.

So far, Dray has eliminated several alternatives to which the positivist can push the historian. If the laws are universal they must be so general as to be trivial. If they are probabilistic in one way or another they do not explain particular occurrences. The positivists, it might seem, still have a way out. Hempel openly admits that historians do not explicitly use laws. They give "explanation sketches" which require "filling out" (making explicit the implicit laws which allow movement from "cause" to "effect") rather than complete explanations. Dray gives the example[14] of a supposed law for the explanation of Louis XIV's unpopularity, "Rulers who pursue policies detrimental to their subjects' interests become unpopular." The historian would refuse this because it does not specify the policies; rulers who pursue

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[14] Laws and Explanation in History (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 33.

any policies detrimental to their subjects' interests are not necessarity unpopular; it depends on the total situation. A dialectic is then set up between positivist and historian, the positivist willing to incorporate whatever the historian feels necessary into the law. Eventually the "law" has the form, "Rulers who do X, Y, Z ... become unpopular." It becomes ever more difficult for the historian to deny that the law allows prediction of the unpopularity of the ruler. (Prediction is important here because it is the positivists' criterion for completion of an explanation.) It might be argued at this point, says Dray, that the specific laws arrived at at each point in the dialectic are not logically required by the historian's explanation. The historian need not at any point accept the temporary "law". As Dray put it, "No matter how complicated the expression with which we complete a statement of the form 'E because ...', it is part of the 'logic' of such 'because' statements that additions to the explanatory clause are never ruled out by our acceptance of the original statement."[15] It is easy to give an example of what Dray means. Suppose I want an explanation of why the light went on. Someone says that it went on because he turned it on. I retort that that does not explain why the light went on. He could reply that it went on because he turned it on and because the light bulb was a new one that

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[15] Ibid., p. 35.

worked. This could obviously go on for quite some time. The positivist might argue in the case of Louis XIV that some law is required, "Any ruler pursuing policies and in circumstances exactly like those of Louis XIV would become unpopular." Thus, some sort of generality is logically involved, but it turns out to be a vacuous one. The "exactly", as Dray put it, "rules out the possibility which calling it a'law' at first seems to envisage."[16]

According to Dray, then, the positivist model, such as that given by Hempel, says something about explanation, but its conclusions are pushed too far. First, if any laws explain, only universal, and not probabilistic laws do so. Second, such "laws" are of two types. They are either so general that they explain anything, or else they can be used to explain only the specific case in question. An example of the latter type of "law" is cited by Dray, "Any people like the French in the aspects specified would dislike a ruler like Louis in the respects specified."[17] This, Dray claims, is hardly what the positivists would call a law in the scientific sense. It is not "the sort of thing which could be 'appealed to', or 'used'".[18]

Dray's next step is to attempt to show that what the

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[16] Ibid., p. 36.

[17] Ibid., p. 38.

[18] Loc. cit.

positivist considers to be empirical laws in the historian's explanation are really only principles of inference. He claims that the "law" which the historian admitted "was elicited simply by means of the demand that the historian be consistent."[19] In other words, if the historian says that E because C_1 ... C_n, then this statement "commits him, in consistency, to reasoning in a similar way in any further cases which may turn up, since he claims universal validity for the corresponding argument, 'p so q'".[20] Dray thinks that this explains why, in the case given above, the historian refused to admit that he was committed to a law when set upon by the positivist. The historian probably believes that such a complex series of circumstances as that symbolized by "p" will never recur. Thus, he is unlikely to assent to the statement or "law" , "if (whenever) p then q". If the hypothetical were to have a meaning such that "if such an unlikely complexity of circumstances (p) were ever to recur, then q", Dray claims, then the historian would probably accept it. It is the "whenever" which bothers the historian. What Dray wants to do is to "make a distinction between general statements which express empirical generalizations and those which merely project in general terms the argument of the historian

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[19] Ibid., p. 39.

[20] Ibid., p. 41.

in a particular case."[21]

In other words, Dray would say, the historian does not draw upon a stock of laws when he wants to explain. He does not use statements of "if C then E" form, but for the sake of consistency he is forced to admit that when he says, "E because C", should such a complex, C, again occur then E would follow, or if the complex, E, occurs then it must have occurred because of a similar complex, C. The "if C then E" thus results from the historian's argument and not the argument from the "if C then E".

Dray writes:

> Distinguishing between empirical laws and principles of inference also helps to explain how the logician could remain so firmly convinced that, despite the historian's reluctance to agree, the explanation must exhibit the pattern set forth in the model. For the logician will regard it as obvious that every rational argument must have a principle - a kind of covert universality which is brought out by what I have called the demand for consistency.[22]

A few pages later he writes:

> There is no point in saying that it [the law] is used, or functions, in the explanation; and there is no point in asserting it except to register one's belief that the inference drawn was a reasonable one.[23]

The two important words here are "consistency" and "reasonable". Dray seems to think that the positivists want

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[21] Ibid., p. 42.

[22] Ibid., p. 42.

[23] Ibid., p. 44.

to draw up a logical model where the "if - then" functions only as a logical connective, such that if the historian ever states $C_1 \ldots C_n$ again he will have to use "if C then E" for the sake of logical consistency. The positivist would question why the inferences were reasonable and how they satisfy the demand for consistency. It is not enough to say that the historian will reason consistently if similar circumstances occur again. The historian does not believe that they ever will, so any promise he makes to be consistent is in reality a promise he does not think he will ever have to keep. The positivist claims that the cogency of the historian's explanation lies in a different type of consistency and reasonableness. The inference is reasonable because it fits in with what the historian has learned about how people regularly behave. What he says in his explanation is consistent with what he has observed about people in his everyday life. Although these regularities and observations may not be empirical laws in a strict sense, they do provide a basis for explanation which is somewhat more tangible than the logical connections which Dray seems to be claiming the positivists have in mind, or to which he reduces their argument.

Having examined some of Dray's more cogent arguments against the necessity of covering laws for explanation, I shall now look at his argument that even if there were a set

of laws or generalizations of which the event to be explained is an instance, this set would not be sufficient to explain the event. Basically, Dray's argument against sufficiency is, that by saying that A happens because that is what always happens we are not necessarily explaining A.

