whereas time or succession is always broken and divided. If the distance is large enough it creates a challenge for the imagination, which is invigorated by it; the challenge (and therefore the invigoration) is greater with temporal than with spatial distance, and this is the reason why all the relics of antiquity are so precious in our eyes, and appear more valuable than what is brought even from the remotest parts of the world.

(3) The third phenomenon that I noted—namely, the fact that our admiration for a thing is increased more by its being distant in the past than by its being distant in the future—fully confirms this. [Hume’s explanation of this is based on the thesis that we think of past/future in terms of high/low, e.g. thinking of our ancestors as above us. That has the result that it is harder for us to think our way ‘up’ to earlier times than to think our way ‘down’ to later ones; if the difficulty is great enough it presents an invigorating challenge to our imagination and our passions, and that makes us have ‘veneration and respect’ for any object that our thought reaches by this difficult route. Then Hume ends the section:]

Before I leave this subject of the will, I should perhaps give a brief summary of what I have said about it, so as to put the whole body of doctrine more clearly before your eyes. A ‘passion’, in the ordinary sense of the word, is a violent emotion that the mind experiences when confronted by something good or evil, or by something that arouses an appetite in us by hooking into the basic structure of our faculties. By ‘reason’ we mean emotions of the very same kind as passions, but operating more calmly and causing no disturbance in the person’s temperament. (The calmness of these emotions leads us into a mistake about what they are, causing us to regard them as merely conclusions of our intellectual faculties.) The causes and the effects of these violent and calm passions are pretty variable, and largely depend on the particular temperament and disposition of the person concerned. The violent passions generally have a more powerful influence on the will; though we often find that the calm ones, when backed by reflection and supported by resolution, can control the violent passions in their most furious movements. A calm passion can easily turn into a violent one, either by

- a change of mood in the person,
- a change in the circumstances and situation of the object of the passion,
- reinforcement by an accompanying passion,
- reinforcement by custom, or
- input from an excited imagination,

and that fact makes this whole affair more uncertain, i.e. makes it harder to predict with justified confidence how a given person’s emotional state at a given moment will lead him to act. This so-called ‘struggle between passion and reason’ adds variety to human life, and makes men different not only from each other but also from themselves at different times. Philosophy can account for only a few of the larger more obvious events of this war, leaving aside all the smaller and more delicate revolutions because they depend on mechanisms that are too fine and minute for philosophy to grasp.

Section 9: The direct passions

It’s easy to see that the passions, both direct and indirect, are based on unpleasure and pleasure, and that all you need to produce an affection of any kind is to present some good or evil. Remove the unpleasure and pleasure and you immediately remove love and hatred, pride and humility, de-
sire and aversion, and of most of our reflective or secondary impressions.

The impressions that arise most naturally and simply from good and evil—actual or prospective—are the direct passions of desire and aversion, grief and joy, hope and fear, along with volition. The mind by a basic instinct tends to unite itself with the good and to avoid the evil.

[Hume goes on to fit indirect passions into his account. Some impression of unpleasure or pleasure gives me a direct passion; and further features of the situation make ‘certain dormant mechanisms of the human mind’ kick in to create one or more indirect passions in the manner Hume has described early in Book II. A secondary passion doesn’t compete with the primary passion from which it comes, and may indeed increase it. A suit of fine clothes gives me pleasure because of its beauty; this pleasure produces the direct passions of volition and desire; the thought that I own the suit starts up the mechanism that produces pride; and the pleasure that this involves reflects back on my direct passions, adding strength to my desire or volition, joy or hope. Then:]

When a good is certain or probable, it produces joy. When evil is certain or probable, there arises grief or sorrow.

When good or evil is uncertain, it gives rise to fear or hope—depending on where the balance of uncertainty lies.

Desire is derived from good considered simply, and aversion is derived from evil. [That sentence is verbatim Hume.] The will exerts itself, when either good can be achieved or evil averted by some action of the mind or body.

Beside good and evil—i.e. pleasure and unpleasure—the direct passions often arise from a natural impulse or instinct that defies explanation. Examples include: the desire for our enemies to be punished and for our friends to be happy, hunger, lust, and a few other bodily appetites. Strictly speaking, these indirect passions produce good and evil rather than coming from them as other emotions do. For example, when I look hungrily at the food on my plate, the situation is not that I see the food as good and am led by that to hunger for it; rather, it is that I hunger for the food, and that makes it a good for me.

