

# Treatise of Human Nature

## Book II: The Passions

David Hume

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis . . . . indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omitted passages are reported on, between [brackets], in normal-size type.

First launched: June 2008

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## Part iii: The will and the direct passions

### 1: Liberty and necessity

The next task is to explain the *direct* passions, i.e. the impressions that arise immediately from good or evil, from unpleasure or pleasure. These include desire and aversion, grief and joy, hope and fear.

Of all the immediate effects of unpleasure and pleasure, none is more remarkable than *the will*. That isn't strictly speaking a *passion*; but we can't understand the passions unless we fully understand the will—what it is and how it works—and for that reason I'm going to explore it here. Please note: by 'the will' I mean nothing but

the internal impression that we feel and are conscious of when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body or new perception of our mind.

This impression, like the previously discussed ones of pride and humility, love and hatred, can't be defined and needn't be described; so I shan't get into any of those definitions and distinctions with which philosophers customarily •tangle rather than •clarify this topic. Instead I'll get straight into the topic by first examining the long-disputed question concerning *liberty and necessity*, which crops up so naturally in discussions of the will.

[Regarding the next two sentences: An instance of 'indifference' would be a state of affairs that could develop in either of two or more ways. (This does *not* mean merely 'that could, *so far as we can tell*, develop in either of two or more ways'.) Hume holds that in the material world there are no indifferent states of affairs. He says that indifference is ruled out by 'absolute fate', but don't attach any weight to that. What makes it certain that this body at this moment will move precisely *thus*, Hume holds, is not its being spookily 'fated' to move like that but its

being down-to-earth *caused* to do so.] Everyone accepts that the operations of external bodies are necessary—that there's not the least trace of indifference or liberty in how they •push one another around, •attract one another, and •hang together. Every object is *determined* by an absolute fate to move at a certain speed in a certain direction; it *can't* move in any other way, any more than it can turn itself into an angel . . . . So the actions of matter are to be regarded as *necessary* actions; and anything that is in this respect on the same footing as matter must also be acknowledged to be necessary. We want to know whether the actions of the •mind are on this same footing; and I'll work towards that by first examining •matter, asking what basis there is for the idea of a necessity in its operations, and what reason we have for ever concluding that one body or •bodily• action is the necessitating cause of another.

I have said that •the ultimate connection between any two objects can never be discovered through our senses or our reason, and that •we can never penetrate far enough into the essence and structure of bodies to perceive the fundamental source of their mutual influence. All we are acquainted with is their constant union, and *that* is where the necessity comes from. If objects didn't occur in uniform and regular relations with one another, we would never arrive at any idea of cause and effect. 'What about the element of *necessity* that is contained in the idea of cause and effect?' Yes, that too! All there is to that necessity is the mind's determination •to pass from object x to the object y that usually accompanies it, and •to infer the existence y from

the existence of x. [See the first paragraph of I.iii.14.] So these are two elements that we are to consider as essential to necessity—

(1) the constant union, and

(2) the inference of the mind;

and wherever we find these we must acknowledge a necessity. (The two are connected with one another, because it's our observation of (1) that leads us to perform (2).) Now, it's *only* because of these two that we take the actions of matter to be necessary; this view of ours owes nothing to any insight into the essence of bodies. What, then, would it take to show that the actions of our mind are also necessary? One might think that the answer to that is this:

To show that the actions of the mind are necessary, all that is needed is to show (1) that there is a constant union of these actions; that will secure (2) the inference from one mental action to the next; and from (1) and (2) together we get necessity.

To give my results as much force as I can, I shall take these two elements separately: I'll first prove from experience (1) that our actions have a constant union with our motives, temperaments, and circumstances, before I consider (2) the inferences that we draw from this union.

A very slight and general view of the common course of human affairs will be enough to establish (1). . . . Whether we consider mankind according to the difference of sexes, ages, governments, conditions, or methods of education, the same uniformity and regular operation of natural mechanisms are discernible. Just as in the mutual action of the elements and powers of material nature, so also in the mind, like causes produce like effects.

Different kinds of trees reliably produce different-tasting fruit, and we'll all agree that this regularity is an example of necessity and causes in external bodies. But is there any

more regularity in how

•the products of Bordeaux differ in taste from •the products of Champagne

than there is in how

•the forceful and mature feelings, actions, and passions of the male sex differ from •the soft and delicate feelings, actions, and passions of the female sex?

Are the changes of our body from infancy to old age more regular and certain than those of our mind and conduct? Is it *more* ridiculous to expect a four-year-old child to raise a weight of 300 pounds than to expect that same child to produce philosophical reasoning or a prudent and well-thought-out course of action?

We have to accept that the cohesion of the parts of matter arises from natural and necessary causal sources, however hard we find it to explain what they are; and for a similar reason we have to accept that human society is based on similar sources. [Hume is here likening •the way portions of matter hang together to constitute (say) a *pebble* with •the way human beings hang together to constitute a *society*.] Indeed we have more reason to say this about humans and societies than to say it about rock-grains and pebbles. That's because as well as observing that men always seek society we can explain the mechanisms that underlie this universal coming-together. It's no more certain that two flat pieces of marble will unite together than it is that two young savages of different sexes will copulate. And then there are further uniformities: parents caring for the safety and preservation of children arising from this copulation; parental foresight of possible difficulties when their offspring leave home; plans to avoid these difficulties by keeping close and collaborative relations with the offspring.

The skin, pores, muscles, and nerves of a day-labourer are different from those of a man of quality; so are his

sentiments, actions, and behaviour. A man's position in life influences his whole fabric, external and internal; and these different positions arise •necessarily, because •uniformly, from the necessary and uniform mechanisms of human nature. Men can't live without society, and can't have society without government. Government brings it about that people differ in how much property they have, and in what their social ranks are; and out of this arise industry, manufactures, lawsuits, war, leagues, alliances, voyages, travels, cities, fleets, ports, and all the other actions and objects that produce so much diversity, while also maintaining so much uniformity, in human life.

If a traveller from abroad told us that he had encountered a climate in the fiftieth degree of northern latitude where all the fruits ripen in the winter and rot in the summer, in the way that in England the reverse happens, very few people would be so gullible as to believe him. I suspect it would be the same with a traveller who told us he had encountered people just like the ones in Plato's *Republic*, or the ones in Hobbes's *Leviathan*. There is a *general course of nature* in human actions as well as in the operations of the sun and the climate. There are also national characters and individual personal characters, as well as characteristics that are common to all mankind. Our knowledge of what these national or personal •characteristics *are* is our observation of the actions that uniformly flow from •them in the given nation or the given individual person; and this uniformity is the essence of necessity.

