TASC

THE FLOURISHING SOCIETY

The Secret Chain

Francis Hutcheson and Irish Dissent – A Political Legacy

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The Secret Chain: Francis Hutcheson and Irish Dissent – a Political Legacy

I

Francis Hutcheson is associated with the Scottish Enlightenment of the 18th century, due to his professorial role at Glasgow University. During his period as an academic in Scotland, from 1729 until 1746, he taught the philosopher David Hume and the economist Adam Smith, as well as enacting the roles of teacher and father–figure to the sons of Irish dissenting families who had travelled to Glasgow to engage in the higher education that they were denied under the Williamite settlement.

However, Hutcheson can be considered an Irish intellectual of considerable distinction. This article will consider whether his writings have had any influence on subsequent Irish history, as well as contributing to political developments beyond these islands. It will ask whether his philosophy speaks into the social and economic dilemmas faced in contemporary Ireland and whether Hutcheson possesses a vision of human nature and of society that poses pertinent questions about the prevailing verities and contemporary ethos of Irish capitalism.

Francis Hutcheson was born in 1694 in Saintfield, County Down and he attended an academy for the education of dissenters in the nearby town of Killyleagh. He crossed to Glasgow and attended the university where he would later become such an influential teacher. He returned to Ireland as a young clergyman, but before long he had accepted the job of running a dissenting academy in Dublin's Drumcondra Lane, a post that he held throughout most of the 1720s. Such academies provided young Presbyterians and members of other minority Protestant groups with an education that could reach the academic levels expected during the early years of a contemporary degree in a Scottish university. During his time in Dublin, Hutcheson joined a circle of thinkers and writers who were encouraged in their work by Viscount Molesworth of Brackenstown, near Swords. Molesworth was an influential

figure in the Irish Establishment. He was the owner of a beautiful and innovatively designed country estate and he was a friend of the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury.

Shaftesbury was opposed to the theories of Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Mandeville, in which human nature is seen as intrinsically self-centred, requiring strict contractual governance in order to stem the tide of anarchic egoism. Shaftesbury was an articulate opponent of Mandeville's argument that all social and altruistic behaviour is the result of 'the secret stratagems of self-love.' [1] For Shaftesbury, human beings were sociable and benevolent beings, who desired the network of what we now call 'the community' in order to thrive. As part and parcel of this optimistic, open vision of humanity, Shaftesbury argued for the appropriateness and the benefits of tolerance in matters of religious belief and in the expression of heterodox political opinions.

As Francis Hutcheson was establishing himself in Molesworth's Dublin circle, he would have found himself in a somewhat difficult position. As a leading Presbyterian he possessed a marginal status within a society in which the Established Church was dominant. Yet the intellectual group within which the young philosopher was nurturing new friendships contained, the literary Church of Ireland cleric, Dean Swift and a range of establishment politicians and clerics, all of whom endorsed the preservation of a Protestant Ascendancy, which kept both Dissenters and Catholics firmly 'in their place', even though Molesworth himself possessed an interest in the new religious viewpoints thrown up by the Enlightenment, such as deism.

Hutcheson established a secure reputation as a writer of substance and quality, in short articles published in a Dublin journal and more extensively within two books of philosophy published during the 1720s – his *Enquiry into the Original of Beauty and Virtue*, first published in 1725, and his *Essays on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense,* which followed in 1728.

