On the Study of Non-Economic Factors in Irish Economic Development

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THE geographical, demographic, financial and political forces that hampered the progress of economic development in Ireland have been debated for many decades; and Ireland's economic lagardliness has been constrasted, directly or by implication, with Britain's prosperity. Undoubtedly persuasive as are many of the arguments couched in these terms, it is no criticism of them to wonder whether they have the final word on so complex a subject. It cannot be a matter for doubt that paucity of natural resources, lack of investment, absentee landlordism, overseas migration, political subjection, all in their various fashions contributed to under-development in the purely economic sense. On the other hand, we must ask whether explanations offered exclusively in such terms are entirely adequate. The question is made the more pointed by our present-day experience of programmes of economic development for the so-called Third World that so often result in failure. It is increasingly recognized that, try as we may to get the economic conditions right for development, these alone are insufficient; we have also to understand, and to take into account in economic planning, the social setting in which economic change is to take place. Put thus, the matter seems obvious enough: if "hard work" is a pre-requisite for economic development, for example, (although it probably is not), but a preference for leisure deeply embedded in a community's value system and social organization, economic change will be hampered, if not rendered impossible. It is therefore reasonable to ask whether there were not features of life in Ireland that were in some similar way out of harmony with the spirit of industrial society. Were there, in addition to oppressive historical circumstances, social characteristics that by themselves held back the transformation of Irish traditional life into the form demanded by industrial, or even agrarian, revolution? The obstacles I have in mind are those that, unlike those imposed from without by a parsimonious Providence or an exploiting colonial power, sprang as it were from among the people themselves.

There were many foreign, and especially English, observers who were in no doubt that the question should be answered affirmatively. A preliminary and general reading of their accounts of visits paid to Ireland during the late 18th and the greater part of the 19th centuries shows these travellers virtually unanimous in their condemnation of the material condition in which the mass of the Irish population were living. "Almost every reference to the subject by travellers and doctors," Connell tells us, "underlines the filthiness both of the persons of the mass of the Irish and of the interior and surroundings of their cabins: all point to conditions of gross overcrowding, with whole families, or sets of families, living in one or two rooms, with sick and healthy sleeping under the same covering."[1] Travelling widely in Ireland at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Gustave de Beaumont thought the conditions of the people incomparably worse than those of any other country. "Elsewhere the traveller might see some, even a majority of the population, destitute, but nowhere else was there to be found a whole nation of poor." Other countries might consider poor only those who were unemployed or who begged; yet in Ireland "farm labourers and even small farmers suffered a degree of poverty such as was almost unknown elsewhere. . . ."[2] Farmers built no pigsties or cowhouses, writes Maxwell in the same vein, and there were no floors to the barn. "Ploughs and harrows were left in the corner of the last field they had tilled, for there were no sheds to protect them. . . . The peasant had no capital, but he was slovenly in his lack of arrangement; so too were the richer farmers. None of the cabins seem to have had the gardens with flowers and vegetables that graced English cottages, and as poverty can hardly have been the cause, this lack of artistry has been ascribed to concentration on the cultivation of the potato."[3] De Beaumont thought the Irishman slothful, deceitful, intemperate and violent.[4] Rogan remarked that patients entering Irish fever hospitals had bodies "bronzed with filth. . . . Their hair was filled with vermin, and the smell of many was so offensive as to render it a very disgusting office . . . to free them from the accumulation of dirt with which they were loaded."[5] Many others noted the domestic squalor of even the better-off farmer—". . . not a single chair or stool in his house but one three-legged one," commented Otway of one farmer of whom he was a guest, "no bed but rushes,

1. K. H. Connell, *The Population of Ireland, 1750–1845*, Oxford, 1950, p. 187.

2. G. de Beaumont, *L'Irlande sociale, politique et religieuse*, Paris, 1839, quoted, N. Mansergh, *The Irish Question, 1840–1921*, London, 1965, p. 24.

3. C. Maxwell, *Country and Town in Ireland under the Georges*, London, 1940, pp. 127–128. On the lack of flower gardens, it is interesting to note that in Paraná (Brazil) in the 'seventies, "though the people had absolutely nothing to occupy them for nine months out of the twelve, yet such a thing as a "kitchen garden" was not to be seen in the place, and as for expending even half an hour's thought or labour upon a pleasure or flower garden, such a thing the wildest imagination never dreamed of. . . .". T. P. Bigg-Wither, *Pioneering in South Brazil*, London, 1878, vol. 1, pp. 250–251.