Dray gives the example of an explanation of the seizure of a motor-car engine.[24] The answer, says a mechanic, is that there is a leak in the oil reservoir. This knowledge, that when there is a leak in the oil reservoir the engine will seize, may have been obtained by induction. This, however, would not explain why such a leak would lead to a seizure. Such an explanation would require information as to how the lubrication system works and why it is necessary for the operation of the car. It would be necessary to trace a continuous series of events from the leakage to the seizure.

There are two objections, says Dray, to this "model of continuous series", but both can be answered. The chain of events can be made more and more complete and, hence, the most complete series will be the best explanation. Also, each link in this chain of events is subsumed under a generalization of the form that it always follows events of the type preceding it in the chain. Both of these objections, Dray answers by what he calls the "pragmatic dimension" of explanation. In answer to the first objection, Dray says

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[24] Ibid., pp. 67-68.

that a particular series may be continuous for one person but not for another. What is an explanation for the mechanic may not be so for the layman. Whether a series can be said to explain or not is dependent on who the explainer and explainee are, or what is presupposed without explicit mention in the explanatory series. Thus, the series does not have to be of infinite length to explain. There is a point where it can be said to explain for every individual but this point will vary, depending on how much knowledge the person has to whom the event is being explained.

The second objection is also answered pragmatically but it is not so obvious how, at first. It is true that the gross event may be explained by sub-laws. That is, the seizure of the engine can be explained by giving the series each event of which may be subsumed under a law. The sub-law is, thus, part of the explanation of the gross event but does not cover it; the sub-law also covers the sub-event but does not explain it. The sub-event would be explained by a series of sub-sub-events with their corresponding sub-sub-laws. These sub-sub-laws would not explain their sub-sub-events and so, it would appear, an infinite regress is set up. If this is the case, nothing can be explained unless a point is reached where there is some ultimate law that needs no explanation. As Dray points out, however, it is important

to keep in mind what we are explaining. If it is the question, "Why did the engine seize?" a series such as, the oil leaked out of the reservoir; therefore, there was no oil in the cylinders to lubricate the motion of the pistons; therefore, the friction of the pistons against the cylinder walls built up to the point where the metal surfaces expanded and grew hot; finally, a point was reached where they locked and fused. Thus, the problem of explanation is pragmatic with respect to explainer, explainee, and, finally, the event to be explained. We could go on to ask for an explanation of why metal surfaces expand when hot but it is important to note that we have changed our question and are asking for an explanation on a different level. For an explanation to be complete, it is not necessary that it be in terms of what is itself explained, but rather in terms of what, at that moment, or for that purpose of inquiry, or at that level, does not require explanation. As Dray says, "It is part of the logic of 'explanation' that if something can be explained, there is something else which does not require explanation. But the reason it does not require explanation is not necessarily that we know its explanation already."[25]

Several important points have come to light in this discussion. Among these are the distinction between

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[25] Ibid., p. 72.

individual events and kinds of events, the "pragmatic dimension" of explanation, and the failure of probabilistic statements to explain individual events. Dray has attempted, with some success, to show that covering laws are neither necessary nor sufficient for explanation. That is, we can have an explanation without using covering laws and even if covering laws are used something else must be added to give an explanation. Although the discussion so far has dealt with what an explanation is not, it remains to say what it is. If covering laws are not necessary for explanation, what is? If covering laws are not sufficient for explanation, what else is required?

Before getting too deep into these topics, however, I would first like to examine the concept "cause" because this concept is inextricably interwoven with explanation.

IV

AN EXAMINATION OF THE CONCEPT "CAUSE"

It would seem that when someone demands an explanation of an event, he may, in some sense of "explanation", want to know the cause or causes of the event. If we want to get a clearer understanding of what it means to explain something, it will, therefore, be necessary to take a close look at what is meant by saying that something "causes" something else. What are the criteria for picking out X rather than Z as the cause of Y? Questions of this nature can best be illuminated by examining when and how the concept "cause" is used.

Hempel avoids causal terminology. He uses the symbols "C" and "E" to suggest "cause" and "effect"."In every case where an event of a specified kind C occurs at a certain place and time, an event of a specified kind E will occur at a place and time which is related in a specified manner to the place and time of the occurrence of the first event."[1] As it is, therefore, it is rather difficult to say what Hempel's views on causality are.

What lies at the basis of Hempel's position is the Humean account of causation - we call X the cause of Y because we are accustomed to seeing an X occur before a Y

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[1] "The Function of General Laws in History", in Patrick Gardiner, ed., Theories of History (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959), p. 345.

in a specified manner that is the same for every occurrence of X and Y; whenever we have an X we have a Y. It is important to note that Hempel uses the words, "in every case". He also mentions the spatio-temporal relations of X and Y. It is not just that X and Y are constantly conjoined but also that they are conjoined in a set pattern. This is quite important to the Humean and Hempelian concept of "cause". This constant conjunction and geometrically constant relationship is what leads us to think that X in some way forces Y to occur. There is something, we feel, in the X which necessitates the occurrence of Y. It is not just coincidental that X and Y always occur together in the same relationship.

Hume regarded the felt necessity to pass from X to Y as simply psychological. In other words, there was not necessarily anything in the X which "caused" the Y. In noticing that X always precedes Y in a set manner, we are just led to think that this was the case, the human mind tending as it does to behave in a certain fashion. Hempel regards this tendency to move from X to Y as grounded in the derivation of the law connecting X and Y from a broader theory.

We do use the word "necessary" in connection with "cause", however. We would say that C was necessary for the occurrence of E, where C and E are individual events, if without C there would not occur E, providing that

everything else remained the same. The positivists would say much the same thing, only about types of events and not about individual events. They would phrase it to read, "only if X then Y", where X and Y are types of events. The positivists would also insist that "cause" entails something more than mere necessity. They would claim that the cause of Y is that set of necessary conditions which is sufficient to bring about Y. For a type of event like lighting a match, for example, there must be oxygen present, the match must be dry, and so forth. Each of these conditions is necessary. The whole set of them must be present to bring about the lighting of the match. Non-positivists, too, would want a criterion of sufficiency. In this case the sufficiency is often provided by a ceteris paribus clause. For both interpretations the problem of sufficiency is the more difficult. For the positivist, the problem is how many necessary conditions and their corresponding connecting laws are required for the Y-type event to occur. For the non-positivist, the sufficiency criterion is usually satisfied by some notion of the "real" cause, as opposed to a merely concomitant event. It would not, for example, be claimed that the shape of Cleopatra's nose was a "cause" of the downfall of the Roman Empire. The conditions sufficient to cause the downfall of the Empire would be some list that would not require information about Cleopatra's

nose. Most of the conditions sufficient to "cause" an historical event would be necessary for the occurrence of the event, but not all of them would always be mentioned in an historical account of the "cause" of an event E. The "cause" is usually used in reference to the "real" cause or the most important cause, the condition that primarily brought about E; whereas "causes" would indicate the sufficient set of conditions.