II

Hutcheson's philosophy, as enunciated in the Dublin texts and expanded in later writings, was a creative extension of the view expressed by Lord Shaftesbury, that human nature is inherently prone to sympathy and kindness. The young author stressed that acts of human goodness bring much pleasure both to those who practice them and those who behold them. Hutcheson argued that human beings *do* care passionately about others and that there is a distinct, inner faculty called the 'moral sense' which is possessed by all of us, and which is capable of discerning good and evil and can guide us into all kinds of ethical behaviour, in which we bring to bear our 'natural disposition' to 'desire the happiness of any known sensitive creature' – that is, so long as we are perceive 'no oppositions of interest.'[2]

Mandeville's pessimistic verdict on human nature is well summed up in his theologically coloured statement that '...it is impossible that Man, mere fallen Man, should act with any other view but to please himself.' Such statements brought disapproval from Hutcheson, who was at pains to find evidence that we are far more often 'employed about the state of others' than seeking our own 'private good', noting that most of us like to think we are making a positive contribution to the world around us and that we often 'measure our own self-esteem by the benefits we bestow on those closest to us.'[3]

It is clear that the writer of *An Enquiry into the Original of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* also aimed to establish human happiness and personal well-being as the objective of moral law and the aim of all enlightened policy-making. To read this early 18th century book today is to notice a number of judgments which helped create the intellectual basis for later policies delivered by social reformers within the British body-politic. One particular statement by Hutcheson became a famous watchword for 19th century reform, when adopted as a utilitarian maxim by Jeremy Bentham.

Hutcheson had written with luminous concision in the *Enquiry* that:

'that action is best, which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers; and that is worst, which, in like manner, occasions misery.'[4]

It may be argued that Hutcheson's emphasis on 'happiness' as the ultimate goal of morality, and also of social and economic policy, continues to have great resonance far beyond the 18th and 19th centuries, in a contemporary world where the maximisation of material wealth and the pursuit of year-on-year economic growth have been established as the paradigms of 21st century capitalism, guiding the attitudes of so many political leaders, in Ireland and elsewhere. Hutcheson's advocacy of the widespread dissemination of happiness amongst the 'greatest numbers' of people is also starkly significant, given the huge gap in present-day Ireland, within many other western nations and all across the world, between the physical comfort and educational prospects of a secure minority and the much more vulnerable and potentially perilous fate of the rest of society.

So Hutcheson's moral discourse, as evidenced in this and other maxims, speaks Into our disappointing world of human inequality and cupidity, with a vision of an often-thwarted human instinct to care for one another and to seek each other's welfare – as summed up in a delightful phrase, where he describes humanity's capacity for sympathetic kindness as

'this secret chain between each person and mankind'[5]

For Hutcheson, too many moralists simply 'twist self-love into a thousand shapes' in order to argue for a politics of constraint, justified by the 'need' to govern a supposedly ineradicable human tendency towards individual self-aggrandisement. Hutcheson argued that there is, at the deepest level within human conduct, 'an entirely different principle of action from interest or self-love', and he proposed that no misguided thinker should disparage or ignore this 'secret sense' which 'influences us to the love of others.' Hutcheson believed his argument was strengthened by the fact that - as well as enjoying our own acts of benevolence

towards others - we relish seeing complete strangers acting with generosity towards one another. Indeed, 'we feel joy within us, admire the lovely action and praise its author.' [6]

Hutcheson was particularly keen to assert, throughout the *Enquiry,* that 'there is a universal determination to benevolence in mankind, even towards the most distant of the species' and that it is this instinctive 'moral sense' that stimulates and guides men and women to acts of charity that go beyond mere, self-serving affiliation with kith and kin. Arguably, if transferred by time-travel into the modern era, in which there is often an instant awareness of far-off famine and natural disaster, Hutcheson would have been unsurprised that human beings often give very generously to those who are suffering dire mishap and tragedy on the other side of the world.[7]

One obvious consequence of belief in a web of instinctive human benevolence is support for a politics that acknowledges such benign proclivities and puts them to good use. Thus for Hutcheson, a wise politician – perceiving that each individual is 'a part of a great whole or system' – would devise constant opportunities for the individual to 'concern himself with the public good.' Because humans have a nature that is 'designed for the good of others ', a healthy society would be one where the capacity for 'public love', dedicated to the 'public good', is allowed free reign, with general benefit. [8]