4. N. Mansergh, *op. cit.*, pp. 356–357.

5. K. H. Connell, *loc. cit.*, citing F. Rogan, *Observations on the condition of the middle and lower classes in the North of Ireland*, 1819, p. 78.

no vessels for boiling their meals but one, nor any for drinking milk out of but one. . . ."[6] Connell, indeed, concludes that the Irish may have been prone to give visitors an impression of greater poverty than their real economic situation justified—perhaps in the hope of receiving financial aid, but partly to conceal from landlord and middleman the true extent of their resources.[7]

The received nineteenth-century English opinion of the Irish people is familiar enough to require little illustration: it was on the whole a derogatory opinion. But it is essential to view this in its contemporary perspective, for such opinions were not at all unusual. Shelley, liberal idealist though he was, described the Italians as ". . . a tribe of stupid and shrivelled slaves. . . . I do not think I have seen a gleam of intelligence in the countenance of man since I passed the Alps."[8] In Germany, Mary Shelley noted ". . . the horrible and slimy faces of our companions in voyage. . . . Our only wish was to absolutely annihilate such uncleanly animals."[9] James Cobbett thought the Italians ". . . a nasty, dirty nation. . . . Some of the filthiness of this country is such that to enter into particulars would be a loathsome task."[10] The Rev. G. R. Gleig found the Slavonian villages he passed through in the 1830's, "nowhere remarkable for their cleanliness, but anything to approximate the filth of St Marton I never beheld. . . . I remember it as the most perfect sink of abominations into which my evil fortune has ever led me."[11] In Hesse, "the villages . . . display, externally at least, the utmost squalor . . . wooden hovels, dark, smokey, patched and ruinous."[12] Hungarian villages fared no better: ". . . the open doors made a sad disclosure of filth and squalor within. The women and children, too, . . . were dirty and half-naked, while throughout there was an air of languor and listlessness, such as bespoke a state of social existence very little raised above barbarism."[13] Across the world, in Brazil, the average house was "disorderly and dirty: spider's webs in every corner, dust, dirt and stains on the walls; on the floor the droppings of animals that enter—hens, cats, dogs and even pigs . . . many people are in the habit of never washing . . ."[14] "In passing by these doorless huts," commented a later visitor, "one sees the men and many of the women . . . waste their days in sleep, and their nights in orgies of *cachaça,* and wild songs and dances. A very little labour serves to obtain their very simple requirements; they want no more and are probably quite contented . . . perhaps to be envied by those who appreciate the delights of a pig wallowing in the mud, and basking in the sun."[15] Travellers

6. Otway, *Sketches in Erris and Tyrawly,* (1812–1813), cited by Maxwell, *op. cit.,* p.143.
7. K. H. Connell, *op. cit.,* pp. 86–87.
8. *Works of Shelley,* (Julian Edition), Vol. IX, p. 336.
9. N. I. White, *Shelley,* London, 1947, Vol. I, pp. 359–360.
10. James Cobbett, *Journal of a Tour of Italy,* London, 1830, p. 187.
11. G. R. Gleig, *Germany, Bohemia and Hungary visited in 1837,* London, 1839, Vol. III, p. 147.
12. J. Russell, *A Tour in Germany, etc., in the years 1820, 1821 and 1822,* Edinburgh, 1825, Vol. I, p. 330.
13. G. R. Gleig, *op. cit.,* Vol. III, pp. 20–21.
14. H. Burmeister, *Viagem ao Brazil,* (Berlin, 1853), São Paulo, 1952, p. 253.
15. James Wells, *Three Thousand Miles through Brazil,* London, 1886, Vol. I, p. 338.

in Argentina commented severely on the living conditions of farmers and *gaúchos*—lacking furniture, bedding a mere pile of sheepskins, clothing in rags.[16]