The only direct passions that are worth studying closely, it seems, are hope and fear; and I’ll now try to explain them. The fundamental fact is obvious:

If an event would produce grief or joy if it were certain to happen, it will give rise to fear or hope if there is only an uncertain probability that it will happen.

Thus, the difference in certainty of upshot makes a considerable difference in the associated passion. To understand why, we have to go back to what I said in I.iii.11 about the nature of probability.

Probability arises from an opposition of contrary chances or causes, by which the mind is not allowed to settle on either side but is incessantly tossed from one side to the other—from thinking of the object as existent to thinking of it as nonexistent. [This to-and-fro of ‘imagination or understanding, call it which you please’ [Hume’s exact phrase] creates a fluctuation between joy and sorrow—the unsettledness of thought produces unsettledness of passions. Hume continues:]

With regard to its passions, the human mind is not like a flute, which stops making a sound the moment the breath ceases, but rather like a violin, which still makes some sound, gradually fading away, after the bow’s stroke has been completed. The imagination is extremely quick and agile; but the passions are slow and hard to budge, which is why when the mind is presented with an alternation of two views that are productive of two different passions, though the imagination can change its views very nimbly, it does
not happen that each stroke produces a clear and distinct note of some one passion, but rather one passion is always mixed and mingled with the other. Depending on whether the probability is greater on the good or the evil side, the passion of joy or sorrow predominates in the composition. Probability provides a larger number of views or chances on one side than on the other; or—to put the same thing in different words—it involves a larger number of returns of one of the passions. Those dispersed passions are collected into one, and form a higher intensity of that passion. Which is to say, in other words, that the joy and grief that are intermingled by means of the alternating contrary views of the imagination produce through their mixture the passions of hope and fear.

The contrariety of passions that is our present topic raises a teasing question about how to explain the following empirical fact. When the objects of contrary passions are presented at once, any one of four things can happen. One is that the predominant passion absorbs the other and is increased by it (I have already explained this, and won't discuss it further here). The other three are:

(1) Brief attacks of one of the passions alternate with brief attacks of the other.
(2) The two passions cancel one another out, so that neither of them is experienced.
(3) Both passions remain united in the mind.

What theory can we use to explain these different upshots? and what general mechanism underlies then all?

(1) When the contrary passions arise from entirely different objects they take place alternately, because the lack of any relation in the relevant ideas separates the impressions from each other and prevents them from cancelling one another out. For example, when a man is upset over losing in a lawsuit, and joyful at the birth of a son, his mind can’t run from the agreeable to the calamitous object and back again quickly enough for one emotion to damp down the other and leave him between them in a state of indifference.

(2) It’s easier for the mind to achieve that calm state when a single event is of a mixed nature, having both good and bad aspects. In that case, the two passions mingle with each other by means of the relation—i.e. the relation of coming from different aspects of a single event—and so they cancel out and leave the mind in perfect tranquillity.

(3) Suppose that what we have is not (1) two different objects or (2) good and bad aspects of a single object, but rather a single entirely good object which is being considered not as certain but only as more or less probable. In that case, I contend, the contrary passions will both be present in the soul at once, and instead of destroying and damping down each other they will exist together and produce a third impression or emotion by their union. [A little later on, Hume compares (1) with two liquids in different bottles, (2) with acid and alkali in one bottle, and (3) with oil and vinegar in one bottle. On the way to that he explains rather lengthily what is needed for a case to be of type (3) rather than type (2). The explanation is ingenious, but not very nutritious, philosophically speaking. After all that he returns to his main topic in this section:]

The passions of fear and hope can arise when the chances on the two sides are equal. In such a situation the passions are at their strongest, because the mind there has the least foundation to rest on and is tossed about by the greatest uncertainty. Add a little probability on the side of grief and you immediately see that passion spread itself over the joy/grief mixture and tincture it into fear; as the probability on the grief side goes on increasing, the grief steadily grows and so does the fear, until—as the joy component continually diminishes—the fear imperceptibly turns into pure grief. And
the entire process can be run in reverse: increase probability on the joy side and you'll intensify the joy until it turns into hope, and eventually when the probability becomes high enough the hope will turn back into pure joy. Aren't these facts plain proofs that the passions of fear and hope are mixtures of grief and joy—as plain as the comparable proofs in optics that a coloured ray of the sun passing through a prism is a composition of two others? I'm sure that neither natural nor moral philosophy contains any proofs stronger than this.