The only conceivable way of evading this argument is to deny the uniformity of human actions that is its basis. Someone who accepts that human actions have a constant union and connection with the situation and temperament of the agent, though he may be unwilling to *say* 'Human actions are necessary', is really accepting that they are. Now,

you may want to deny this regular union and connection for the following reason:

'What is more capricious than human actions? What more inconstant than the desires of man? What creature departs more widely not only •from right reason but •from his own character and disposition? An hour—a *moment!*—is sufficient to make him change from one extreme to another, and overturn some plan that it had cost him the greatest work and effort to establish. Human conduct is irregular and uncertain; so it doesn't come from necessity, which is regular and certain.'

To this I reply that our conclusions about the actions of men should be reached by the same kind of reasoning we use in reaching our views about external objects. When any two phenomena are constantly and invariably conjoined together, they become so strongly connected in •the imagination that •it passes quickly and confidently from one of them to the other. ·In such a case, we are *certain*, and we say that the connection is *necessary*·. But there are many degrees of evidence and probability that are lower ·than this certainty·, and we don't regard our reasoning to a general conclusion as completely destroyed by a single counter-example. The mind balances the items of empirical evidence for and against our conclusion, and deducts the lighter from the heavier; the remainder fixes the degree of assurance or evidentness that the conclusion still has. Even when evidence and counter-evidence are of equal weight, we don't drop the whole idea of *causes* and *necessity* ·from our thinking about the subject-matter of our conclusion·. Rather, we take it that the counter-examples are produced by the operation of hidden contrary causes, and conclude that any *chance* or *indifference* that there is here lies only in our imperfectly informed judgment and not in the things themselves—the

events are in every case equally necessary (we think), even though they don't *appear* to be equally constant or certain. And this intellectual handling of events in the material world should, I repeat, be applied also to events of the mind and human conduct. No union can be more constant and certain than that of some actions with some motives and characters; and if in other cases the union is uncertain, it's no more uncertain than plenty of events in the operations of body; and we can't infer from the mind/conduct irregularity anything that won't follow equally from the irregularities in bodies.

It is commonly accepted that madmen have no liberty. But their actions have less regularity and constancy than the actions of sane men, and consequently—if we judge by the surface—they are further removed from necessity than sane men are. So our way of thinking about liberty in humans is absolutely inconsistent; but that's a natural upshot of the confused ideas and undefined terms that we so often use in our reasonings, especially on this topic.

My next task is to show that just as motives relate to actions in the same constant way that other kinds of natural events relate to one another, the influence of this constancy on our understanding is also the same in one sphere as in the other—meaning that we are caused to infer the occurrence of an action from the existence of a motive. If this turns out to be right, there is no known circumstance that enters into the connection and production of the actions of matter that isn't to be found also in all the operations of the mind; which implies that it would be a manifest absurdity to attribute necessity to matter and deny it of mind.

[This next paragraph will use the phrase 'moral evidence', using 'evidence' in its old sense of 'evidentness'. So 'moral evidence' could mean **(1)** something like what 'moral certainty' means today—referring to something short of absolute certainty but sure enough to be a safe basis

for planning and predicting. That was one of its meanings in Hume's day too, but 'moral' then also had a different sense, meaning **(2)** 'having to do with human thinking and acting'—a sense in which psychology was a 'moral science'. It's natural to think that the opponents Hume envisages here are talking about 'moral evidence' in sense **(1)**. His reply to them isn't evasive, but it does shift the emphasis from **(1)** to **(2)**.] Any philosopher, however firmly his judgment is riveted to this fantastic system of liberty, accepts the force of moral evidence, regarding it as a reasonable basis for thinking both in theory-building and practical planning. Well, what *is* moral evidence? It's nothing but a conclusion about the actions of men, derived from premises about their motives, temperaments, and situations. Here's an example. [Here as nearly always Hume uses the word 'fact' to mean 'proposition', so that for him calling Caesar's death a fact isn't implying that Caesar died.]

We see certain words printed on paper, we infer that the person who wrote them would affirm such facts as Caesar's death, Augustus's success, Nero's cruelty; and, recalling many other testimonies to these same things, we conclude that those facts were once really existent, and that so many men wouldn't conspire to deceive us without having any motive to do so, especially since the attempt to do so would expose them to the derision of all their contemporaries. . . .

The same kind of reasoning runs through politics, war, commerce, economics—indeed it's woven so densely into human life that we couldn't act or survive for a moment without making use of it. A prince who imposes a tax on his subjects, expects them to pay. A general who leads an army relies on a certain degree of courage in his soldiers. A merchant looks for honesty and skill in his agent. A man who gives orders for his dinner doesn't wonder whether his servants will obey. In short, most of our reasonings relate to judgments concerning our own actions and those of other

people, because nothing is more central to our interests than that. I contend that when anyone reasons in this way about his and other people's actions he is expressing his belief that the actions of the will arise from necessity; and if he denies this, he doesn't know what he means!

Any two items of which we call one 'cause' and the other 'effect' are, considered in themselves, as distinct and separate from each other as any two things in nature; and however carefully we look into them we can never infer the existence of the effect from that of the cause. It's only from experience and the observation of their constant union that we can make this inference; and when we *can* conduct the inference there's nothing to it but the effects of custom on the imagination. We mustn't here be content with saying •that the idea of cause and effect arises from

(1) constantly united objects;

we have to say •that it also involves

(2) constantly united ideas of objects;

and •that the necessary connection is not discovered by a conclusion of the understanding on the subject of (1), but is merely a perception of the mind arising from (2). Thus, whenever we see that kind of uniformity, and wherever the uniformity has that effect on our belief and opinion, we have the •idea of *causes* and *necessity*, even if we don't like using those •words. In every case that we have observed, when a moving body has collided with another, the other has moved. That is as far as the mind can go; it can't dig any deeper. From this constant union it forms the idea of cause and effect, and through the influence of the union it feels the necessity. What we call 'moral evidence' involves that same constancy and that same influence—and that completes my argument. What remains can only be a dispute about words.

Think about how neatly natural evidence and moral evidence join together to form a single chain of argument. If

you do, you won't hesitate to agree that the two are of the same nature, and derived from the same principles. [In this sentence 'principle' can't plausibly be replaced by 'mechanism' or 'causal source', as it usually has been up to here. There's a real question as to how much similarity Hume is here claiming between the two kinds of evidence; and 'principle' is left standing, to mark the spot. On most of its future occurrences, it will be replaced by 'drive'.] If a prisoner has no money and no influence, he can't escape, and that is as much because of the obstinacy of his jailer as because of the walls and bars with which he is surrounded; and when he tries to escape, he chooses to work on the hardness of the stone and iron rather than on the inflexible nature of the jailer. When he is led to the scaffold, he foresees his death as certainly from the constancy and fidelity of his guards as from the operation of the axe. His mind runs along a certain train of ideas—

the refusal of the soldiers to consent to his escape,  
the action of the executioner,  
the separation of the head from the body,  
bleeding, convulsive motions, and death.

Here is a connected chain of natural causes and voluntary actions. As the mind passes from one link to the next, it doesn't feel any difference, and it is as sure of the future event as it would be if it were connected with the present impressions of the memory and senses by a chain of causes cemented together by so-called 'physical necessity'. The same experienced union has the same effect on the mind, whether the united items are •motives, volitions, and actions, or •shape and motion. . . .