So noticeable a unanimity of voice, it is true, could very well be occasioned by features of material living that these diverse societies really did have in common. To deny that, according perhaps to standards external to them, material poverty was widespread, would be to adopt a position very difficult to sustain. But if we wish to determine with some degree of accuracy the level of material life at which the mass of the Irish people were living, and to compare this with the level enjoyed by their contemporaries in other parts of Europe (or in the world at large), we discover that the comparison was rarely made. As Mansergh remarks, à propos of de Beaumont, ". . . it is to say the least, doubtful whether conditions were worse in Ireland than in Central Europe, Spain or the two Sicilies."[17] Our present concern is not quite this, however. We may agree readily enough that from the point of view of our own consumer society, as from that of middle-class visitors from Victorian England, the Irish were poor. What is in question is how far this assessment coincided with that of the people themselves, for the nature of poverty is culturally, not absolutely, determined, and its definition related both to the material potentiality of the environment, and to people's expectations. If there is little doubt, viewed from the western standards of today, that the mass of the Irish people was poor, perhaps abysmally so, their point of view was not ours. They may have been led, therefore, to interpret their condition somewhat differently. To be sure, during the recurrent periods of food shortage to which they were subject—as, indeed, in the Famine years themselves—widespread and violent feelings of discontent were to be expected. But how were such periods as these interpreted by the people who underwent them? Were we able to ascertain what these interpretations were, they would reveal to us something of what the Irish people expected from their material environment. At what level of material deprivation did they feel themselves poor? It may have been that they saw habitual material misfortune in much the same light as natural calamities—that they were as beyond human control, as much an inescapable part of the human dilemma, as drought or flood. We ourselves may feel impatience with material hardship because we believe it avoidable; and our expectations are consequently higher. If the Irish did not feel a like impatience, this may have been due, not to their "laziness", but to their feeling that little was to be expected from life in a material way, and hence to their failure to feel "poor", because what they had coincided with what they expected. On the other hand, the immediate effects of these calamities may have been exacerbated by a feeling that they *were* avoidable; by the expectation of a level of material well-being that was nevertheless never achieved even in normal times; and by resentment that the Irish people generally had little hope of attaining a level so manifestedly enjoyed by a politically dominant minority among them. To the

16. J. Scobie, *Revolution on the Pampas: a social history of Argentine wheat, 1860–1910*, Austin, Texas, 1964, p. 66.

17. N. Mansergh, *The Irish Question, 1840–1921*, London, 1965, p. 26.

degree that such feelings as these were widespread, we can assume that the low material standard of living of the Irish was not adhered to merely because it embodied a way of life that was traditional, but because no immediate means of improving it seemed open to them.

The first alternative, in view of what we now know of other peasant societies, seems not implausible: that traditional Irish life was a non-materialist one, satisfied with a subsistence economy because it left people free to pursue other activities thought more important than the search for a higher level of material consumption. Such conventions, of course, like others are subject to change. The basis of tradition may well have been undermined, as the greater affluence of other people became more widely known, by a growing feeling of relative deprivation: "poverty . . . may be defined as the disproportion between the desires of individuals and the means to satisfy them."[18] But if in the meantime other preferences, such as that for leisure, did not disappear as rapidly as new material desires arose, the resulting disharmony could provide a setting in which economic development—even had other necessary conditions, such as capital investment, been met—would not be easy (though it may well have been one in which resentment and discontent could flourish). However, the rejection of traditional poverty[19] and the emergence of new material expectations were not, it seems, particularly quick in coming:

> That "a taste for other objects besides mere food" was a primary necessity for economic development in Ireland was a point much emphasized by classical authors. Ricardo and Malthus were essentially in agreement upon it, despite the divergence in their views on effective demand, and it was also stressed by McCulloch. That much surplus labour could be released from agriculture to produce the goods and services to gratify such tastes is unquestionable; what is more difficult to determine is how the economists expected it to be drawn into industrial exployment. Malthus was the most nearly explicit on this point, indicating that the change in tastes and the resultant growth of demand must precede the introduction of capital for manufactures. . . .[20]

A recent sociological study of Dublin people suggests that the search for material wealth may not yet dominate Irish life to the degree common elsewhere in the western world.[21] On the other hand, a contrary hypothesis makes economic

18. Raymond Aron, *Eighteen Lectures on Industrial Society*, London, 1967, p. 123.

19. It is interesting, in this connection, to note Cullen remarking of 17th century Ireland: "Housing for the ordinary people was bad. But bad housing for many denoted the survival of traditional standards rather than poverty." L. M. Cullen, *Life in Ireland*, London, 1968, p. 61.