A crucial corollary of such an exalted vision of collective interaction is a strong disapproval of despotism, which may be seen as a political ploy which is 'solely intended for the good of the governors'. A government that rules its subjects selfishly and without their consent is preventing the free exercise of the moral sense amongst its citizens – a moral sense that can be flawed, just as our other senses may be flawed - but which nonetheless guides most people, most of the time, towards everyday acts of quiet virtue. There cannot be any place then, for a 'government so absolute' that it has an unchecked right to 'do or command everything' because, quite simply, 'the right of private judgment, or of our inward sentiments, is inalienable.' The moral sense of individual men and women must be allowed to

function if the virtuous society that flows from the free exercise of this sense is to be given a chance to flourish. [9]

Hutcheson went on to argue that 'wherever any invasion is made upon inalienable rights' and wherever government takes place without 'the universal consent of the people' there arises a 'right to resistance'. Indeed - as he argued in the latter sections of the *Enquiry* - 'the only remedy' may be 'a universal insurrection against' those 'perfidious trustees' who have misused government for their own ends.

Clearly, if the arguments about humanity's innate moral sense which were proposed by Francis Hutcheson possess any modern validity – even in an age when we have witnessed so much war and violence - then the political philosophy that underlies much of 21st century capitalism has questions to answer, given the dominance within that economic philosophy of a model of human beings as consumers and competitors who are motivated by self-interest, and a rigid model of the state as a gigantic and all-pervasive marketplace. Hutcheson's notion of political leaders as trustees whose rule must be briskly terminated, should they prove self-serving and unjust, is also of relevance in countries where systemic cronyism and corruption have been exposed.

One other aspect of Hutcheson's argument for ubiquitous human virtue was his re-evaluation of the rich poignancy of numerous small acts of everyday kindness. In his attempt to 'recover the ordinary affections of men' and acknowledge the spirit of emotional 'bounty' which leads to acts of love, he pointed out that it is 'not only the prince, the statesman, the general' who is 'capable of true heroism.' He explained to his readers that moral heroism was something they could find every day 'in an honest trade, the faithful, prudent advisor, the charitable and hospitable neighbour, the tender husband and affectionate parent, the sedate yet cheerful companion, the generous assistant of merit, the cautious allayer of contention and debate, the promoter of love and good understanding.' [10]

Hutcheson was at pains to indicate that in any truly mature polity, ordinary people - engaging in their daily lives - should be regarded as more significant than those

erstwhile heroes who are accorded an inappropriate degree of fame and whose 'external splendour dazzles an injudicious world.' Three centuries after it was written, Hutcheson's text helps substantiate the case for undercutting the cult of celebrity which has been mediated to the contemporary consumer of wall-to-wall mass- entertainment. [11]

It is important to realise that for Hutcheson, morality was not to be understood as a painful shackle on human desire and aggrandisement but rather as a guide to the highly pleasurable exercise of humanity's capacity for altruism. The vision of human pleasure that emerges throughout the *Enquiry* is one in which satisfaction as a mere exercise in personal gratification or the mere fulfilment of a personal appetite is seen in a very sorry light. Hutcheson asked his readers – 'should we not think the state low, mean and sordid, if there were no society, no love, or friendship, no good offices? What then must that state be wherein there are no pleasures but those of the external senses... do these short fits of pleasure make the luxurious happy?' It is clear that for Hutcheson, a society in which the deeper pleasure of mutual affection and everyday benevolence has been discounted, ends up being focused on mere 'wealth and external pleasures', on 'transient sensation' and on 'nauseous satiety'. The mature society is one which turns its back on such shallow hedonism and instead valorises 'moral enjoyments', emphasising 'something of love, of friendship, of esteem, of gratitude.' [12]

Missing out on the satisfying reality that 'human nature is formed for universal love and ... gratitude', the citizens of an inferior society that does not prize benevolence and reciprocity are in danger of experiencing only 'the misery of excessive selfishness'. This philosophical warning goes to the very heart of the experience in too many capitalist countries of transient 'boom' years, which although they bring many material benefits, also suffuse a society with the values of conspicuous acquisition and consumption, leaving an aching sense of precious things that have been lost –such as community, decency, reciprocity and simple trust. [13]

