

Others there are, who acknowledge indeed that the divine will is really a principle of obligation, and consequently a principle of the morality of human actions ; but they do not stop here. They pretend, that antecedent to all law, and independent of a legislator, there are things which of themselves and by their own nature, are honest or dishonest ; that reason having once discovered this essential and specific difference of human actions, it imposes on man a necessity of performing the one and omitting the other ; and that this is the first foundation of obligation, or the original source of morality and duty.

II. What we have already said concerning the primitive rule of human actions, and the nature and origin of obligation^b, may help to throw some light on the present question. But in order to illustrate it better, let us turn back and resume the thing from its first principles, by endeavouring to assemble here in a natural order, the principal ideas that may lead us to a just conclusion.

Principles
relating to
this ques-
tion.

1. I observe in the first place, that every action considered purely and simply in itself as a natural motion of the mind or body, is absolutely indifferent, and cannot in this respect claim any share of morality.

This is what evidently appears ; forasmuch as the same natural action is esteemed sometimes lawful and even good, and at other times unlawful or bad. To kill a man, for instance, is a bad action in a robber ; but it is lawful or good in an executioner, or in a citizen or foldier that defends his life or coun-

^b See part 1. chap. 5. & 6.

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