20. R. D. Collison Black, *Economic Thought and the Irish Question, 1817–1870*, Cambridge, 1960, p. 137.

21. ". . . we cannot get concerned (as the English and the Americans) over business and material things. We are less active in these matters because always in the background of our minds we are concerned with a more fundamental philosophy.": informant quoted by A. J. Humphreys, *New Dubliners*, London, 1966, p. 219.

development independent of consumer demand, and dependent upon quasi-psychological concepts, as love of innovation, desire for efficiency, the need for success in competitive situations, or the level of neuroticism. The subject is a difficult one, the more so because of the necessity (but impossibility) of standardizing the economic, demographic and financial conditions that provide the setting for the postulated relationships.[22] It seems unlikely, nevertheless, that men, whatever their psychological characteristics, will for long produce goods they cannot sell. The final goal of an economy is consumption; but societies differ in what they wish to consume. The emergence of a sense of relative poverty, and hence of a demand for more, or for new sorts, of consumption goods, depends upon a relevant criterion of comparison. So long as such a criterion is absent, or remains unrecognized, a feeling of relative deprivation by definition cannot be experienced; nor will it be experienced as long as divergent standards of living are accepted by the community as normal and unassailable features of life.

There may be evidence that acquiescence in a rich exploiting aristocracy was common enough in Ireland.[23] In view of the long period during which the aristocracy was established in the country—a period long enough for many generations of the Irish to have lived and died knowing of nothing else—this would not be surprising. Not that this acquiescence, if it existed, is central to the argument. The way of life of the rich differed so much from that of the generality of Irish people, and no doubt appeared to them so impossible of achievement, that it was very largely irrelevant. The hope of achieving a like prosperity being so remote, it could scarcely spur the ambitious to greater productive effort in the expectation of attaining it. But if differences in wealth were for many years accepted as part of the natural scheme of things, cultural differences were not. The religious barrier, between Protestant landlords and Catholic tenants, was not only almost insuperable. It suggested that material wealth was the prerogative of one sect but not of the other. Such a view would have seemed amply confirmed by the Penal Laws, whose effect was to hamper the accumulation of wealth by Catholics. Whether or not the basic division in the structure of Irish society that so emphatically separated the rich from the poor[24] was accepted by both sides as inevitable, there can be no doubt as to their failure in mutual understanding. "There exists (1831) to the most frightful extent a mutual and violent hatred between the Proprietors and the Peasantry."[25] If these words somewhat exaggerate the difficulties of daily life in Ireland (as judging from other evidence, they seem to do), they are suggestive in another way. They suggest, that is, that mutual antagonism was so great that the affluence and the habits of the proprietor

22. Cf. C. P. Kindleberger, *Economic Growth in France and Britain, 1851–1950*, Harvard Univ. Press, 1964, pp. 88–89; 112; 113–114; 133–134.

23. Maxwell seems to suggest this: *op. cit.*, p. 20.

24. ". . . the division between rich and poor in the Ireland of the Union . . . remained the dominant social reality. It was not only great; it was also unbridgeable." N. Mansergh, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

25. The Lord-Lieutenant, Anglesey, to Lord Grey. Quoted by R. D. Collison Black, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

class were likely to become rather the object of scorn than the ultimate goal of an ambitious and achievement-motivated people. A numerous and an effective Catholic Irish middle class could have changed this situation in a more fruitful direction. Had such a class been present in Ireland during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, its moderate well-being and restrained bourgeois ambitions could have provided the incentive the people may have generally lacked. However, it was not present.[26]

The middle class, while it may have been fairly prosperous, was too few in numbers to suggest to the rest of the Irish people a path to material improvement or social promotion. Even had the middle class been more numerous than it was, it remains unlikely that its way of life (or the way of life of resident landowners) by its example could have encouraged habits of thrift, work and acquisition among the population generally. Maxwell tells us that the Irish gentry spent "lavishly on everything that brought immediate pleasure at the cost of neglecting house and grounds, and to sacrifice the niceties of living. . . . There was no stint of servants, horses, cars, dogs, guns, fires, meat, wine and guests, yet English visitors noticed that rain trickled through ceilings, windows rattled, and doors hung loose on their hinges. . . ."[27] This vision of a well-to-do but ramshackle and inefficient Ireland (similar to the contemporary view of the Russian landed gentry) was common enough outside the country. To the degree that the description was apt, so the small Irish middle class (who "aped the gentry")[28] patterned their lives on the same characteristics. In other words, neither the gentry nor the middle class, at any rate until well after the middle of the nineteenth century, offered to the Irish people an example of a bourgeois way of life which, if copied, might have led, as in Britain, to social and economic attitudes of mind appropriate to economic development. Even if the Irish had not been restricted economically and politically by the equivalent of a dominant colonial power, and even if the habits and values of Protestant materialism had found a place in their traditional life, the gap between rich and poor was so great that ambitions to bridge it may well have shrivelled immediately they appeared.