It is also apparent that in the course of the *Enquiry,* Hutcheson founded his positive estimate of human nature on his perceptions of the behaviour of children. Countering the emphasis on inborn perversity and inherited sin within the deeply Calvinist theology that had hitherto dominated his own Presbyterian denomination, he expressed delight at witnessing the way in which most children possess an early sense of right and wrong, wishing for fair treatment and hating to see cruelty being practised. All such observations seemed to him to constitute good evidence for a 'moral sense' that is already deeply present within the mind of infants -

'Observing the sentiments of children' he wrote, it can be seen that 'they always passionately interest themselves on that side where kindness and humanity are found; and detest the cruel, the covetous, the selfish, or the treacherous. How strongly do we see their passions of joy, sorrow, love, and indignation, even though there has been no pains taken to give them ideas of deity, of laws, or a future state.'[14]

Elsewhere in his *opus*, Hutcheson observed that children are 'ever in motion while they are awake' and that 'they observe whatever occurs ... remember and enquire about it ....' He noted that amongst children, 'kind affections soon break out towards those who are kind to them' and that they show 'strong gratitude and an ardour to excel in anything that is praised... they are prone to sincerity and truth and openness of mind.'[15]

There are considerable implications for the development of a modern 'child-centred' pedagogy in Hutcheson's positive endorsement of the natural behaviour of children and his psychologically perceptive vision of the early years of life. Hutcheson's musings on childhood can be seen as one of many contributions to the growth of new educational ideals during the Enlightenment period.

In a time when Irish people have been forced to look back with shame and horror at the harm done to many children ever since the establishment of the modern Irish state, within soulless educational and social care environments, in a range of brutal 'corrective' establishments and under the abusive tutelage of some members of religious orders who were entirely unfitted for the task, it is refreshing and

challenging to encounter Hutcheson's advocacy of the innate worth and dignity of the child and to consider whether the writings of the 18th century moralist of Drumcondra Lane should have been on the curriculum of all Irish teacher-training colleges and Christian seminaries, rather than languishing on a shelf in Ireland's philosophy departments, as irrelevant, dust-covered texts.

III

The social and political implications of the discourse which we have discussed in this article did not escape those citizens of the American colonies who by the mid-to-late 18th century were convinced, despite a considerable degree of prosperity, that they had become victims of British despotism. Hutcheson's teachings chime with the words of the Virginia Bill of Rights, signed in June 1776. That bill - in arguing for a government which is 'for the common benefit' and aimed at 'the greatest degree of happiness and safety' for the people - was adopting principles that can be heard in the texts of the Scots-Irish philosopher of Drumcondra Lane. The author of the *Enquiry* would go on to argue in later work - much read and discussed in America - that when the public good is neglected by a 'mother country', then 'colonies may justly constitute themselves into an independent state.'[16]

Amongst those who read and admired Hutcheson were American intellectuals and politicians such as John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin – Franklin saluted him as the 'ingenious Mr. Hutcheson.' When Samuel Johnston of Yale published the first philosophy manual to originate within the colonies, he drew heavily on Hutcheson's teachings and when the Reverend Francis Alison taught at the College of Philadelphia in the mid-18th century, numbering future signatories of the Declaration of Independence amongst his students, he quoted extensively and approvingly from Hutcheson.

Such quotations, extolling the virtues of resistance to despotism, were not hard to find throughout his works:

'No endowment, natural or acquired, can give a perfect right to assume power over others without their consent .... civil power can scarcely be constituted any other way than by consent of the people...the people have the right of defending themselves against the abuse of power...if any citizens, with permission of the government, leave their country and at their own expense, find new habitations, they may justifiably constitute themselves into an independent state...if the mother country attempts anything oppressive towards a colony...the colony is not bound to remain subject any longer.' [17]

However, Francis Hutcheson's tenure of the professorial post at Glasgow University during the 1730s and 1740s meant that he was also an influential figure in the intellectual flowering within Scotland during the 18th century. The Scottish economist Adam Smith – tutored by Hutcheson - is well known for his book, *The Wealth of Nations* but his earlier text – *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* – was considered by its author to be the superior document. In this study of morality, Smith argues that although we do often pursue self-interest, we also have a profound capacity for sympathy with other beings and that this ability to use our imagination and 'stand in their shoes' enables us to act altruistically.