The problem still remains, however, why we would infer that X, and not Z, is the cause of Y, even though Z may occur with equal regularity previous to Y. In other words, why do we think X is necessary for Y but that Z is not? Red sky, for example, might be observed to precede rain regularly. Since there is sometimes red sky and then no rain, red sky is clearly not a sufficient condition of rain, but red sky might be taken as a cause of rain in the sense of a necessary condition. The red sky might be necessary for the rain but not sufficient; certain other atmospheric conditions might also need to be present. We could not deny that the red sky is necessary on the grounds that sometimes red sky occurs without rain, because it might be that some other condition was also missing. The problem of why we choose some X to be necessary for Y, and not some Z, is, therefore, still a very puzzling one. It is a problem that arises for sufficient as well as necessary conditions, on either the positivist or non-positivist account

of "cause".

It makes some sense to say that "X, and X causes Y" does explain Y, where "causes" is not analyzed and X can be a complex concatenation of events. When Dray sets out to criticize what he calls the "causal version of the model", where the causal laws take the form "X causes Y", what he wants to criticize is the special Humean and Hempelian sense of "cause" outlined above. He wishes to criticize that sense of "cause" in "X causes Y", where "X causes Y" is equivalent to "whenever X then Y". It is his claim that a distinction can be made between "offering a causal analysis of, and applying causal laws to, a particular happening",[2] and that it is the former in which historians engage. It is part of Dray's aim to show that causal language is applicable in history but that "cause" means something other than constant conjunction. If it were merely constant conjunction, according to Dray, he has already shown that covering laws are neither sufficient nor necessary for explanation. If Dray is right, and "cause" has a meaning exclusive of its positivist and Humean meaning, this explains why Hempel is so distrustful of causal language. It also makes unnecessary the distrust which idealists, such as Oakeshott, have for causal language. The idealists, Dray claims,[3] tend to think

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[2] Laws and Explanation in History (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 90.

[3] Ibid., pp. 110-117.

that "cause" means Humean "cause", and since this implies laws and they are against laws in history, it is easy to see why they eschew causal language. What is at the base of the idealist dislike of causal language is their libertarianism. For them causal language would mean causal laws, and causal laws imply a deterministic universe, one which they find repugnant to human freedom. If the occurrence of an event is completely determined in advance, there would be no place for human will to alter events.

As in the previous chapter where there was shown to be a dichotomy between scientific explanation and non-scientific explanation, so it will be seen that there is a dichotomy between the positivist or scientific account of "cause" and the non-scientific account or accounts. Dray does not try to refute the scientific account. What he does attempt is a demonstration that the word "cause" has a non-scientific meaning. If he is right, then an historian can legitimately speak of A as the cause of B without committing himself to the covering law model.

As was pointed out above, to say that X causes Y is to claim more than constant conjunction. It also claims that there is some ground why, whenever X occurs, Y will occur. The positivist would claim that this ground or difference between observed correlation and necessary, causal connection is a general theory which relates X and Y as cause and effect.

This theory is the scientific answer to the potency of the word "cause". In this sense when we say "X causes Y" we have in a sense explained Y, where "explain" does not just mean placing Y under a covering law of constant conjunction, "if X then Y". The actual explanation is done by the theory.

Dray accepts theoretical explanation as a valid way of grounding causal claims in science but does not think it applicable to history. Although he does not explain why, it is surely quite obvious. Theories are constructed on the basis of empirical observations. Their effect is to codify and systematize laws. They link up the observations into a logical whole and, thus, scientifically explain them. Hence, if Dray were willing to accept the idea that theories ground causal claims in history, then he would also be indirectly accepting the covering law model. He would be saying that constant conjunctions(covering laws) explain events, since theories are derived from and made to fit the the observations or constant conjunctions. Since it is Dray's main thesis that subsumption under laws does not explain, except, perhaps, in scientific context alone, he is compelled to reject explanation by theory, as well.

The alternative for theoretical explanation in history, for Dray, is the historian's judgment in the particular situation. Thus, "cause" is interpreted as the necessary condition in the individual-event sense. In

rendering a causal analysis the historian must judge what are the causes. His judgment in a sense takes the place of theory in a scientific explanation. Where the scientific theory provides the grounds for the explanation of types of events, the historian, since he is dealing with particular events in a situation which is regarded as intrinsically unique, must judge the causes in each individual case.

The historian, says Dray, must show two things when he claims that a particular X caused Y. He must show "that the condition called the cause was really necessary, i.e. that without it what is to be explained would not have happened. He must also be able to show that there is some reason for singling out the condition in question from among the other necessary conditions."[4] Dray called these criteria the "inductive" and "pragmatic" tests of causal selection, respectively.

I shall deal first with the "inductive" criterion of cause. Contrary to the "pragmatic" criterion, which is something of which Hempel makes no mention, the inductive criterion uses the same vocabulary as that which the positivists use. The contrast between the two criteria would seem to be one of relative objectivity. The pragmatic test, as its name suggests, has its basis outside the events that are being studied. "Pragmatic" suggests that this

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[4] Ibid., p. 98.

condition is chosen as a cause in the light of some purpose or end. This is not to say that it is not on other grounds a cause, but that it is particularly emphasized. It is important to the historian and it is this importance that is the basic difference between the "pragmatic" cause and the other "inductive" causes. The pragmatic aspect of the cause is not something inherent in the cause itself, (as opposed to anything that is "inductively" inherent) but something that the historian considers about this particular X to make it of greater importance to its corresponding Y, or to the story he is telling, and, therefore, usually chooses it as a cause before proving its necessity.

