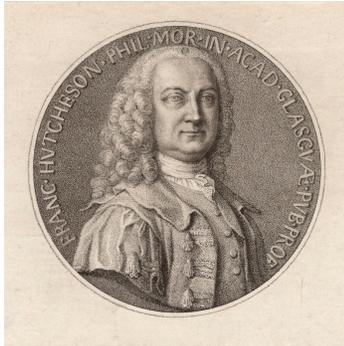


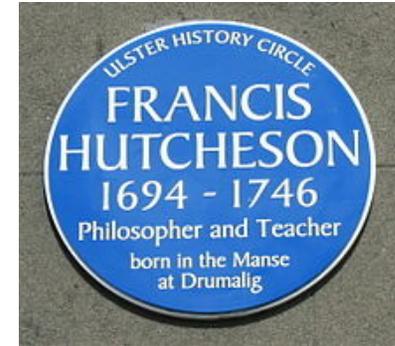
“Destruction of other Natures”: Francis Hutcheson on the Morality of Murder in the 18th Century¹

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Francis Hutcheson.

BORN A. D. 1694.—DIED A. D. 1747.



HUTCHESON, whose name holds an eminent place in the history of metaphysical philosophy, was the son of a presbyterian minister in the north of Ireland. The precise place of his birth is not mentioned; but he was born, 8th August, 1694. It is said that he displayed early indications of extraordinary intellectual power; and having been first sent to school, somewhere in his native country, where he completed so much of his education as is usually attained in schools—he was, in his sixteenth year, sent to the university of Glasgow, which was mostly² preferred to our own university by the Irish dissenters.

“But to prove that Men are void of a *moral Sense*, we should find some Instances of *cruel, malicious Actions*, done without any *Motive of interest, real or apparent*; and approv’d without any *Opinion of Tendency to publick Good, or flowing from Good-will*: We must find a Country where *murder in cold Blood, Tortures, and every thing malicious*, without any *Advantage*, is, if not *approv’d*, at least look’d upon with *Indifference*, and raises *no Aversion* toward the Actors in the unconcern’d Spectators: We must find Men with whom the *Treacherous, Ungrateful, Cruel*, are in the same account with the *Generous, Friendly, Faithful, and Humane*; and who approve the *latter*, no more than the *former*, in all Cases where they are not affected by the Influence of these Dispositions, or when the *natural Good or Evil* befalls other Persons.”³

¹ *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections. With Illustrations on the Moral Sense* (London: W. Innys and J. Richardson, S. Birt, C. Hitch and L. Hawes, T. Astley and R. Baldwin, J. Hinton, J. and J. Rivington, J. Ward, W. Johnston, M. and T. Longman, T. Field and R. Withy, MDCCLVI), 276.

² James Wills, ed., *Lives of Illustrious and Distinguished Irishmen, From the Earliest Times to the Present Period, Arranged in Chronological Order, and Embodying a History of Ireland in the Lives of Irishmen* (Dublin: Macgregor, Polson, and Company, 1844), 96.

³ Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (London: R. Ware, J. and P. Knapton, T. and T. Longman, C. Hitch and L. Hawes, J. Hodges, J. and J. Rivington, and J. Ward, 1753), 206. Emphasis in original, though I did update f to s for ease of reading.



“Some horrid attempts, such as those of murder, assassination, poisoning, robbery, or piracy, shew so desperate a wickedness, that scarce any sufficient security can be obtained to society against the repetition of the like crimes, but the deaths of the criminals.”
~ p. 95

“A manifest tyrant or usurper may be cut off by any private man: here killing is no murder.”
~ p. 134

“Thus one who gave poison, or who discharged a gun at his neighbour with a design on his life is to be punished as a murderer be the event what it will.”
~ p. 335

“Abstract from this previous knowledge by reason and reflection, the Scripture-precepts would be of no use to us, as they are of none to idiots. *Thou shalt not kill*. All killing is not prohibited, 'tis only *murder*. Now where is the Scripture-definition of *murder*? 'Tis our reason must shew what is the lawful, and what the unlawful killing; the lawful, is in self-defense, in just war, in the execution of criminals: and the same reason will shew some extraordinary cases wherein it may be just, for the defence or recovery of all the valuable rights or liberties of a nation.”

~ Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy, in Three Books* (Glasgow: R. and A. Foulis, 1755), 130-131.

⁴ “The Glasgow Story: Old College,” Mitchell Library, Glasgow Collection, <https://www.theglasgowstory.com/image/?inum=TGSA01061> (accessed 24 May 2018).