So, for Smith, out of the consequences of sympathy, we think to construct a moral code that is to the long-term benefit of everyone. Although he did not argue that human beings possessed an innate 'moral faculty', as Hutcheson had done, and although self-interest plays a key role in his economic vision, Smith clearly inherited from his teacher a strong sense of the centrality of moral behaviour within the life of the individual and within society – and the importance of the emotions in sustaining that behaviour.

Contrary to the belief that Adam Smith's writings may simply be used to licence the growth of a free-market capitalism where everyone simply pursues their own 'enlightened' self-interest, there is plenty of evidence that Smith thought human

beings were disposed to social concern just as much as they were given to personal acquisition.

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* he argued that:

'howsoever selfish man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortunes of others and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it.'

Smith suggested that the desire to see the redistribution of wealth is often present in those who have accumulated it –

'They are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life which would have been made had the earth been divided with equal portions among all of its inhabitants.'[18]

It is arguable that Smith did indeed share with his mentor a sense that society can and should be structured so as to capitalise on the human desire to offer, receive and witness benevolence – something which the more bold proponents of free market economics have tended to ignore, many of them assuming that Adam Smith may be invoked as the godfather of a strenuous über-capitalism, in which economic profit trumps all other criteria and all other motivations, when devising the logistics for the provision of help to those in need.

By focusing intensely on both the motivational and the relational life of the individual human being and placing his or her moral and emotional development within the context of 'community', Hutcheson and Smith were in fact laying down the ground for a further development of the venerable concept of 'civil society', elaborated by several other Scottish thinkers, who in so doing, made one of the Scottish Enlightenment's significant bequests to the modern world.

But Hutcheson was also one of a band of progressive thinkers who bequeathed an intriguing heritage to a generation of young Irishmen who were being educated at Glasgow University. In this prestigious academic institution, as the 18th century

progressed, there was continued debate about humanity's moral and political potential, conducted in a spirit of free enquiry - an ambience that owed much to Enlightenment texts such as the *Enquiry.* Glasgow University in the 18th century was very far from being a wild hotbed of political revolution, but the young men who were training there for the Presbyterian ministry in Ireland, picked up sufficient political literacy and a habit of free intellectual self-fashioning that make them amenable to revolution during the tempestuous Irish decade of the 1790s. By the time of the 1798 Rebellion, over fifty ordained and trainee Presbyterian clerics had decided on an insurrectionary remedy for a country in which the public good was being denied by an Anglo-Irish elite, backed by an exploitative and oppressive British government.

Whilst Hutcheson himself cannot be seen as an explicit advocate of armed insurgency in Ireland, nonetheless the young scholars from Ulster who attended the university where he had been such a presiding figure, had been introduced to moral arguments against the practice of slavery – described by Hutcheson as a reason for 'abhorrence and indignation.' They would have been aware of the argument that 'the people have the right of defending themselves' against enslavement and been acquainted with the great professor's belief that 'the people's right of resistance is unquestionable.' What is more he would have seen recent evidence that his teachings had helped fire the American colonies into revolt – and many Presbyterian families possessed relatives on the other side of the Atlantic, who would have informed them of the logic and ethos of that revolution.[19]

Clergymen such as James Porter, Thomas Ledlie Birch, Archibald Warwick and William Steele Dickson became key figures in the United Irishmen, once it had been formed in 1791 in Belfast. The United Irish movement argued for the lessening of England's influence on Irish affairs, a cordial brotherhood of all religions and the practice of universal suffrage - allowing individual citizens the opportunity to exercise their private judgment in search of the 'good' of the social whole. In due course, all these clerics paid for their ideals with imprisonment, exile or execution.