The important concept in the inductive criterion is that of "necessity". As mentioned above, if C is necessary for E, then, if C does not occur, neither does E, all things being equal. The difficulty here is the ceteris paribus clause. The historian, Dray claims, would say that "C causes E in this particular situation."[5] The "in this particular situation" is ambiguous. Dray probably means that the conditions of E and the events surrounding it are unique in some sense, but there is a vagueness in the temporal boundaries of the "situation".

On the surface, it would appear that "cause" does have a meaning independently of the particular situation.

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[5] Ibid., p. 102.

Dray, as mentioned above, is interested in differentiating between the causal analysis of an event and the application of causal laws to the event. The historian, he points out, would not have to know laws of the "only if X, then Y" form to establish the particular X as a cause in this particular situation. It must be questioned, however, what right the historian has to assert his X as a cause of the Y under examination.

Both Dray and Patrick Gardiner have an answer to this question. Dray says that for the historian to see if X is necessary if Y is to occur, he need only "think away" the X in question and see what difference its non-occurrence would make in the light of what else he knows about the particular situation.[6] Gardiner says that we can better understand what is meant by "cause" in a given case, and, hence, "necessity", if we translate the historian's explanation into the form of the "contrary-to-fact conditional".[7] Gardiner's handling of this particular question has the advantage over that of Dray by showing the differences in meaning that "necessity" can have depending on what is expected by the question asked. When we say, for example, that a certain series of shots on the boulevards caused the

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[6] Ibid., p. 104.

[7] The Nature of Historical Explanation (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 106-107.

1848 Revolution, this could be translated into the contrary-to-fact conditional, "If the shots had not occurred the revolution would not have occurred." This is what Dray had in mind by saying that the historian "thinks away" the "cause" in question. Gardiner goes on to make explicit what is implicit in the claim that the revolution would not have occurred. The contrary-to-fact conditional given above is an attempt to answer the question, "Did the shots cause the 1848 Revolution?" or, "Were the shots necessary for the occurrence of the 1848 Revolution?" Gardiner points out that this is ambiguous in the sense that it could indicate two different questions. Do we want to know if the shots were necessary for the revolution to occur <u>when</u> it did and in the manner in which it did, or do we want to know if the shots were necessary if the revolution were to occur at all?

It would seem that the answer to this question would be that we want to know if the shots were necessary for the revolution to occur when it did, since it is a specific historical event which the historian is examining. If the question were whether or not the shots were necessary for the revolution to occur at all, this would seem to imply that one had in mind something like, "Are shots necessary to cause revolutions in situations which resemble this one in certain respects?" Perhaps this is the interpretation Gardiner desires, since he wants "regularity" to

have a part in explanation in some nebulous way.

If we accept the first interpretation, and take the causal claim to be that the shots were necessary for the occurrence of the revolution when, in fact, it did occur, in other words, necessary for a specific, historical event, we have Dray's case of "thinking away" the candidate cause. In the process of thinking away the suggested cause the historian would have to assume that the other conditions obtained. This is implied, says Dray, in the phrase, "the situation being what it was", which indicates that the historian has taken account of the other features of the situation.

Dray then makes a comment which is difficult to interpret.[8] He mentions that if the necessity of the candidate cause were seriously challenged, the historian would be required to bring in all the data, to render a "complete explanation" (which, for Dray, would consist of a complete description of the chain of events leading up to the event whose cause is in question, although the "complete" here is question-begging):

> This is not to say that, after all, we must enlarge our conception of a cause to that of a sufficient condition rather than a merely necessary one. It is rather that, if pressed to show conclusively that

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[8] Dray, Op. cit. p. 104.

> X was necessary, the historian might have to specify what, in fact, the other conditions were - i.e. to rebut the suggestion that even without X they constituted a sufficient set.[9]

What Dray is attempting to say here is that a causal explanation is by no means a complete explanation. A causal explanation highlights the important features in the chain of events leading up to the situation in question. I think Dray has missed a difficulty here. I do not think that if the historian were asked whether or not some specific event before the event in question "caused" the event in question, he would mention the "necessity" of the event. He would not "think away" the candidate cause. The historian would connect "necessity" with determinism in some vague sense and would hesitate to say an event was necessary for the occurrence of some other event. He would answer the question, "Was event C necessary?" with some remark to the effect that he does not know whether he would put it that way, but that C did occur, E occurred after it, and C contributed something to bringing about E. Perhaps the revolution would have occurred even without C; the revolution might have been in the offing for some time and C just triggered things off. C, then, is necessary in one sense. Had C not occurred, the revolution as the specific, historical event which it was would not have

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[9] Loc. cit.

occurred when and in the manner in which it did. It was a "cause" in the sense of being one of the lead-up events to the outbreak of the revolution.

Therefore, Dray is in a sense correct to say that the historian would give a complete description of the chain of events leading up to the revolution if he agreed on the idea of "necessity" in relation to "cause", but I do not think most historians would like the use of "necessity" in such a situation. The historian might say that a particular event is a "cause" because it was particularly pre-eminent in leading the revolution to take on the form that it did - not because it was necessary for its occurrence as opposed to its non-occurrence. When the historian accedes to Dray's "necessity" he is only affirming that it was an event in the chain of events leading up to the revolution and not some completely extraneous event like whether or not the sun shone on a particular day.

Before the historian has shown that the condition X is a necessary[10] condition of Y, he probably has chosen X for a pragmatic reason. The necessity of a cause is more important than its pragmatic aspect because without the fulfilment of the requirement of necessity, the particular X

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[10] From here on, I shall use "necessary" in a vague sense that would be acceptable to an historian, not in the sense in which Dray uses it. Often where I have used "necessary" this could be replaced by "necessary, if the historian thinks necessity is a requirement of causal analysis in history." Some historians would probably agree with Dray, but not the majority.

would not be a cause. The pragmatic aspect is temporally prior, however, in most cases. That is, the historian chooses some X which according to his research has impressed him as being more important than other conditions or events prior to the Y-event. There are several reasons for which the historian might choose a particular X as having more significance in causing Y. Some of these reasons might be widely held by other historians as valid for choosing X in this particular way. If a particular X were chosen simply on pragmatic grounds and did not meet the inductive criterion, the historian would be guilty of subjective bias. This may or may not be intentional and the problem of historical objectivity is certainly a complex one with which I have no intention of dealing. Suffice to say, however, that any bias of the historian toward a particular kind of factor will make him very unlikely to give up his X as unnecessary without more than due consideration.

