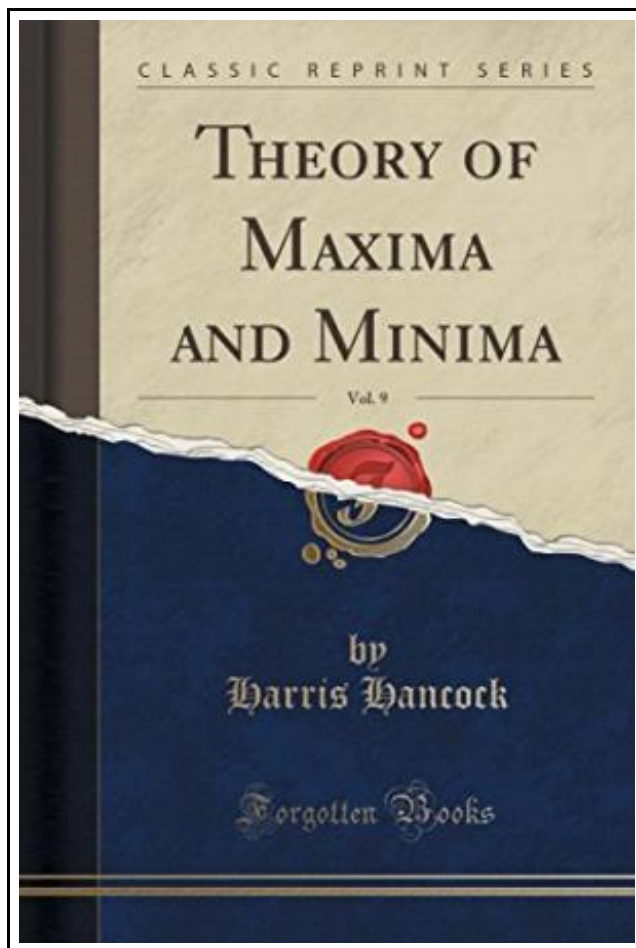


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Mathematicians have always been occupied with questions of maxima and minima. With Euclid one of the simplest problems of this character was: Find the shortest line which may be drawn from a point to a line, and in the fifth book of the conics of Apollonius of Perga occur such problems as the determination of the shortest line which may be drawn from a point to a given conic section. It is thus seen that a sort of theory of maxima and minima was known long before the discovery of the differential calculus, and it may be shown that the attempts to develop this theory exercised considerable influence upon the discovery of the calculus. Fermat, for example, after making numerous restorations of two books of Apollonius, often cites this old geometer in his method for determining maximum and minimum 1638, a work which in some instances is so closely related to the calculus that Lagrange, Laplace, Fourier, and others wished to consider Fermat as the discoverer of the calculus. This he probably would have been had he started from a somewhat more general point of view, as in fact was done by Newton (*Opuscula Newtoni*, I, 86-88). Maclaurin (*A Treatise of Fluxions*, Vol. I, p. 214. 1742), wrote: There are hardly any speculations in geometry more useful or more entertaining than those which relate to maxima and minima. Amongst the various improvements that began to appear in the higher parts of geometry about a hundred years ago, Mr. de Fermat proposed a method for finding the maxima and minima. How the methods that were then invented for the...



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