The early leaders of the United Irishmen certainly believed, in true Hutchesonian manner, that a 'secret chain' linked the welfare of the individual human being and that of the society of which he was a part. It is apparent in such documents as the one devised by a newly formed Dublin branch of the United Irish movement, in December 1791. This document stated enthusiastically that its members were all agreed:

'in thinking that there is not an individual whose happiness can be established on any other foundation so rational and so solid as the happiness of the whole community.'

The writer of this document went on to declare his desire to 'make all Irishmen citizens – all citizens Irishmen ...' He argued that without truly representative parliaments and the introduction of universal suffrage, the recent achievement of legislative independence by Ireland in 1782 would be quite inadequate, leaving Ireland with a mere 'servile majesty and ragged independence.'[20]

The United Irish objective of de-Anglicisation was certainly in keeping with Hutcheson's advocacy of the rights of a 'colony' to throw off despotism, while the United Irish belief in the political value of a more cordial religious life was in keeping with Hutcheson's estimate of the significance of generous and un-sectarian 'public love.' The United Irish desire for universal suffrage was consonant with the philosopher's teachings that we are all 'formed with a view to the general good' and that the 'secret chain' of human mutuality should be allowed to perform its God-given task of binding individuals to the larger polity, in order to establish a truly healthy and fair society.

IV

Other significant United Irishmen, although not coming directly under the influence of Glasgow University, nonetheless grew up in a political atmosphere that owed much to the culture of 18th century Irish and British dissent in which Hutcheson was such a seminal figure. It was a culture which possessed innumerable and often

incompatible variants on the reformation themes of freedom of conscience and unmediated access to the Scriptures. Amongst those variants was a Unitarian project which perceived the Trinity as a polytheistic corruption, which focused on a Christian faith that stressed moral endeavour, and which believed deeply in human goodness and radical social reform. It was a project with advocates who held Hutcheson's ethics in high respect and who often aligned themselves with the cause of insurrection against perceived despotism.

This article has already noted the dissenting academy in Killlyleagh, which the young Francis Hutcheson attended and which had been founded by the wealthy Hamilton family in the course of the 17th century. Archibald Hamilton Rowan, born in 1751, just five years after Hutcheson's death, was a descendant of that academy's founder. Rowan would go on to act upon the political values he encountered as a boy in his father's London residence, where the English reformer John Wilkes and the Dublin radical Charles Lucas were frequent guests.

Rowan experienced tuition at Cambridge by the political reformer and dissenting clergyman, John Jebb, and then, on his return to Ireland, he became a founding member and an outspoken leader of the Dublin branch of the United Irishmen, before his imprisonment on a charge of sedition. Amongst Rowan's closest friends and confidantes were several pupils and teachers in the network of dissenting academies, including key members of the revolutionary body known as the United Scotsmen and also the egalitarian political thinker and innovative scientist, Joseph Priestley.

Following a 'gaol-break' and several years of exile in France and America, Rowan retuned to Ireland and committed himself to progressive social causes once again, including support for Daniel O'Connell's campaign for Catholic Emancipation. Rowan had also maintained close links with the early feminist, Mary Wolstonecraft and continued throughout the early years of the 19th century to support her former partner, the theorist of democracy, William Godwin[21].