This is not to imply in any way that Dray's pragmatic criterion is the sign of historiographic bias. Indeed, this is only one type of historical "pragmatism". Such "pragmatism" when it comes to the choosing of causes is probably the distinguishing feature of non-scientific cause, where scientific cause is of the type "X's cause Y's". Often the question, "What caused Y?" is answered by "X caused Y", where X is a single event or a single cause. Instead of translating

"What caused Y?" as "What are the causes of Y?" we often translate it as "What was the cause of Y?" This is most often the case in everyday language. In this way, everyday language is more "pragmatic" than historical texts. Gardiner gives the example of the lighting of a match.[11] When asked what caused the match to light, most people would answer, "So-and-so struck it." There would be no question of bringing in a sufficient set of conditions. We would not say, unless the questioner hinted that he wanted something other than the normal, obvious answer, that the presence of oxygen and the dryness of the match caused its lighting. It is not that we do not realize that this must be the case. Such conditions we would usually group under a ceteris paribus clause. It is understood that the matches must be dry and other conditions hold, but when we are asked why the match lighted we tend to select what is often called the "manipulative" condition. That is, we select that condition which we, as human beings, can control. Thus, what is chosen as the cause of an event is often largely dependent on its practical value. For instance, says Gardiner, when the causes of a war are investigated, economic, rather than psychological factors are considered more important. The reason for this choice is that we consider it to be more within our power

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[11] The Nature of Historical Explanation (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 11.

to control economic conditions than to regulate human psychology, even though we freely admit that the latter are relevant. This manipulative condition might also refer to what is left un-done, as Dray points out.[12] Here the cause of Y was somebody's not doing X. Had they done X, Y would not have occurred. The condition referred to may also lead to the prevention of Y as opposed to its production, but in all such cases the practical, manipulative aspect is emphasized.

The condition subject to manipulation varies from imdividual to individual. Although the striking of the match is the manipulative factor for the man who wants a fire with which to warm himself, the manufacturer of the matches would be interested in some of the other conditions covered by the ceteris paribus clause. In this way what is considered the cause of the match lighting varies in a way analogous to what is considered to explain the seizing of the automobile engine. It is still the manipulative aspect that is of interest, but what condition is considered to be manipulative will vary depending on who demands to know the cause.

Another aspect of the pragmatic test can be seen in the notion of the cause, or the real cause. These terms do not imply that the other conditions leading up to Y are not

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[12] Op. cit., p. 98.

necessary. There is no sense in which one cause is objectively (independently of pragmatic criteria) more "real" than another, presuming that they are both necessary. The "real" cause is merely that cause which is selected on some pragmatic grounds as being of more importance than the other causes. The criterion of importance often depends on the level of generality at which the causal explanation is given. Gardiner gives the example[13] of a journalist and an historian who each give an account of the cause of the First World War. The journalist asserts that the incident at Sarajevo is "the" cause of the war, whereas the historian gives another cause. The two writers are not contradicting each other in this case. The journalist is restricting himself to the period of intense activity just prior to the outbreak of the war. The historian, who is giving a more general account of the period, depending on his interests, may state ecomomic, individual, diplomatic, or political conditions as the "real" cause of the war.

What is often chosen as the "real" cause is that condition which leads to a deviation from the normal state of affairs.[14] Gardiner gives the example[15] of a man who is

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[13] The Nature of Historical Explanation (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 105.

[14] Dray, Op. cit., p. 101.

[15] The Nature of Historical Explanation (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 102.

suffering from indigestion after eating parsnips. Normally, he can eat good helpings of parsnips with no adverse reaction. The night before, however, the same man has been out at a party and has consumed a large quantity of alcohol. The "real" cause in this case is the consumption of alcohol since it is the condition which deviates from the normal state of affairs. The eating of parsnips might also be a necessary cause of the indigestion, however, since it did not occur until after the parsnips had been eaten. A counter-example might be given of a man who is a chronic alcoholic but does not normally suffer from indigestion. He eats parsnips and has indigestion. Here we have the reverse case of the above. This time the eating of parsnips is the "real" cause. It is quite possible that if such examples were quite common we might be led to think that if anyone ate parsnips and consumed alcohol, the result would be indigestion. Here both the consumption of alcohol and the indulgence in parsnips are necessary conditions. This example plainly shows that the pragmatic aspect of cause is something superimposed on the condition of necessity.

Some of the different uses of "cause" having been investigated, it now remains to see whether or not to give the causes of Y is to explain Y. The answer to this, I suggest, will not be of univocal nature. Gardiner's statement that causal laws may be used as guidelines to further

research,[16] suggests that, although the causes of Y may in some way help to explain Y, they do not do so adequately. It might be argued that the answer to the question of whether or not to state the causes of Y is to explain Y, depends on what we mean by "explain". If we are to determine whether or not the causal analysis of a situation is to be considered as in that class of entities called "explanations", we shall first be required to define the range of that class. This statement might lead us to believe that answering the question of whether or not a causal analysis is an explanation is done in the same way as answering the question, "Is the shape before us in that class designated 'circles'?" There are several reasons why this is not so. We have already seen that "cause" has several meanings depending on its context. "Cause" has meanings that appear to be contradictory. The Humean "cause" refers to constant conjunction, whereas in some cases "cause" refers to the exception to the normal state of affairs. It is hoped that this thesis will show that "explanation" is just as difficult to define and that it, too, has many different meanings dependent on context. To give a rather rough analogy, it is difficult to see if area A fits into area B, where these areas represent classes, if the areas themselves have no definite boundaries. At this point little more can be said than that not all explanations

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[16] Ibid., p. 93.

are causal but that causal analyses do help to explain in many cases.