There are two kinds of probability: •when the object is really in itself uncertain, and to be determined by chance; and •when the object is already certain but we can't be certain about it because we have evidence on both sides of the question. Both kinds of probability cause fear and hope; which must come from the one property that they have in common, namely the uncertainty and fluctuation they bestow on the imagination by the unresolved contrariety of views.

It's not only probability that can cause hope and fear. They can arise from anything which, like probability, produces a wavering and unconstant method of surveying an object; and that is convincing evidence that my hypothesis about the causes of hope and fear is correct.

An evil that is hardly thought of as even possible does sometimes produce fear, especially if it's a very great evil. A man can't think of extreme pain without trembling, if he is in any danger of suffering them. The smallness of the probability is made up for by the greatness of the evil, and the sensation of fear is just as lively as it would be if the evil were more probable.....

Fear can even be caused sometimes by evils that are agreed to be impossible. For example, when we tremble on the brink of a precipice, though we know that we are in no danger because it is up to us whether we advance a step further. What is happening here is this: the immediate presence of the evil influences the imagination in the same way that the certainty of it would do; but when this fear collides with our thought about how safe we are, it is immediately retracted, and causes the same kind of passion, as when contrary passions are produced from a contrariety of chances.

Evils that are certain sometimes produce fear in the same way that merely possible and impossible evils do. A man in a strong well guarded prison with no chance of escape trembles at the thought of being tortured on the rack, to which he has been sentenced. This happens only when the certain evil is terrible and confusing: the mind continually pushes the evil away in horror, and the evil continually pushes back into the man's thought. The evil itself is fixed and established, but the man's mind cannot bear being fixed on it; and from this fluctuation and uncertainty there arises a passion that feels much the same as fear.

[Fear can arise when some evil is uncertain (not as to whether it did or will occur, but) as to what evil it is. Hume gives the example of a man who learns that one of his sons has been suddenly killed, but doesn't yet know which. This produces in his mind a fluctuation between one evil and another—the passion cannot settle—with nothing good about it; and this produces something like the fear that comes from evil/good uncertainties.]

These results enable us to explain a phenomenon that at first sight seems very extraordinary, namely that surprise is apt to change into fear, and everything that is unexpected frightens us. The most obvious explanation of this is that human nature is in general cowardly, so that on the sudden appearance of any object we immediately conclude it to be an evil and are struck by fear without waiting to learn anything about it. But although this seems obvious it turns out to be
wrong. The suddenness and strangeness of an appearance naturally creates a commotion in the mind, like everything that is unfamiliar to us and that we weren’t prepared for. This commotion naturally produces a curiosity or inquisitive-ness that is very violent (because of the strong and sudden impulse of the object); because of its violence it becomes unpleasant, and resembles in its fluctuation and uncertainty the sensation of fear or the mixed passions of grief and joy. This likeness of fear naturally turns into fear itself, giving us a real sense that something evil is present or on the way. That’s an example of the mind’s general practice of forming its judgments more from its own present disposition than from the nature of its objects. [The concept of fluctuation seems to intrude into this paragraph without being explained or justified. Perhaps Hume’s thought is that a ‘commotion’ is bound to be a shaky fluctuating affair.]

Thus all kinds of uncertainty are strongly connected with fear, even when they don’t cause any opposition of passions coming from opposite features of the situation or ways of looking at it. A person who has left his friend on his sick-bed will feel more anxiety about his friend than if he were still with him, even if he can’t give him any help and can’t judge what the outcome of the sickness will be. Here is the explanation of this. What he chiefly cares about here is the life or death of his friend; he will be just as uncertain about that when he is with his friend as when he is away from him; but while he is there in the hospital room he will take in a thousand little details of his friend’s situation and condition, these will steady his thought and prevent the fluctuation and uncertainty that is so like fear. It’s true that uncertainty is in one way as closely allied to hope as to fear, because it is essential part of both; but it doesn’t lean to that side, because uncertainty as such is unpleasant, which gives it a relation of impressions to the unpleasant passions.