Foreign observers especially accounted for Irish poverty in terms of the people's laziness: they were indolent, they made no effort, they neglected their land, they neglected their dwellings and they neglected their personal appearance.

> "The moment an overseer quits," wrote Crumpe in 1793, "they inevitably drop their work, take snuff, and fall into chat as to the news of the day; no traveller can pass them without diverting their attention from the business in hand, and

26. *Ibid.*, p. 135; N. Mansergh, *op. cit.*, p. 30. It is interesting to compare contemporary Britain: ". . . some of the working classes . . . were reaching up to grasp middle-class virtues. . . . As the working classes were looking up, some, at least, of the upper classes were looking down. Middle class ideals set standards for the nation. . . . Along with the spread of middle class virtues went a rise in middle class comfort." Asa Briggs, *Victorian People*, London, 1965, pp. 27–28.

27. C. Maxwell, *op. cit.*. pp. 28–29.

28. R. D. Collison Black, *loc. cit.*

> giving rise to numerous surmises as to his person, errand and destination. The most trivial occurrence, especially in the sporting line, will hurry them, unless restrained, from their occupations."[29]

Laziness was thought characteristic not only of the Irish. Throughout the nineteenth century (as indeed, during much of the twentieth) a non-Anglo-Saxon nation that escaped a like condemnation was fortunate.[30] It remained for the anthropologist ultimately to point out the ethnocentricity of judgements arrived at on the basis of such pre-eminently value-loaded concepts as those of "indolence" and "laziness". As we shall see, there were powerful external reasons that, in any case, made continuous hard work and high productivity unattractive to a community that might otherwise have valued them in the same way as visiting middle class Protestants. But we have little evidence that the Irish, whose traditional social organization differed profoundly from that of industrializing Britain, shared these values or felt the same ambitions. The notion of idleness, like that of other sins, is related to the values of the community, for, contrary to the belief of European, particularly British, travellers of the nineteenth century and after, it has no absolute definition of universal relevance. So the "accusations" of laziness levelled at the Irish were, in their essence, no more than tacit recognition that the Irish people very generally organized their lives on the basis of values that were not those of their observers. It is likely that among these values, as among the values of many other communities, was one that accorded to leisure a position surpassing that given to work. To the degree that subsistence agriculture was predominant, and production patently for living, not for commerce; to the degree that the cultivation of the potato, and the keeping of a cow, provided (it now appears) an admirably balanced diet: so the pursuit of work beyond the minimum necessary to satisfy these conditions had little function. Were leisure essential for proper attention to be paid to other important features of community life, the burden of work would not have been increased unnecessarily. We do not refer only to other forms of economic production, hunting, fishing and domestic manufacture. We mean also those features of social life—as, for example, conversation, dancing, festivities and celebrations—which, regarded by industrial society somewhat as time-wasting inessentials, in simpler communities are an integral part of the system of social relationships. Fuller investigation may show

29. S. Crumpe, *An Essay on the best means of providing employment for the people* (1793). Quoted C. Maxwell, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

30. See, for example, statements in G. E. Gleig, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 48–49; II, p. 168; III, pp. 20–21; J. Russell, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 326–327, 330; W. Hazlitt, *Notes for a Journey through France and Italy*, London, 1826, pp. 222–223; W. M. Conway, *The Alps from End to End*, London, 1895, p. 77; C. Seidler, *Dez anos no Brasil, 1825–1835*, São Paulo, 1941, p. 57; G. Gardner, *Travels in the Interior of Brazil*, London, 1846, pp. 336–337, 379–380; J. Wells, *Three Thousand Miles through Brazil*, London, 1886, I, pp. 263, 266–267, 338, 390, 396–397, etc.; A. de Saint Hilaire, *Viagem ao Rio Grande do Sul*, 1820–21, São Paulo, 1939, pp. 153–154; M. Leclerc, *Cartas do Brasil*, (1890) São Paulo, 1942, p. 154; H. C. Dent, *A Year in Brazil*, London, 1886, p. 122; L. Agassiz, *A Journey in Brazil*, London, 1886, pp. 51–52; Maria Graham, *Diário de uma viagem ao Brasil* (1822), São Paulo, 1956, pp. 137, 211.

that there were indeed features of Irish social life whose importance to the people was as great as that of work—even constituted the main purpose of living, and hence of working. Matters had to be so arranged as to provide a sufficient margin of leisure for them.[31] The insistent demands of industrial society created the belief amongst its members that a man not working was doing nothing; or at any rate was doing nothing of importance. That this view was the reverse of that held by the majority of the world's pre-industrial populations seemed only to confirm its validity.

