We must now analyze the concept of a causal law, both for its own sake and because the analyses to follow will involve the concept. As usual, the solipsist is on the lookout for the most economical analysis, and theories of the Humean sort are unquestionably the most economical.

In this chapter we will therefore examine Humean extensional theories of causation. Particular attention will be paid to objections to these theories based on the notion of an accident, since it is objections of this sort that are most crucial. The generic theory of this type is the one which equates a causal connection between two events, a and b, with a constant conjunction between events of the type A and events of the type B. Correspondingly, a general statement asserting a causal connection between two types of events will actually describe a causal law if and only if there are no exceptions to this generalization anywhere in time or space. Many qualifications will be necessary if this theory is to be at all plausible and such phrases as “of the type A” would have to be analyzed further; however, this is the basic theory upon which extensional analyses of causation have drawn, and this statement of it is sufficient to bring in the important objections.

The most important of these is that on this analysis we cannot distinguish between a causal connection and an accidental connection which happens to be unbroken.\(^1\) Thus it happens that everyone on a certain park bench is Chinese, but this does not establish a causal connection between sitting on the bench and being Chinese. Of course, no extensional analyst holds that a constant conjunction which has only held for the past and will not hold for the future constitutes a causal connection; his initial reply can then be that if the connection is merely accidental it will not hold for the future and will thus be distinguished from a causal connection which holds for both the past and the future. How-

---

ever, this answer is not likely to satisfy the objector who can reply that an accidental connection can hold for both the past and the future, but is still different from a causal connection. It is this disagreement which I will try to elucidate in the course of this chapter. However, I would like to note at this point that the Humean can make some distinction between a connection which is accidental and one that is causal; namely, that the latter is one which holds for the future as well as the past. The question is whether this is the correct distinction, and, in case it is not adequate, whether some less naive distinction can be made from the point of view of this theory.

Our next job is to look at some of the relationships which we suppose to hold between the notions of cause and accident. One obvious difference between the two concepts is that we can talk about single events as accidents whereas we have to talk about causal connections between sets of events, or at least about the cause of some event which is specified by the context. We never talk about a cause outside of any such context. The result of this is that the word "accident" is a relative term in that we always have to know what it is an accident relative to before we understand the particular assertion that is being made. Thus an automobile accident is an accident relative to the intentions of the driver, but it is not an accident relative to the physical laws of moving bodies. In general it seems better to talk about accidental connections between events rather than just talking about accidents. However, in order to transform our language in this respect we must first find the implicit relative term and re-state the original assertion so that it says, not that A is an accident, but that the connection between A and B is an accidental one. In practice, however, it is not usually very easy to pick out the relative term that was intended, as there are always many possibilities.

Thus when the anti-Humean points to the fact that everyone sitting on a certain bench is Chinese and says that this constitutes an accident, it is not yet clear exactly what he means. One possibility in such a case is that the event in question is an accident relative to anything and everything that has happened in the past. This would be tantamount to saying that there is no way in which the event could have been predicted and that it is a chance event for which there is no explanation. It is often the position of philosophical indeterminists that there are such events, even though the indeterminist may not claim to know just which events are inexplicable in this way. In any case this is a philosophical position which does not seem to be involved in our everyday