I venture to predict, with confidence, that no-one will ever try to refute these reasonings of mine in any way except by altering my definitions and giving different meanings to 'cause', 'effect', 'necessity', 'liberty', and 'chance'. According to my definitions, necessity is an essential part of causa-

tion; and consequently liberty, by removing necessity, also removes causes, and is the same thing as chance. As chance is commonly thought to imply a contradiction, and is at least directly contrary to experience, there are always the same

arguments against liberty or free-will. If anyone alters the definitions, I can't undertake to argue with him till I know what meanings he *does* give to these terms.

## 2: Liberty and necessity (continued)

The doctrine of liberty is absurd taken in one sense, and unintelligible in any other—so why is it so prevalent? I think there are three reasons for this. **(1)** After we have performed an action, though we accept that we were *influenced* by particular views and motives it's hard for us to persuade ourselves that we were governed by *necessity* and that it was utterly impossible for us to have acted differently; because we have no sense of the force, violence, or constraint that seems to be implied by the idea of necessity. Not many people are capable of distinguishing

- the liberty of spontaneity (as the scholastics call it), the liberty that is opposed to violence [= 'opposed to being physically locked up or held down or the like']

, from

- the liberty of indifference, i.e. the liberty that means a negation of necessity and causes.

The former is the most common sense of the word; and that species of liberty is the only one we have reason to want to preserve; so our thoughts have chiefly turned towards it, and have almost universally confused it with the other.

**(2)** There is a false sensation or experience of liberty, which is regarded as evidence for its real existence (I'm talking now just about the liberty of indifference). The

necessity of any action, whether of matter or of the mind, is a quality not in the thing that acts but in the mind of any thinking being who considers the action. It consists in •the determination of the spectator's thought to infer the action's existence from something that happened before it; whereas liberty or chance is nothing but the lack of •that determination, and a certain looseness that we feel in passing or not passing from the idea of one to the idea of the other. When we are viewing or thinking about the actions *of others*, we seldom feel such a looseness or indifference, but we often feel something like it regarding *our own* actions; and . . . this has been offered as a conclusive proof of human liberty. We feel that our actions are usually subject to our will, and we *imagine* we feel that our will isn't subject to anything. Here is why: If someone insists that our will *is* subject to causes, we may be provoked to try ·to show him to be wrong·, we feel that our will moves easily in every direction, and produces an image of itself even on the side on which it didn't settle. We persuade ourselves that this image could have developed into the thing itself, because if that is denied we find, on a second trial, that it can. But these efforts get us nowhere. Whatever capricious and irregular actions we may perform ·in such a situation·, they are •motivated by the desire to

show our liberty, so we can't ·in this way· ever free ourselves from the bonds of •necessity. We may imagine that we feel a liberty within ourselves, but a spectator can commonly infer our actions from our motives and character; and even where he can't, he concludes in general that he could have done so if he had known all the details of our situation and temperament, and the most secret springs of our character. And that, according to my doctrine, is the very essence of necessity.

(3) A third reason why the doctrine of liberty has had a better reception from the world than has its antagonist involves religion, which has needlessly concerned itself with this question. No method of 'reasoning' is more common, or more blameworthy, than in philosophical debates to try to refute a thesis by claiming that it has dangerous consequences for religion and morality. When any opinion leads us into absurdities, it is certainly false; but an opinion's having dangerous consequences does *not* make it certain that it is false. So we ought never to use that line of thought: it isn't in the least helpful towards discovering the truth; all it does is to draw down hatred on one's opponent. I'm offering this as a general remark, without wanting to get any advantage from it, ·such as I might get if I thought my position to be true and also dangerous·. I am entirely willing to have my views tested for dangerousness! I would go so far as to say that the doctrine of necessity, understood in terms of my account of it, is not only innocent but even advantageous to religion and morality.

I define 'necessity' in two ways, conformable to the two definitions of 'cause', of which necessity is an essential part. I place necessity either in (a) the constant union and conjunction of pairs of similar items or in (b) the inference of the mind from one such item to the other. Now, necessity in *each* of these senses has been attributed to the will of

man—tacitly, but by everyone in the schools, in the pulpit, and in common life. No-one has ever claimed to deny that (b) we can draw inferences concerning human actions, and that those inferences are based on (a) the experienced union of similar actions with similar motives and circumstances. If someone is to disagree with me about this, it will have to be either •by refusing to call this 'necessity' or •by maintaining that the operations of matter involve something more ·than the necessity described in my theory. The former of these dissents doesn't matter: the word can do no harm as long as its meaning is understood. As for the second dissent: the question as to whether my account captures the necessity of material events is of no consequence to religion, however much it may matter to natural science. Perhaps I am wrong in asserting that our only idea of connections between the actions of •bodies is the one I have analysed, and I'll be glad to be further instructed about this; but I am sure that I don't ascribe to the actions of •the mind anything but what must readily be agreed to. So no-one should make my position look bad by misconstruing my words and saying simply

'He asserts the necessity of human actions, putting them on a level with the operations of senseless matter.'

I do not ascribe to the will the unintelligible necessity that is supposed to lie in matter. I do ascribe to matter the intelligible quality—call it 'necessity' or not—which the most rigorous orthodoxy does or should agree belongs to the will. If I am in conflict here with any of the received systems, the conflict concerns material objects, not the will.

Indeed I go further! I contend that this kind of necessity is so essential to religion and morality that without it they would both be undermined, and that any account of the will different from mine would be entirely destructive to all laws, both divine and human. All human laws are based

on rewards and punishments, so it *must* be assumed as a fundamental principle that these motives influence the mind in producing good actions and preventing bad ones. Call this influence anything you like; but . . . . common sense says it should be regarded as a cause, and be looked on as an instance of the necessity that I am arguing for.

This reasoning holds just as well when applied to divine laws, with God being considered as a legislator who inflicts punishments and gives rewards in order to produce obedience. But what about when he is acting not •in that magisterial capacity—i.e. distributing rewards and punishments so as to get obedience—but rather •as the avenger of crimes simply because they are disgusting and ugly? •I stand my ground even then. I contend that without the necessary connection of cause and effect in human actions, punishments would be inconsistent with justice and moral fairness, and no reasonable being could even *think* of punishing anyone. The object of hatred or anger is always *a person*, a creature endowed with thought and consciousness; and when some criminal or injurious •action creates hatred or anger, it does so only because of its connection with the •person whose action it is. But the doctrine of liberty or chance reduces this connection to nothing, implying that men are no more accountable for their designed and premeditated actions than they are for their most casual and accidental ones. Actions are by their very nature temporary and short-lived; if an action doesn't come from some cause in the character and disposition of the person who performed it, then doesn't *attach* itself to him, and can't bring him either honour (if it's a good action) or dishonour (if it's a bad one). *The action* may be blameworthy, and contrary to all the rules of morality and religion; but *the person* isn't responsible for it, because it didn't come from anything durable or constant in him and doesn't leave anything durable or constant behind in him.