V

THE MEANING OF "EXPLANATION"

So far I have examined the Hempelian account of explanation and dealt with what seem to me to be Dray's better arguments against the nesessity and sufficiency of such a model. Although in some contexts, mainly the physical sciences, the Hempelian model does explain, it does not do so in others. It would seem, therefore, that "explanation" has more than one meaning. Hempel's model is not incorrect. That is, it does not completely lack explanatory power. On the other hand, however, an explanation need not require the use of covering laws. Where the Hempelian model does go astray is not in its form but in its claim to universal application. The Hempelian model is one type of explanation, a technical, stipulative definition of "explanation".

Dray's emphasis on the pragmatic dimension of explanation is important here. "Pragmatic" suggests that there is not a definition of "explanation", but rather that "explanation" has several meanings depending on its context. We have examined one type of explanation in detail, the causal explanation. It might be argued that the Hempelian model does not explain, but that neither does a causal "explanation". An attempt might be made in such a case to find another type of explanation that would explain. I would like to argue that to try to classify types of explanation

is to approach the problem in the wrong way. We might understand "type" to mean that this is an historical explanation as opposed to a sociological explanation or a chemical explanation. Some attempt will be made in the next chapter to see whether or not there are such "types" of explanation, namely in the case of historical explanation. When I say that to claim that there are types of explanation is the wrong approach to the problem, however, I use "type" in a second sense. Here, I mean not that explanations are classified by the subject matter which they claim to explain, but rather that they are classified as Hempelian or causal explanations. When I say that such a search for types is wrong, I am saying neither that Hempelian "explanations" or causal "explanations" or some other type of "explanation" does explain, nor that any or all of them do not explain. What I am claiming is that "explanation" must also have a second pragmatic dimension. This second pragmatic dimension has been mentioned earlier. Dray himself says that whether or not X explains "depends on who says it and to whom - or, to put the matter in more formal terms, it depends on what else is presupposed, or contextually supplied."[1] Thus, it would seem, an explanation is an explanation with respect to a certain person, not with respect to any form it might have.

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[1] Laws and Explanation in History (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 67.

A causal "explanation" may not explain for me. Another causal "explanation" may explain. This would suggest that X is an explanation as far as I am concerned if it satisfies me in a particular way. What this "particular way" is can perhaps be elucidated by examining what "explain" means in ordinary language.

Before examining the ordinary meaning of "explain" I would like to point out that this second pragmatic dimension of "explain" may lie at the base of the argument between Hempel and Dray. It is quite possible that Hempel thinks all explanations are either explicitly or implicitly of the form given in his covering law model, because to him the only X's which count as explanations would conform in some way to this model.[2] In other words, certain types of "explanation" will explain for some people but not for others. The reason for this, as pointed out earlier, may be that Hempel and others like him may consciously or unconsciously have a deterministic view of the universe.

There must be some features of explanations that are common, otherwise it would make little sense to have words such as "explain" and "explanation". Unfortunately, both Gardiner and Dray have very little to say on the topic of

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[2] I do not imply here that Hempel realizes that this is the case. On the contrary, he would probably object that he has formalized the implicit structure of any act of explanation. This objection could be answered by some sort of empirical testing whereby different types of "explanation" are given for X and the person undergoing the test must choose which "explanation" does explain X for him.

"explanation" in ordinary language. Gardiner sees everyday explanation as a type of causal explanation based on some type of regularity.[3] "Regularity" is an attempt on Gardiner's part to take advantage of some of the features of the Hempelian model without its tight formalism. Dray says that to explain something is to reduce its obscurity or difficulty or make it intelligible.[4] This can be done by giving causes, reasons, or more detail. This is consistent with the second pragmatic dimension. By explaining X to Y we make it intelligible to him. The "to him" is of importance. For Z to be an explanation of X, it must be satisfactory to or "explain" X to Y. Thus, an explanation is not just of X, but for Y. For this very reason, there are grounds for saying that what Gardiner, Hempel, and Dray say about explanation is in each case right, in a sense, provided they add "for me". It is for this reason that Gardiner and Dray say little about common language explanation. There is little that is to be said except that if Z renders X intelligible to me and satisfies[5] me in this way, then Z is

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[3] The Nature of Historical Explanation (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 5-27.

[4] Op. cit., pp. 75-76.

[5] When I say that Z "satisfies" Y, it might seem that an obvious objection would be what are the criteria of "satisfaction". This, however, is to miss the point. When I say that Z satisfies Y, I mean satisfaction to be irreducible. Z might satisfy me today but not tomorrow, and, hence, is not a reflection of previous knowledge.

an explanation of X as far as I am concerned. For someone else, X might not be adequate, but if it is for me, then for me it explains. Sometimes Z may consist of causes, sometimes of "regularities", sometimes of human motives, or, maybe on occasions, just some more detail. The explainer must try out these until I say that, yes, that explains it. To say that Z is the explanation is to say Z is the explanation given by those who should know (for example, the press) and, thus, may imply that for me, however, it does not explain X. In other words, it is an explanation, where it is assumed that it explains X for somebody (for example, the newspaper editor who wrote it up) and is,thus, a possible explanation for others. To say Z is the explanation may also mean that Z is the explanation as far as I am concerned. What is important to note is that whenever the word "explanation" is used, it is used with the idea that the given Z will render an X intelligible to a Y.[6] Something

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[6]For example, Z might be an explanation having to do with astrology. Somebody gives the explanation that X occurred because of some astronomical phenomenon and this explains X for Y. It might not explain X for Y_2, however, because Y_2 does not believe in astrology. Y cannot say why Z explains X. He does not know why astrology should be able to explain things for him, and, thus, to say Z explains X to Y because Y has certain beliefs is saying very little. Z might not explain X to Y_3 who also believes in astrology, since astrology is not as systematic as natural science. There is just something about Z that explains X to Y. Z satisfies Y and this satisfaction is irreducible. Why can we say that Chamberlain's giving way at Munich explains World War II to some Y? It does not do so in virtue of Y's previous

is an explanation in principle if it is intended to explain X to a Y.

Let us grant that for Z to be an explanation of X there must, in principle, be a Y for whom the explanation is meant. The "in principle" and the idea of an explanation suggest that explanations usually consist of the same types of things - causes, reasons, extra details, etc. Obviously, an historian cannot write an explanation that will satisfy all his readers. Instead, he gives an explanation that satisfies himself and hopes that in so doing it will satisfy others. After all, he is writing to satisfy others. If his explanations satisfy only himself or a mere handful of people, he will not be a very successful historian.

