To influence the will, morality must be based on the passions – extended by sympathy, corrected for bias, and applied to character traits or motives that promote utility.
Hume’s empiricism

- Hume is a strict empiricist, i.e. he holds that knowledge of the world and ourselves ultimately comes from (inner and outer) experience.
  - Its original elements are *impressions*, from which we form *ideas*.
  - Any supposed idea that can’t be traced to an impression is illusory and should be rejected.

- He therefore thinks that causal “necessity” must refer to something we experience, namely
  - *the constant union/conjunction of events*: events of one type regularly follow or accompany events of another, and/or
  - *a habit of inference*: in response to events of one type, we’re moved to infer the existence of the other.

- Thus understood, it applies as much to acts as to physical events; cf. his examples, e.g. of an execution..
“Compatibilism”

- Hume’s account of causal necessity (= determinism) renders it compatible with a version of liberty [= free will].
  - Liberty as “spontaneity” just amounts to absence of any constraints on action, so that what we do is caused by us, i.e. our character and motives, whatever their prior causes.
  - Hume thinks this is wrongly equated with liberty as [causal] “indifference,” on the basis of an illusory feeling we have as agents that we could do something other than what we actually decide to do.

- Hume argues that, far from posing a threat to moral responsibility, causal necessity in fact is presupposed by it.
  - To warrant praising or blaming an agent, an act must be attributable to something durable in him.
  - But without a regular causal connection to the agent’s motives and character, an act would amount to no more than a chance occurrence.
Reason alone can't influence the will or oppose a passion, since it's limited to discovering truth or falsity, i.e.

- relations of ideas, as in logic (= demonstrative use of reason)
- relations of objects, as revealed in experience (= empirical use of reason)

Reason therefore can’t supply motivation to act, but can merely discover the truth or falsity of certain presuppositions of the passions, or of their role in motivating action:

- existence of their objects (= what a particular passion is directed toward)
- means/end causal relations (what act would satisfy a particular passion)

It’s in that sense that Hume famously says that reason is and ought to be the “slave” of the passions. He denies the existence of practical reasoning, understood as reasoning that makes us act.
Extending the passions

- In themselves, passions can never be true or false, since they don’t represent anything. So they can’t conflict with reason or be reasonable or unreasonable in themselves (p. 62).

- Although the term “passions” in Hume’s day wasn’t limited to turbulent emotions, Hume extends it even more widely, so that preferences, desires, and dispositions count as passions.

  - To explain cases of apparent conflict between reason and the passions, or where reason seems to influence the passions, he allows for “calm” passions, including dispositional traits that needn’t be manifested in current feeling, e.g. benevolence.

  - The category of “calm passions” also includes what Hume later refers to as “moral sentiments”: approbation/disapprobation, praise/blame, admiration/condemnation, etc.