So it can't possibly draw down punishment or vengeance on him because of it. According to the hypothesis of liberty, a man is as pure and untainted after committing a horrid crime as he was at the moment of his birth; his character isn't in any way involved in his actions because they don't come from it, so that the wickedness of the actions is no evidence of the depravity of the man. . . .

But men are so inconsistent with themselves that though they often *say* that necessity utterly destroys all merit and demerit . . . . , they still continue to base their judgments about merit and demerit on the thesis that necessity reigns. •Here are three striking bits of evidence for this•.

Men aren't blamed for evil actions that they perform ignorantly and casually, whatever their consequences may be.

Why? It can only be because the causes of these actions are only momentary, and come to an end the moment the action is performed.

Men are blamed less for evil actions that they perform hastily and without premeditation than for ones that they perform thoughtfully and deliberately.

Why? It must be because a tendency to act with rash haste, though it's a constant cause in the mind, operates only intermittently and doesn't infect the whole character.

Any crime can be wiped off by repentance, especially if the repentance is accompanied by an evident reformation of life and manners.

Why? It must be because actions make a person criminal only because the actions are proofs of criminal passions or drives [Hume: 'principles'] in the person's mind; and when these drives alter in such a way that the actions are no longer proofs of that, they are no longer criminal. But according to the doctrine of liberty or chance, the actions never were sound proofs •of anything bad and durable in the person

who performed them, and so they never were criminal!

[Hume ends the section with a triumphant challenge to his adversaries to support their position by 'fair arguments'. He concludes:] I have no doubt of an entire victory. So now,

having proved that all the actions of the will have particular causes, I proceed to explain what these causes are and how they operate.

### 3: The influencing motive of the will

Nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life, than to talk of the battle between passion and reason, to give the preference to reason, and to assert that men are virtuous only to the extent that they conform themselves to reason's dictates. Every rational creature, it is said, ought to regulate his actions by reason; and if any other motive or drive tries to take control, he ought to oppose it until it is either entirely subdued or at least made to conform to the superior drive, reason. Most moral philosophy, ancient and modern, seems to be based on this way of thinking. This supposed pre-eminence of reason over passion provides a rich source of metaphysical arguments as well as of moral harangues, in which

reason's eternity, unchangingness, and divine origin are held up for admiration, while

the passions' blindness, inconstancy, and deceitfulness

are equally strongly emphasized. Wanting to show the fallacy of this entire line of thought, I shall try to show that reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will, and that reason can never oppose passion in directing the will.

The understanding [here = 'the faculty of reason'] goes to work in two different ways: **(1)** reaching judgments through

demonstration, attending only to the abstract relations of our ideas, and **(2)** reaching them on the basis of probability, attending to the relations of objects that we can know about only from experience. I hardly think anyone will contend that **(1)** the demonstrative species of reasoning is ever, on its own, the cause of any action. That kind of reasoning belongs in the world of ideas, while the will deals on with the world of realities; so it seems that demonstration and volition are totally removed from each other. It's true that mathematics [here = 'geometry'?] is useful in all mechanical operations, and arithmetic is useful in almost every art and profession; but they don't have any influence by themselves. Mechanics is the art of regulating the movements of bodies for some purpose; and our only reason for using arithmetic in fixing the proportions of numbers is to help us discover the proportions of the influence and operations of bodies. . . . Abstract or demonstrative reasoning never influences any of our actions except by directing our judgment concerning causes and effects. That brings me to the second operation of the understanding.

**(2)** It's obvious that when we have the prospect of un-pleasure or pleasure from any object, we feel a consequent emotion of aversion or liking, and are led to avoid or embrace

the object in question. It's also obvious that this emotion doesn't stop there; rather, it makes us look in every direction so as to take in whatever objects are connected with the first one by the relation of cause and effect. That's where reasoning comes in: it looks for cause-effect connections, and the results it comes up with will affect how we subsequently act. But it's obvious that in this case reason doesn't *provide* the impulse to act but only *steers* it. It's the prospect of pleasure or unpleasure from an object that makes us want it or want to avoid it; and these feelings extend themselves to the causes and effects of the object as they are pointed out to us by reason and experience. We couldn't have the slightest interest in what causes what, if the causes and effects were indifferent to us [i.e. if we didn't have attitudes, pro or con, towards them]. Where •the objects themselves don't affect us, •their way of being connected can't have any influence over us; and because reason is nothing but the discovery of how they are connected, objects can't affect us with the help of reason.

Since unaided reason can't **(a)** produce an action or give rise to a volition, I infer that it is equally incapable of **(b)** preventing a volition or of challenging any passion or emotion •in its role as a producer of our conduct•. This inference is strictly valid. The only way reason could possibly **(b)** prevent a volition would be by pushing our passions in a different direction; but such a push, if it operated alone, would have been able **(a)** to produce a volition. Nothing can block or dampen the impulse of passion except a contrary impulse—a push in the opposite direction•; and if this contrary impulse ever comes from reason, it follows that reason must have a basic influence on the will, and must be able to cause volitions as well as block them. But if reason has no basic influence, it can't possibly resist any drive that does have such efficacy; it can't ever keep the mind in suspense for a moment. So it seems that the drive that opposes our passion

can't be *reason* (using that word in its proper sense). When we talk of the struggle 'between passion and reason', we aren't speaking correctly. **Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions**; the only work it can claim to do is in serving and obeying them. [The famous first half of that sentence is verbatim Hume; he didn't put it in bold type.] This opinion may strike you as rather extraordinary, so perhaps I should back it up by some other considerations.

A passion is just a bit of the world's furniture, or if you like a property or state of a bit of the world's furniture; there's nothing about it that would enable it to represent or be a copy of anything other than itself. When I am angry, that passion is just the state that I am in; it isn't *about* anything else, any more than a reference to something else is involved in my being thirsty or sick or more than five foot tall. So my anger can't *possibly* be opposed by, or contradictory to, truth and reason; because any such contradiction consists in a misfit between objects and the ideas that represent them; •and my anger doesn't represent anything•.

. . . . Passions can be contrary to reason only to the extent that they are *accompanied* by some judgment or opinion. So there are only in two senses in which any passion can be called 'unreasonable'. **(1)** When a passion such as hope or fear, grief or joy, despair or security, is based on a belief in the existence of objects that don't really exist—which includes: a belief in the occurrence of events that don't really occur•. **(2)** When in acting on a passion the person chooses means that won't secure his desired end, because he is making some false judgment about causes and effects. If a passion isn't based on false beliefs, and doesn't lead to the choice of inadequate means for the person's end, there's nothing the understanding can say about it by way of justification or condemnation. It's not contrary to reason for me to prefer •the destruction of the whole world to •the scratching of

my finger. It's not contrary to reason for me to choose •my total ruin so as to prevent •some slight unpleasure for a person who is wholly unknown to me. When I accept that x is better y, it's not contrary to reason for me to have a strong preference for y. A trivial good can in certain circumstances produce a stronger desire than does the greatest and most valuable enjoyment; and there's nothing extraordinary in this, any more than there is in mechanics when we see a one-pound weight so situated that it can raise 100 pounds. In short, a passion must be accompanied by some false judgment if it is to be unreasonable; and even then, strictly speaking, what is unreasonable is not the passion but the judgment. . . .