It remains to see if there is such a thing as historical explanation, as a type of explanation. Hempel gives what is usually considered the scientific explanation, subsumption under laws. Is there a type of explanation that is particularly historical? Is history a study that is sui generis and, thus, like science, requires its own unique form of explanation? In the next chapter I shall attempt to answer these questions.

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knowledge, because, even if Y had been an adult in 1938 and, therefore, the knowledge was not of a type acquired in the manner of historians doing research, he would simply judge that Chamberlain's actions explained the war. To ask what are the criteria of the satisfaction of Y, that this is the explanation of the war, is senseless.

VI

IS HISTORY *SUI GENERIS* WITH RESPECT TO EXPLANATION?

Is there such a thing as specifically historical explanation? By "historical explanation" I mean explanation as it is given by historians when they are writing history. I do not intend to answer the question empirically. That is, I do not intend to search historical works in an attempt to see if historians use the words "explain" or "explanation" or wording that might be construed as equivalent to these. In other words, I will make no attempt to answer the question as to whether or not historians "explain" at all. It appears to be assumed by both Gardiner and Dray that they do and I shall follow suit. When I say that I intend to investigate whether or not there is such a thing as *historical* explanation, I mean historical as contrasted with other types of explanation. Is historical explanation the same as scientific explanation, ordinary language explanation, or is it in a class by itself, with its own peculiar features?

The answer to this problem is usually sought by attempting to answer another problem - is history *sui generis*? The idea here is that if it can be proved that history studies a unique type of subject matter, it will follow *ex hypothesi* that historical explanation will also be of a unique nature. Let me say at the outset that a difficulty which lies at the base of the problem of whether or not

history is sui generis, is the failure to distinguish between the two histories, outlined in the first chapter - "history" as what has happened in the past, that which historians write about, and "history" as that which historians write.

History is often considered as an autonomous branch of study because historical events are seen as "unique and unclassifiable" and have "an irreducible richness and complexity."[1] This view is usually held by the non-positivists who do not want to see history assimilated into the sciences and do not think it can be. Those of positivist leaning, however, claim that historical events are classifiable and, indeed, are classified. The stock example is that of "revolution". The fact that historical events are classifiable, according to the positivists, indicates that historical explanation is connected in some vague way with "regularity". Oddly enough, although Dray often speaks of Gardiner as a positivist, as if the two philosophers were in direct opposition, both men come to the same conclusion on at least one point, although their reasons for doing so and the inferences they derive from it are not identical. Gardiner writes, "The fact that the historian's interest is directed upon particular events rather than upon universal laws is a fact about the purpose of history and not a fact about the type of event

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[1] Patrick Gardiner, The Nature of Historical Explanation (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 34.

with which history deals."[2] Dray admits that just because the French Revolution is complex, this does not prevent its being an instance of a law of revolutions.[3] What is important, however, he claims, is that if such were the case, it would not be history and this is where Dray and Gardiner would agree. The historian is not interested in a particular revolution as an instance of revolutions in general, but rather his interest is in the particular revolution as it is in itself, distinct from other revolutions. What is important here is that, as Gardiner points out, "The given is neutral;[4] and our judgments of uniqueness or otherwise depend amongst other things upon human selection, points of view, purposes, and convenience."[5] "The world is one; the ways we use to talk about it, various. And the fact that in some cases we decide to describe it in one way rather than another is contingent upon our purposes."[6] We must not make the mistake of confusing history as that series of events which actually occurred and history as it is written by historians. Gardiner

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[2] Ibid., p. 64.

[3] Laws and Explanation in History (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 49.

[4] It might be argued that if Gardiner's "neutrality" is to be taken seriously he must be a nominalist. This need not be the case, however, to make his point. There may well be a "real" basis for classification but our classification depends to a large extent on convenience and purpose.

[5] Op. cit., p. 44.

[6] Ibid., p. 61.

claims that this is a result of the mirror theory of meaning[7] which says that the meaning of every word is an object and that every sentence is a reflection of a state of affairs. Thus, we can often make the mistake of supposing that the historian is dealing with "queer entities" such as revolutions which have a being all their own "out there". Instead, the historian imposes the concept "revolution" on his subject matter as a type of organization.

The subject matter is not completely neutral in the sense that it possesses no grounds on which we can classify, but a revolution does not have the same status as a chair. A chair is a concrete object. One might argue that that concrete object is not a chair but one refers to that concrete object, just the same. In the case of "revolution", there is nothing to which we can point as the revolution. We can point out various events but the classification "revolution" is a secondary step.

As Gardiner points out, the given is "neutral". We must classify in order to communicate, however. This is basically what language is, a classification of the given. This does not mean that there are things which we call "revolutions" in such a way that we can go out and label them. Historical language, like that used in our everyday speech, is relatively imprecise. There is no set definition

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[7] Ibid., p. 55.

of "revolution", for example. A revolution indicates a series of events of a certain nature which have certain purposes. A "revolution" usually is accompanied by riots, social disorder, and mass emotion. We do not say, however, that a revolution occurs when, as Gardiner puts it, "at least 40 per cent of the total male population should have appeared armed in the streets, shouting subversive slogans."[8] Such a restriction would unduly limit the applicability of the term "revolution". In this way historical concepts differ from those used in the physical sciences where they are more precisely defined and must be in order to fit into laws that will have any relevant meaning. Concepts, being as they are only ways of classifying the neutral given in order to speak about it for certain purposes in a certain way, cannot be the basis for making history sui generis any more than science. So Gardiner would say. What is at stake here, once more, is confusion between the two types of history. "History" in the sense of the actual series of events which occurred is not sui generis. Sui generis would have no meaning here because it consists only of the "neutral given", as Gardiner says when he writes:

> The contention that the subject matter of history is sui generis on the grounds that history is concerned with special entities referred to by such words as "revolution" and "nation" is a mistaken notion based

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[8] Ibid., p. 60.

upon a misunderstanding of the function of historical concepts.[9]

There is ground for saying that history is sui generis in the sense of "history" as it is written in history texts. The historian uses the concept "revolution" in a very different way from the way in which a social scientist uses it, because his purposes are different. History can be claimed to be sui generis on the basis of concepts, not because these concepts refer to entities that only history studies, and not because the words representing these concepts are different from those used in the social sciences, but because the terms themselves are used differently because historians have a different purpose in their writing than have social scientists. To classify events as a "revolution" is not to bring them under a law because the concept "revolution" is not of the type required to fit the precision of a law. It is imprecise because it is not intended to be used in a law.