That’s why it is that uncertainty concerning any little detail relating to a person increases our fear of his death or misfortune. [Hume decorates this with four lines by the Latin poet Horace.]

But this mechanism connecting fear with uncertainty goes even further: Any doubt produces fear, even if it’s a doubt about whether A or B or C will happen, when each of them is good and desirable. A virgin on her bridal night goes to bed full of fears and apprehensions, although she expects nothing but pleasure of the highest kind, and what she has long wished for. The newness and greatness of the event, the confusion of wishes and joys, throw the mind into such a turmoil that it doesn’t know what passion to settle on; that gives rise to a fluttering or unsettledness of the spirits, and because this is somewhat unpleasant it very naturally degenerates into fear.

So we go on finding that whatever causes any fluctuation or mixture of passions that has any degree of unpleasant in the mix always produces fear, or at least a passion so like fear that they can hardly be told apart.

I have here confined myself to discussing hope and fear in their simplest and most natural form, not going into all the variations they can have by being mixed with different views and reflections. Terror, consternation, astonishment, anxiety and the like are nothing but different species and degrees of fear. It’s easy to imagine how a different situation of the object or a different turn of thought can change a passion, even changing how it feels; and the more specific sub-kinds of all the other passions come about in the same sort of way. Love may show itself in the shape of tenderness, friendship, intimacy, respect, good-will, and in many other forms; basically they are all one passion, arising from the same causes though with slight variations. I needn’t go into the details of this, which is why I have all along confined
myself to the principal passion, love.

The same wish to avoid long-windedness has led me to by-pass a discussion of the will and direct passions as they appear in animals. It’s perfectly obvious that they have the same nature and the same causes in the lower animals as they have in human creatures. Look at the facts about this for yourself—and in doing so please consider how much support they give to the theory of the direct passions that I have been defending here.

Section 10: Curiosity, or the love of truth

All these enquiries of mine started from the love of truth, and yet I have carelessly ignored that love while inspecting many different parts of the human mind and examining many passions. Before leaving the passions, I should look a little into the love of truth and show its origin in human nature. It’s such a special emotion that it couldn’t have been satisfactorily dealt with under any of the headings of my discussion up to here.

Truth is of two kinds: (1) the discovery of the proportions of ideas, considered as such, and (2) the conformity of our ideas of objects to their real existence. [The rather mysterious (1) seems to refer primarily to truths in geometry, though we’ll see Hume extending it to mathematical truths generally.] It is certain that (1) is not desired merely as truth, and that our pleasure in truths of this kind doesn’t come just from their being true; something else has to be at work here.

The chief contributor to a truth’s being agreeable is the level of intellect that was employed in discovering it. What is easy and obvious is never valued; and even what is in itself difficult isn’t much regarded by us if we learn it without difficulty and without any stretch of thought or judgment.

We love to track through the demonstrations of mathematicians; but we wouldn’t get much pleasure from someone who merely reported the conclusions, telling us the facts about the proportions of lines and angles, even if we were quite sure that he was well-informed and trustworthy. In listening to this person we wouldn’t be obliged to focus our attention or exert our intellect; and these—attending and stretching—are the most pleasant and agreeable exercises of the mind.

But although the exercise of intellect is the principal source of the satisfaction we get from the mathematical sciences, I don’t think that it alone is sufficient to give us any considerable enjoyment. If we are to get pleasure from it, the truth we discover must also be of some importance. It’s easy to multiply algebraical problems to infinity, and there’s no end to the discovery of the proportions of conic sections; yet few mathematicians take any pleasure in these researches—most turn their thoughts to what is more useful and important. The question then arises: How does this utility and importance operate on us? It is a tricky question because of a strange fact:

Many philosophers have consumed their time, destroyed their health, and neglected their fortune, in the search for truths that they regarded as important and useful to the world; although their over-all conduct showed that they weren’t endowed with any share of public spirit and had no concern for the interests of mankind.

We have here something that seems to be a contradiction: These philosophers would lose all enthusiasm for their studies if they became convinced that their discoveries wouldn’t matter to mankind; and yet they haven’t the least interest in the welfare of mankind!