For anyone who doesn't examine things with a strict philosophic eye [Hume's phrase], it is natural to think that there's no difference between two actions of the mind that don't *feel* different. Now, reason exerts itself without producing any sensible emotions, and hardly ever gives pleasure or unpleasure . . . . So it comes about that every action of the mind that is performed with that same calmness and tranquillity is confused with reason by everyone whose opinions about things are based on superficial appearances. Some calm desires and tendencies, though they are real passions, produce little emotion in the mind and are known more by their effects than by how they feel. These desires are of two kinds: **(1)** basic instincts implanted in our natures, such as benevolence and resentment, the love of life, and kindness to children; **(2)** the general desire for good and aversion to evil, considered merely as such. When any of these passions are calm, and cause no turbulence in the soul, they're easily mistaken for the determinations of reason, •so that (for example) when someone is calmly drawn to behaving kindly to a child• he thinks he is being told to do this by the faculty that makes judgments concerning truth and

falsehood. Because the calm desires and the workings of reason don't *feel* different, they have been thought to have the same nature and to work in the same way.

Beside these calm passions that often determine •the will, there are certain violent emotions of the same kind that also have a great influence on •that faculty. When someone harms me, I often feel a violent passion of resentment that makes me want him to be punished by coming to harm, independently of any thought of pleasure and advantage for myself. •Another example•: When I am immediately threatened with some grievous ill, my fears, apprehensions, and aversions rise to a great height and produce an emotion that I feel.

Philosophers have commonly gone wrong by •ascribing the direction of the will entirely to one of these mechanisms and •supposing the other to have no influence. •Evidence that the calm passions don't do all the work•: Men often act knowingly against their interest, which means that •the calm passion involved in• the view of the greatest possible good doesn't always influence them. •Evidence that the violent passions don't do all the work•: Men often counteract a violent passion in furthering their interests and designs; so they aren't determined purely by their present uneasiness. [Hume's choice of words here suggests that while expounding his view about calm and violent passions he means also to be offering a passing comment on Locke—who wrote that he used to think that the will is always determined by the person's view of 'the greater good', and then came to see that this is wrong and that the will is always determined by the person's 'present uneasiness'.] The fact is that both these mechanisms act on the will; and when they are opposed, which one prevails will depend on the person's general character or his present disposition. When we credit someone with having 'strength of mind', we mean that in him the calm passions usually prevail over the violent ones; though we

all know that no-one has this virtue so constantly that he *never* gives in to the urgings of violent passion and desire. Because of these variations of temperament, it is very hard

to decide what is actually going on in men's actions and resolutions in any case where there is any contrariety of motives and passions.

#### 4: The causes of the violent passions

This question of the different causes and effects of the calm and violent passions is as tricky—as demanding of careful precision—as anything in philosophy. It's obvious that passions don't influence the will in proportion to how violent they are, to how much disturbance they create in the person's frame of mind. Sometimes the truth is the opposite of that! It often happens that when a passion has become a settled action-driver and the predominant inclination of the soul, it no longer produces any agitation that the person can feel. Its own force and its repeated activity have made everything yield to it, so that it now directs the person's conduct without the opposition and emotion that naturally accompany every momentary gust of passion. So we need to distinguish calm passions from weak ones, and violent passions from strong ones. But despite this, when we want to control a man and push him to act in a certain way we'll usually have a better chance of succeeding if we work on his violent passions rather than his calm ones, hooking into his inclination rather than his reason (as the vulgar call it). And *how* are we to do this? The answer to that introduces my main topic in this section. What we have to do is to get the object of the passion we are working on into a situation that will increase the violence of the passion. It's just a fact that everything depends on the situation of the object,

and that a variation in that can change a calm passion into a violent one or vice versa. Both these kinds of passions pursue good and avoid evil; and both of them are increased or lessened by the increase or lessening of the good or evil. But here's where they come apart: something that the person judges to be good will cause a violent passion in him when it is near, but a calm passion when it is remote—it's the very same good, affecting the passions differently according to its situation. This is part of the story of the will; so I'm going to examine it thoroughly, investigating the circumstances and situations of objects that make a passion either calm or violent.

It is a remarkable property of human nature that any emotion that accompanies a passion is easily converted into it, even if they are basically different from and even contrary to one another. [Hume reminds us of his theory that 'a double relation of impressions and ideas' is needed for one passion to produce another; but that is irrelevant here, he says, because he is talking about two passions that already exist from their own separate causes, and then merge and mingle; and for this there doesn't have to be a double relation, or even, sometimes, a single one. He continues:] The predominant passion swallows up the lesser one and converts it into itself. Once the spirits [see note on page 171]

have been aroused, it's easy to change their direction, and it's natural to imagine that this change will come from the prevailing passion. In many ways the connection between two passions is closer than the connection between any passion and ·passionless· indifference.

[Hume now offers three examples. **(1)** A lover is so 'heartily in love' that he comes to find charming and lovable the little faults of his mistress that would ordinarily make him angry. **(2)** A public speaker, wanting to get his audience worked up over some 'matter of fact', first makes them curious, delaying his revelation until they are almost desperate to know what it is. Hume doesn't provide details to make this plausible. **(3)** The third example concerns the emotions of a soldier going into battle, feeling brave and confident when he thinks of 'his friends and fellow-soldiers' and terrified when he thinks about the enemy. Hume writes of the steps that are taken to increase the soldier's confidence and reduce his fear; and he *says* that this involves the phenomenon that is his official topic here—a dominant emotion converting a lesser one into itself—but he says nothing to make this believable.]

If two passions are both present at the same time, then, however independent they are, they're naturally transfused into each other. From this it follows that when good or evil is placed in such a situation as to cause not only •the basic direct passion of desire or aversion but also •some more specific emotion, the basic passion acquires new force and violence.

One class of cases where this happens is when an object arouses *contrary* passions. When someone is subject to two opposing passions, this often causes a new emotion in the spirits, creating more disorder than would come from the *working together* of two passions of equal force [equal, that is, to the two opposing passions]. This new emotion is easily converted into the predominant one of the two opposing

passions, which thus becomes more violent than it would have been if it had met with no opposition. That explains why it is natural for us to want what has been forbidden, and to take pleasure in performing actions merely because they are unlawful. When the notion of duty is opposed to the passions, it usually can't overcome them; and when it fails to do so, it tends rather to increase them, by producing an opposition in our motives and drives.

Whether the opposition arises from internal motives or external obstacles, the effect is the same: the passion usually acquires new force and violence in both cases. The mind's efforts to overcome the obstacle arouse the spirits and enliven the passion.