Godwin had also been educated in a dissenting academy, albeit under the influence of a strictly Calvinist father. Rowan gave Godwin financial help at a time when he was setting up what amounted to the world's first ever 'educational shop', selling satchels, pens, jotters and schoolbooks written specifically for children. In his famous and influential text, *Political Justice,* Godwin criticised those philosophers whose system had taught them to look upon their fellow men as selfish, arguing that the urge towards goodness is a natural 'passion' in the human heart and hoping for a future society where 'man shall be acknowledged for what he really is, a being capable of rectitude, virtue and benevolence.'[22]

Godwin's writings often echoed the teachings of Hutcheson, as when he claimed that:

'justice is the principle which proposes to itself the production of the greatest sum of pleasure or happiness' [23]

Godwin built on the fundamental premise of the human capacity for virtue in order to construct a much more adventurous - and anarchic - vision of a just society than the one delineated by Hutcheson. For Godwin, there should be little government interference, widespread economic equality, minimal personal property and no pervasive hierarchy or dogma. Nonetheless, his stress on social freedom, rooted in his belief that the universal exercise of private judgment is a crucial right, is arguably a logical extension of the Hutchesonian belief in the naturally benign characteristics of humanity.

In turn, Godwin's writings were a massive influence on the young Daniel O'Connell, whose peaceful mass-campaigns for Repeal of the Union were founded, not on insurrectionary violence, but on the conviction that change could be effected by enlisting public opinion behind a schedule of reform, binding vast groups of citizens together with ties of mutual affection and common purpose. During his early, formative years in London, O'Connell was greatly inspired by reading *Political Justice,* with its proposal that 'all Government is founded in opinion' and its stirring injunction - 'Make men wise and ... you make them free.' [24]

Indeed, though he does not indicate any knowledge of its true authorship, O'Connell was re-working a famously Hutchesonian principle, when writing to Jeremy Bentham in order to say:

"My device is yours; 'The greatest possible good to the greatest possible number.'"[25]

Arguably, the politics of O'Connell were based on a profound Enlightenment notion of the good political state, where liberty and justice prevailed and were constantly reviewed and if possible maximised – a vision that Hutcheson would have recognised and endorsed, with its belief in a network of human relationships, guarded by rights and rich with opportunities for benevolence. O'Connell's politics may be contrasted with the romantic vision of a territorial, racial and linguistic nationality that emerged with the Young Ireland movement, the Fenians, the Gaelic Revival and all their political and cultural progeny.

'The Great Liberator', in demonstrating the capacity of individual Irish men and women to unite peacefully and calling for their 'freedoms' and their 'rights', based his practice on an optimism about humanity's civic potential that was consonant with the views of many thinkers within that part of the Irish dissenting tradition that had emphasised on so many occasions, that: 'civil power can scarcely be constituted any other way than by consent of the people', that 'the people have the right of defending themselves against the abuse of power' and that there is a 'moral sense' which unerringly discerns rank injustice and which gains enjoyment from seeing the rule of injustice overthrown.

As is very well known, O'Connell's mass-meetings formed a template for later public campaigns for civil rights, all around the world. It is therefore possible to detect in world history the fingerprint of the Dublin-based philosopher who had declared in 1725 that moral concern and affection link us all to one another - and that as a result of that 'secret chain', human beings can indeed join together with total strangers in order to fight for justice.

V

Amongst the golden circle of thinkers and writers who met around Viscount Molesworth's table, Dean Swift is most fondly remembered in Ireland, for his mordant scepticism, his blazing, articulate anger and his own intense, Anglo-Irish form of patriotism. Francis Hutcheson is still unknown, along with his dissenting, enlightenment philosophy of affection and benevolence.

Arguably, this is not merely because of Swift's remarkable satirical gifts but because in Ireland, for many years, there has been a national self-understanding that valorises the Irish capacity to perceive the follies of humankind – a tradition that exults in the work of the great Irish comic dramatists and prose satirists, relishing the charming, ludicrous follies of Oscar Wilde's most memorable characters and the bleak, hilarious portrayals of perverse wrong-headedness by Jonathan Swift, or more recently, the dark work of Samuel Beckett, in which the grand 'western' projects of cosmic purpose and self-identity, based on confident cognition, are so often portrayed as hapless, tragicomic folly.