Again, when it comes to the uniqueness of events in history as opposed to events in physical science there is confusion of the two senses of "history". In history as it occurred, all events are unique. An eclipse of the moon is unique in the sense that that eclipse will never occur again. The scientist may classify eclipses by giving them the label

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[9] Ibid., p. 64.

"eclipse" and set up laws to predict future eclipses, but what is given is "neutral" and anything beyond this is a result of the scientist's classifying and organizing the given. To say that history is sui generis because it deals with unique events is, therefore, false. In that it chooses to look at events in their uniqueness rather than attempting to look for what is common among events, it is sui generis.

As Dray puts it, "even if an event is, strictly speaking, absolutely unique, it cannot be explained as absolutely unique".[10] This is because, as I have already mentioned, to speak of anything whatsoever, we use language and language presupposes classification. Classification is based on common features among those entities which are classified. The historian, when talking about the French Revolution as "unique", is interested not in the French Revolution qua revolution, but rather in the French Revolution as unique within the class, "revolutions". Also, when he speaks of the French Revolution or any revolution, he is not speaking about an event but a conglomeration of events. This is a distinction which neither Gardiner nor Dray make explicit, although they probably realize that it is the case.

Therefore, although the French Revolution has features in common with other revolutions and, hence, deserves the label "revolution", it is also unique in the

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[10] Op. cit., p. 47.

sense that it consists of component events each of which themselves are unique. It might be argued that these component events are not unique, that the king was killed in both of two revolutions. Even if the component parts are not unique, it can at least be said that the series of events as a series is unique in that the series consists of different combinations of events for different revolutions or that the numbers of events varied.

History, then, is sui generis not in its subject matter, but rather in the manner with which its subject matter is dealt. At the beginning of the chapter I mentioned that non-positivists often try to show that historical explanation is of its own type because its subject matter is sui generis. Whether or not historical explanation would be sui generis if its subject matter were is another problem and one which I do not intend to investigate. What I do hope to have shown, however, is that history is sui generis in its aim, in what it sets out to do. What this implies is not that historical explanation is sui generis because "history" is, but rather that "history" is sui generis because historical explanation is. The first italicized "history" is history as the events which occurred, the second, history as it is written by historians. To say that "history" is sui generis because historical explanation is, is equivalent to saying that "history" means historical explanation. History is a separate discipline because an historian operates on the

given in a different way than a scientist would. This "operation" is our manner of organizing, conceptualizing the given and this, in turn, governs the way we describe and explain the given. History is not a science, simply because historians are not scientists. When the historian uses laws and searches for common factors, he ceases to be an historian.[11] His history does not become a science and we cannot make history a science. If we make history a science, it is just that - science - and no longer history. History is a manner of explanation. To differentiate the disciplines can mean no more.

In conclusion, then, there is such a thing as historical explanation. This is not to say, however, that any given historical explanation "explains", because "explains" in this sense implies satisfaction of the individual to whom and for whom the explanation is being given. What it does say is that there is historical explanation, in principle. That is, when historians explain, their explanations satisfy at least their authors and, hopefully, a large percentage of their readers. That these explanations do make what is in question intelligible is all that is required. In this sense, the pragmatic dimension of explanation is its most important aspect.

It might seem that if the pragmatic aspect is what is of greatest importance, then to speak of historical

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[11]Spengler and Toynbee are, therefore, not historians

explanations as a type of explanation would be meaningless. In other words, there cannot be types of explanation. Something either explains or it does not explain. In a sense this is true. This type of pragmatism I called earlier, the "second pragmatic dimension". There is a sense, though, in which there are types of explanation. We often hear it said after someone has given a particular argument to his philosophic colleagues that that "just is not philosophy". I do not want to comment on whether or not such a statement has meaning, but I think an analogous example can be imagined for the disciplines of history and the sciences. For example, if an historian were to give a paper before his colleagues at an historical symposium and were to explain by the use of general laws, I think there would be quite a feeling of tension in his audience. Many would quite rightly be thinking that it was quite an admirable paper as far as it went but it just was not history. In other words, the speaker's paper did not explain to the members of his audience qua historians. In this sense he did not give an historical explanation, even though some members of the audience may have felt that he did explain what was in question to their own satisfaction as an individual.

I have attempted to show that Hempel's model of

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and, indeed, are not normally classified as such by historians. Instead, they would, in general, be called "speculative philosophers of history".

explanation, whether or not it is accurate in its description of scientific explanation, is no more than this. I used Dray's arguments to show that it is possible to explain without subsumption under laws, although whether subsumption under laws does explain I left as an unanswered question. I then tried to analyze the concept "cause" to show that it can be used in different ways and that, therefore, the historian can use it without having to conform to some scientific or positivistic criteria. Having shown that causal explanation is only one type of explanation, I proceeded to give an analysis of the concepts "explanation" and "explain", placing particular emphasis on the pragmatic aspects of the problem. The desire to illuminate the importance of these pragmatic aspects was at the base of my distinction between history as events and written history. The events are what the historian tries to find out and to work with; the writing expresses his aim qua historian. Since what we do and what we say has its basis in usage and purpose, it follows that the pragmatic aspects are the very core of what it is to explain. Having examined explanation in general, I proceeded, in the last chapter, to the problem of whether or not history is sui generis and if so, in what way. I concluded that history is sui generis on the basis of the historian's aim because historians qua historians operate on the given in a particular way, in contrast to the way social scientists might operate on it. For historians qua historians, then,

historical explanation does explain. Since everyday language and historical language are closely related, in the sense that their concepts do not have the precision of scientific concepts, historical explanations are quite likely to explain or make intelligible what is in question, to non-historians. This still does not refute the fact that any particular historical explanation, even though it is historical and explains in this context, is an explanation. To "explain" it must explain to someone.

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