Uncertainty has the same effect as opposition. ·The natural accompaniments of uncertainty·—the agitation of the thought, the thought's quick turns from one view to another, the variety of passions that come with the different views—all these produce an agitation in the mind and transfuse themselves into the predominant passion.

Why does security •diminish passions? The only natural cause for this, I believe, is that security removes the uncertainty that •increases the passions. When the mind is left to itself it immediately goes slack; it has to be continually supported by a new flow of passion if it is to preserve its eagerness and energy. And that's also the reason why despair tends to dampen the passions, despite the fact that despair is contrary to security. ·That contrariety is irrelevant; the crucial point is that despair and security are two forms of certainty·.

Nothing more powerfully enlivens an emotion than concealing some part of its object by throwing it into a kind of shade, so that we are shown enough of the object to be drawn to it while still having some work left for the imagination to do. ·This is doubly enlivening·: •obscurity

is always accompanied by a kind of uncertainty, which is enlivening, and •the imagination's effort to complete our idea of the object arouses the spirits and gives even more force to the passion.

With *despair* and *security* we have an example of

- contrary states that produce the same effects; which contrasts with *absence*, which is
- a single state that has contrary effects

in different circumstances. The Duc de la Rochefoucault was right when he said that absence destroys weak passions but increases strong ones; as the wind extinguishes a candle but blows up a fire. Long absence naturally weakens our idea and diminishes the passion; but when the idea is strong and lively enough to support itself, the unpleasure arising from absence increases the passion and gives it new force and violence.

### 5: The effects of custom

Nothing has more power to increase and lessen our passions, to convert pleasure into unpleasure and vice versa, than custom and repetition. Custom has two *basic* effects on the mind: •it makes easier the performance of any kind of action or the conception of any object, and •it then creates a tendency or inclination towards that action or object. All the other effects of custom, however extraordinary, come from those two.

When the soul sets itself to perform an action or conceive of an object to which it isn't accustomed, the faculties are somewhat stiff and awkward and the spirits find it difficult to move in the required new direction. Because •this difficulty arouses the spirits, •it is the source of wonder, surprise, and all the emotions that arise from novelty; and •it is in itself very agreeable, like everything that enlivens the mind to a moderate degree. But although surprise is agreeable in itself, its effect of agitating the spirits leads to a heightening of *all* our affections, pleasant as well as unpleasant. (This follows from my principle that every emotion that precedes

or accompanies a passion is easily converted into it.) So every *new* thing affects us greatly, giving us more pleasure or unpleasure than what naturally belongs to it. If the item in question often returns, the novelty wears off, the passions subside, the spirits stop bustling, and we survey the item in a calmer way.

The repetition gradually makes the action or conception easy; and that's another very powerful driver in the human mind, and an infallible source of pleasure as long as the easiness hasn't gone too far. It's worth noting that the pleasure that comes from a moderate facility [= 'easiness'] doesn't tend to augment unpleasant as well as pleasant emotions in the way that novelty does. The pleasure of facility doesn't consist in any •ferment of the spirits as much as it does their •orderly motion; and this is sometimes so powerful that it even converts unpleasure into pleasure, eventually getting us to *like* something that was at first most harsh and disagreeable.

That was about *moderate* facility. When an action or conception becomes *too* easy, it often converts pleasure into unpleasure, making the actions of the mind so faint and lethargic that they can't any longer interest and support it. The only things, almost, that become disagreeable through custom are ones that are naturally accompanied by some emotion, which is destroyed by the too frequent repetition.

We can look at or think about the clouds, the night sky, trees, and stones as often as we like without ever feeling any aversion. Not so with women and music and good cheer and all the other things that naturally ought to be agreeable: when one of *them* becomes indifferent, that easily produces the opposite emotion. . . .

### 6: The imagination's influence on the passions

The imagination is notably closely united with the emotions; nothing that affects it can be entirely indifferent to them. Whenever our ·imaginative· ideas of good or evil become livelier, the passions become more violent and keep pace with the imagination in all its variations. Never mind •why this happens; . . . it's enough for my present purpose that the imagination •does have this influence on the passions, and that there are plenty of examples of this.

[Hume now devotes most of two pages to the thesis that if we are acquainted with pleasure x and know about pleasure y only in a general way (presumably from description), we'll be more affected by x than by y, even if we accept that y is better than x. (He might be thinking of x as the pleasure of dining with good friends and y as the promised joys of heaven.) The reason, he says, is that a very general notion of a pleasure doesn't give our imagination, or therefore our emotions, enough to latch on to. He then recounts something that happened in ancient Athens. Someone had a plan for a military action that he thought would be good for Athens, but he couldn't say publicly what it was because surprise was of

its essence. The Athenians told him to confide the details to one man whom they trusted, and that man reported that the proposed action would be •*very advantageous to Athens and very unjust*; whereupon the Athenian people voted against putting the plan into action. Hume reports an historian who is extremely impressed by this behaviour, but he says that it's not surprising: his point is that the description 'very advantageous to Athens' is too general to grip their imaginations or, therefore, their emotions. He concludes:] The advantage must have had a weaker influence on their imaginations, and have been a less violent temptation, than if they had been acquainted with all its details; otherwise it's hard to conceive that a whole people—unjust and violent people, as men commonly are—should so unanimously have stuck to justice and rejected a considerable advantage.

Any satisfaction that we have recently enjoyed, and of which the memory is fresh, operates more forcefully on the will than a less recent satisfaction of which the traces are almost obliterated. That has to be because in the first case the memory helps the imagination, giving extra force and

vigour to its conceptions. The image of the past pleasure being strong and violent, bestows these qualities on the idea of the future pleasure that is connected with it by the relation of resemblance.

A pleasure that is suitable to •our present way of life arouses our desires and appetites more than does a pleasure that is foreign to •it. This can also be explained in terms of the same mechanism.

Nothing is more capable of putting passion into the mind than eloquence, by which objects are represented in their strongest and most lively colours. We don't need the help of an orator to see that x is valuable and y is odious; but •these ideas may have only a feeble influence on the will and the

affections until an orator stirs up the imagination and gives •them force.

But eloquence isn't always needed. Someone else's bare opinion, especially if reinforced by passion, will cause an idea of good or evil to influence us—an idea that would otherwise have been entirely neglected. This comes from the mechanism of sympathy, which, I repeat, is simply the conversion of an idea into an impression by the force of imagination.

It's a conspicuous fact that lively passions usually go with a lively imagination. This is just one of the ways in which the force of a passion depends on the temperament of the person as much as on the nature or situation of the object. . . .

## 7: Closeness and distance in space and time

There is an easy reason why everything that is close to us, whether in space or in time, should be conceived with special force and liveliness, and excel every other object in its influence on the imagination. *Ourself* is intimately present to us, and anything that is related to self—e.g. by closeness—is intimately present too. But that doesn't explain the fact that when an object is far enough away from us to have lost the advantage of this relation, it becomes fainter and more obscure the further away it is. To explain *this* we may need to get into details.