Hutcheson's writings are found within a less biting, vivid tradition that risks being seen as naive but which has always sought to 'recover the ordinary affections of men', to argue that we are all 'born with a view to the general good' and to offer the hope that there is great delight yet to be experienced when citizens contribute to 'public love' and justice.

In the painful place where Ireland now stands, in the aftermath of an unchecked economic 'boom', Irish satire and scorn are once again understandable responses to human folly. These are instinctive and they are necessary reactions to the abuse of power. However, another set of human resources in Ireland's political and intellectual heritage needs to be tapped if this country is to experience fresh self-belief, radical internal reform, fresh national cohesion and above all a sense of buoyant hope.

Sadly, in the aftermath of the recent banking collapse, the exposure of corrupt elites and the evidence of vice and complacency within a privileged Church, hope is a scarce commodity. No sustained mass-rallies have taken place, to protest against those 'perfidious trustees' who led a promising, modern Irish society towards disaster – emulating the great mass-rallies of the O'Connell era, in their call or change. Some commentators have surmised that the capacity of the Irish people to loathe economic, spiritual and political despotism and to relish a concerted fight against its depredations, has long since been subtracted from the national psyche. I would wish to argue that a re-appropriation of the rich moral optimism often found within the much-neglected Irish and British dissenting traditions, is certainly needed if the people are to discover an Irish Spring.

The psychologist Marie Murray has referred to what she calls 'magical narratives', which might enable Irish people to invoke a better, more wholesome future. The philosophy of Frances Hutcheson constitutes one such 'magic narrative.'

Notes

[1] Mandeville's phrase is quoted in Thomas Duddy, *A History of Irish Thought,* (London, 2002) p 173
[2] Hutcheson, *An Enquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (Indianapolis, 2008) p 106
[3] Duddy, p174,
[4] Frances Hutcheson, *An Enquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (Indianapolis, 2008) p 125
[5] Hutcheson, p 91
[6] Hutcheson, P 88, 92, 93 and R.F. Stalley, Admiring the Lovely Action, in Damian Smyth (ed.) *Francis Hutcheson – a symposium* (Belfast, 1992) p 10, 11
[7] Hutcheson, P 148
[8] Hutcheson, P 109, p118
[9] Hutcheson, p 186, 192, 193, 194
[10] Hutcheson, p 106, 107, 134, 135
[11] Hutcheson, p 106, 107, 134, 135
[12] Hutcheson, p 164, 166
[13] Hutcheson, p 149, 179
[14] Hutcheson, p 146, 147
[15] Tom Paulin, New York States of Mind, in Smyth, p 21
[16] The quotations from Hutcheson's are found in David Fate Norton, Salus populi suprema lex, in Smyth, p 16. The words of the Virginia Declaration are quoted by Wolfgang Leidhold in the introduction to Hutcheson, p ix
[17] Quoted in Norton, p 14-17
[18] Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London, 1790) pp 1, 350
[19] The quotations from Hutcheson are found in Norton, p 15,16
[20] Quoted in Marianne Elliott, *Partners in Revolution (*New Haven, 1988*)* p 23
[21] Details of Rowan's career are found in Philip Orr, Doing History – a re-interpretation of the life of the United Irishman Archibald Hamilton Rowan (1751-1834), in Myrtle Hill, Brian Turner and Kenneth Dawson (eds) *1798 – Rebellion in County Down* (Newtownards, 1998)
[22] William Godwin, *Enquiry concerning Political Justice (*London,1798) p 436
[23] William Godwin, *Enquiry concerning Political Justice (*London,1798) p xxv
[24] Quoted in McDonagh, *The Life of Daniel O'Connell* (London, 1991) p 41
[25] Quoted in Fergus O'Ferrall, 'A Prophet of a Coming Time': Daniel O'Connell, Civic Republicanism and Twenty-First Century Ireland in *An Dragún Dian. Dónall Ó Conaill, Éigse na Brídeoige* 2005 in Seán Mac an tSíthigh (Coiscéin, Baile Átha Cliath, 2005) pp. 43-62