It's obvious that our imagination can't ever totally forget the points of space and time in which we exist—i.e. can't ever forget *here* and *now*. It gets so many reminders of them from the passions and the senses that even when it is busy

with things that are far away ·in space and/or time· it is forced at every moment to reflect on the present. Now, when we are thinking about objects that we regard as real and existent, we take them in their proper order and situation; we don't jump from one object to another that is distant from it, without at least sketchily running our thought across all the objects that come between them. [Despite Hume's use of 'distant' and 'space', throughout all this he is talking about near/far in time as well as in space. He'll come to a relevant difference between them in the next paragraph but one.] So when we reflect on any object that is distant from ourselves, we are obliged not only •to reach it at first by passing through all the space between ourselves and the object, but also •to keep redoing this because we are at every moment recalled to the consideration of ourselves

and our present situation, ·i.e. recalled to *here* and *now*·. It's easy to believe that this interruption must weaken the idea, by breaking up the mind's action so that its conception can't be as intense and continuous as it is when we think about something closer to us. . . . The *unliveliness* of our idea of an object is roughly proportional to how distant the object is from us and how difficult it is for us to get our thought across to it.

So those are the effects on our •imagination of close objects and remote ones. If my previous theory is correct, there must be corresponding effects on the •will and the •passions—strong effects for close objects, weaker ones for remote objects. And that's what we find. In everyday life men are principally concerned about items that aren't far away in space or in time, enjoying the present and leaving what is far off to the care of chance and fortune. Talk to a man about his condition thirty years hence and he won't listen. Speak of what is to happen tomorrow and he will attend. The breaking of a mirror at home concerns us more than the burning of a house a hundred miles away.

But although spatial and temporal distance both have a considerable effect on the imagination, and therefore on the will and passions, the effect of spatial distance is much less than that of temporal distance. Twenty years —that's a tiny stretch of time compared with how far back history goes; indeed it isn't very big compared with the extent of some people's memories. Yet I think that a twenty-year distance will weaken our ideas and diminish our passions more than they would be diminished by five thousand miles, or even the greatest distance possible on our planet. A West Indian merchant ·here in Europe· will tell you that he cares somewhat about what is going on in Jamaica, but he is not likely to think far enough ahead to be afraid of possible accidents twenty years into the future.

Why is there this difference? It must come from the different properties of space and time. [Hume's explanation is this. Different parts of space exist together, and can be perceived together; this helps the imagination to imagine them together; and that makes the imagination's journey from *here* to *elsewhere* 'smooth and easy'. In contrast with that, different parts of time don't exist together, and can't be perceived together; so when the imagination traces a route from *now* to *some other time* it must go through the intervening times piecemeal—'Every part must appear single and alone', as Hume puts it—so that the imagination's journey is much bumpier. Hume concludes:] In this way any distance in time causes a greater interruption in the thought than an equal distance in space, and consequently weakens more considerably the idea—and therefore (according to my system) correspondingly weakens the passions.

There's another somewhat similar phenomenon, namely that an object a certain distance into the •future has a greater effect than that same object would have if it were that same distance into the •past. It's easy to explain with respect to effects on the will: what is past can't be altered, so it's to be expected that it won't have any effect on the will. But why does the future have more effect on the •passions than the past does? That question is still standing, and it's worth trying to answer.

When we think about some temporally remote item by going progressively through the points of time between ourselves and it, a further feature of our thinking comes into play—one that I haven't yet mentioned. It is that when we think our way along a period of time, we find it easier to go through the moments in the order in which they exist. Starting from an event in the past, we find it easier to move our thought from that event to what happened afterwards than to move it from that event to what happened

before it. You can see this at work in the order that is always observed in historical narrations: nothing short of an absolute necessity can get an historian to break the order of time by narrating two events in the opposite order to that in which they actually occurred.

It will be easy to apply this to our present question if we reflect on my point that *the present situation of the person* is always what imagination starts from when it sets out to conceive any ·temporally· distant object. When the object is **past**, the movement of thought in passing to it from the present is contrary to nature: it goes from one point of time to an earlier one, then a still earlier one . . . and so on, in opposition to the natural course of the succession ·of time·. Whereas when we turn our thought to a **future** object, our imagination flows along the stream of time, going in

the seemingly most natural order from one point of time to the next . . . and so on. So the move into the future is easier for the imagination, making it conceive its object in a stronger and fuller light than when it makes its (much less natural) journey into the past. A small distance into the past has a greater effect in interrupting and weakening the conception than a much greater distance into the future. And that past/future difference in effect on the imagination produces a past/future difference in effect on the passions.

[The section ends with a one-page paragraph in which Hume presents a further flourish of his present line of thought. It's not clear what the flourish really is, and it seems not to be needed for the understanding of the rest of what he has to say.]

### 8: Closeness and distance in space and time (continued)

Thus I have explained three remarkable phenomena: •distance weakens both conception and passion; •distance in time has a greater effect than distance in space; and •distance in past time has a greater effect than distance in future time. Now we come to three phenomena that seem to be in a way the reverse of these. They all concern the *respect and admiration* that we have for a given item x:

- (1) It is increased by x's being at a very great ·spatial or temporal· distance.
- (2) It is increased more by x's being distant in time than by its being distant in space.
- (3) It is increased more by x's being distant in the past than by its being distant in the future.

This is an odd set of facts; forgive me if I stay with it for some time.

[In the paragraphs headed (1) and (3), 'admiration' is used, as it often was in Hume's day, to mean something like 'enjoyable wonder'; one could 'admire' the distances between the stars without in any way approving of them.]

(1) Why does a great distance increase our respect and admiration for an object? It is obvious that the mere view and contemplation of any greatness, whether in a succession or all at once, enlarges the soul and gives it delight and pleasure. A wide plain, the ocean, eternity, a succession of centuries—these are all objects of great interest; they surpass everything, however beautiful, whose beauty isn't accompanied by a

comparable greatness. Now, when a very distant object is presented to our imagination we naturally think about •the distance between ourselves and it, and get the satisfaction that usually comes from conceiving •something great and magnificent. And our admiration for *the distance* naturally spreads to *the distant object* (because of the imagination's practice of passing easily from one idea to any other that is related to it); so that any passions we have directed to the distance come also to be directed to the distant object. For an object to attract our distance-related admiration, it doesn't have to be actually distant from us; all that is needed is for it to make us, by the natural association of ideas, carry our thought to a considerable distance. A great traveller counts as a very extraordinary person although he is right here in the room with us; as a Greek medal in our display-case is regarded as a valuable curiosity. In these cases the object by a natural transition makes us think about the distance (-spatial for the traveller, temporal for the medal-), and our admiration for the distance by another natural transition reflects back on the object.

Temporal distance has this effect more strongly than does spatial distance. Ancient busts and inscriptions are more valued than •contemporary• Japanese tables; . . . . we regard the •ancient Chaldeans and Egyptians with more veneration than we do the •modern Chinese and Persians, and take more trouble to clear up the history and chronology of the •former than it would cost us to make a voyage and get solid information about the character, learning, and government of the •latter. To explain this I shall have to take a detour.

It's a conspicuous quality in human nature that any opposition that doesn't entirely discourage and intimidate us has instead a contrary effect, and inspires us with a more than ordinary largeness of thought. In gathering ourself together to overcome the opposition, we invigorate the soul

and raise it to a height that it would never have known otherwise. Giving in to a difficulty makes our strength useless, so that we have no sense of *having* strength; but opposition •to a difficulty• awakens our strength and puts it to use.

This is also true in reverse. It's not just that opposition enlarges the soul; when the soul is full of courage and largeness of thought it in a way *seeks* opposition. . . . •Whatever supports and fills the passions is agreeable to us; •what weakens and enfeebles them is disagreeable. Opposition has the •former effect, and facility [= 'easiness'] has the •latter; so it's no wonder that the mind in certain dispositions wants opposition and is averse to facility.

These mechanisms have an effect on the imagination as well as on the passions. To be convinced of this, we need only consider . . . . [Hume now embarks on a three-page exposition of this point (in the course of which he loses sight of what he set out to argue; the only thing in it that has the form '. . . applies to the imagination as well as to the passions' is simply asserted, not shown). The exposition starts with the effect on the imagination of height and depth, which we associate with good and bad—e.g. a monarch has a 'high' status, a labourer a 'low' one. Now, no place is *intrinsically* high: our notion of height is just the thought of a position from which it is easy for bodies to descend towards the earth, a place towards which it is hard for bodies to rise. And the customary descent of •bodies from heights operates on our •senses, which affect our •imagination; the result of this being that when we think about something that is high up, 'the idea of its weight makes us tend to transport it to the place immediately below it, and so on •downwards• until we reach the ground, which stops the body and our imagination'. And we have some difficulty moving from the thought of something to the thought of something above

it, 'as if our ideas acquired a kind of heaviness from their objects'. In this context, Hume revisits his thesis that a fully robust soul will ('in a manner') look for difficult things to do, applies this to the (difficult and therefore attractive) process of raising one's thoughts higher and higher, and asserts that this applies to the imagination as well as passions. Then:]

All this is easily applied to our question of why a considerable distance in time produces a greater veneration for the distant objects than a comparable distance in space. The imagination finds it harder to move from one portion of time to another than to move through parts of space, because space or extension appears to our senses as •united 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

and more obvious events of this war, leaving aside all the smaller and more delicate revolutions because they depend

on mechanisms that are too tiny for philosophy to grasp.

## 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, desire 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 indirect passions in the manner Hume 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 them 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 inquisitiveness 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 unpleasure 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.

### 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 algebraic 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!

To remove this contradiction we must take into account the fact that certain desires and inclinations go no further

than the imagination, and are the faint shadows and images of passions rather than real emotions. Consider someone who surveys in great detail the fortifications of a city; it's clear that in proportion as the bastions, ramparts, and so on are fitted to achieve what they were built for, he will have a suitable pleasure and satisfaction. This pleasure arises from the utility of the objects, not from their form, so it has to be an instance of sympathy—i.e. sympathy with the city's inhabitants, for whose security all these fortifications were designed and built. And yet the pleased surveyor may be a stranger who has in his heart no kindness for those people, or even an enemy who hates them.

You may want to object: 'Such a remote sympathy is a very slight foundation for a passion, and is not nearly strong enough to be the source of so much industry and application as we frequently observe in philosophers.' [These 'philosophers' are scientists, and Hume has focussed on the special case of mathematicians. You'll recall that he is trying to explain why such a person might be motivated by the thought of his work's utility to mankind, even though he doesn't much care for mankind.] But here I return to my earlier point that the pleasure of study consists chiefly in the action of the mind, and the exercise of high intellect and understanding in the discovery or comprehension of a truth. If the *importance* of the truth is needed to complete the pleasure, it's not because that in itself adds significantly to the person's enjoyment, but only because it is somewhat needed to fix our attention. Work that would give us great satisfaction if we did it in a focussed and attentive way won't satisfy us if we do it—the very same work—in a casual and inattentive manner.

Along with the pleasure of doing the work there has to be also some prospect of success in it, i.e. of discovering the truth that is being sought. A general remark that may be useful in many contexts is relevant here: When the mind

pursues any end with passion, even if the passion originally comes not from the end but from the action of pursuing it, we naturally come to care about the end itself, and are unhappy with any disappointment we meet with in pursuing it. . . .

[Hume illustrates this with the psychology of hunting. A very wealthy man gets great satisfaction from a session of hunting and shooting ‘partridges and pheasants’, and may want his catch to be prepared, cooked and eaten. But the resultant food doesn’t motivate his hunt or provide his pleasure, because he could get such food in much less expensive and time-taking ways. On the other hand, he wouldn’t be interested in hunting and shooting ‘crows and magpies’. Why? Because they aren’t edible! —And a second example: Playing cards for money. This can be found enjoyable by someone who already has plenty of money and has no use for more, yet would find the game flat and boring if it were not played for money. Hume winds up:] This is like the chemical preparations where by mixing two clear and transparent liquids you get a liquid that is opaque and coloured.

[In the next two sentences, what Hume means by our ‘interest’ in a game, and our ‘concern’ as we play it, is our caring what happens in it, our wanting to win.] The interest we take in a game engages our attention; without that we can’t enjoy *any* activity. Once our attention has been engaged, the difficulty, variety, and ups and downs still further interest us; and it’s from that concern that our satisfaction arises. Human life is such a tedious and boring scene, and men generally are so slack and lazy,

that anything that helps them to pass the time—even with a passion that is mixed with unpleasure—mostly gives them pleasure. And in our present case this pleasure is increased by the nature of the objects—the coins—which are small and perceptible, making them •easy to get one’s mind around and •agreeable to the imagination. This theory that accounts for the love of truth in mathematics and algebra can be extended to morals, politics, natural philosophy, and other studies, where we our topic is not the •abstract relations of ideas but rather their •real connections and existence.

But along with the love of knowledge that displays itself in the sciences, there’s a certain *curiosity* implanted in human nature that is a passion derived from a quite different mechanism. Some people have an insatiable desire to know about the actions and circumstances of their neighbours, though •their interests aren’t in any way involved in them, and •they must entirely depend on others for their information; so that there’s no room here for •the pleasures of •study or of •useful application. Let us try to see why this is so.

[Hume’s explanation comes down to this: *Believing* can be a source of pleasure or something like it. That’s because (according to his theory about belief) to believe something is to have a *lively* idea that is fixed *firmly* in the mind; liveliness is a source of pleasure, and stability connects with pleasure too, because its opposite is mental unsettledness which is a source of unpleasure. The desire for stability comes into play only when for some reason the relevant ideas ‘strike on us with force and concern us nearly’. That’s why I am curious about my next-door neighbours but not about yours.]