The characteristics of the Irish people on which so many visitors commented—their vivacity, wit, cheerfulness, friendliness and warmth; and their love of conversation, music and dancing—could be mainly cultivated only during hours of leisure. They are the product of leisure, as the dourness of the Lowland Scot and the North-country Englishman is the product of Puritanism and the mystique of work that grew with the Industrial Revolution. Steady application to work, wrote Samuel Smiles, was "the healthiest training for every individual. . . . The gods, says the poet, have placed labour and toil on the way leading to the Elysian Fields."[32] Statements of this sort merely expressed, in a seemingly absolute and generally applicable form, the fundamental values of the society that gave birth to them. They were the expression of values to which it was essential that all should adhere if society were to maintain itself and develop along lines that seemed desirable. They were irrelevant to societies, such as the Irish and many others, organized on the basis of quite different assumptions; and the use of such terms as "laziness" and "indolence" in discussing them was an unjustified extension to them of concepts developed in circumstances, and according to beliefs, that were entirely different. Such ethnocentricity has not yet disappeared from the arguments of all liberal historians, some of whom believe either that the Irish were not "lazy" but worked very hard; or, if they were admittedly lazy, were justifiably so because of the economic and political situation in which they found themselves. The possibility that, for the Irish themselves, such categories had no meaning is not considered.

While it is true that due weight must be given to the influence of traditional modes of thought and behaviour, events external to the Irish community reinforced them and ensured their survival, perhaps, beyond their natural term. Had their circumstances been different, the Irish might have followed earlier the direction already taken by the forms of social organization (and their accompanying values) in the greater part of the British Isles. The fact that social change was longer in coming had its source also in events that had confined the majority of

31. The function of the "margin of leisure", and the accusations of laziness to which this margin gave rise, is discussed in relation to the *caipira* economy of the state of São Paulo (Brazil) by Antônio Cândido, *Os parceiros do Rio Bonito*, Rio de Janeiro, 1964, especially pp. 63–66. Parallels with what we know of traditional Irish culture are striking. It is interesting also that instability of land tenure in Brazil, as in Ireland, led to low productivity and lack of technical improvement in agriculture.

32. Quoted, Asa Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

the Irish people within a tradition inappropriate to rapid economic growth. We have already seen that the example of the landowning and the exiguous middle classes offered little incentive to those searching for material betterment. The gap separating these classes from the rest of the Irish population appeared unbridgeable.

> Temperamentally, the Irish peasant was not restive under the grosses injustice, and, unfamiliar with the example of more confortable living, he was prepared to live as his father had lived before him. If his life were to be made less bestial and his soil more fruitful; if he were to be secured from the danger of repeated famine, he needed attentive teaching and encouragement: he needed a landlord who would be "the example, teacher, arbitrator, helper, friend of the poor, and patron of every good work." But, in fact, if he were typical, he was tenant to a landlord who, by origin, circumstance and self-interest was inclined to be indifferent to the welfare of his tenantry. . . .[33]

The terms on which, for many years, land was occupied in Ireland (except for Ulster and one or two southern districts like the baronies of Bargy and Forth in Co. Wexford) were not helpful. They were terms, as we know, designed to maximize the landlord's return from his land. But they were also terms that disallowed compensation for permanent improvements, that absorbed through increased rent any rise in farm output that an ambitious tenant might achieve, and not only denied security of tenure to sitting tenants, but handicapped the new by obliging them to contract for payments they knew they would fail to meet. Neglect and indifference on the side of the landlords bred antagonism on the side of the tenants; and the latter responded to the situation in appropriate sociological and psychological form—withdrawal from contact, occasional aggression, restriction of ambition, and a turning away from impossible economic goals towards the pursuit of aspects of traditional life that did not conflict with the interests of the dominant élite. In other words, if traditionally the pursuit of material influence had been secondary to that of less tangible goals, relations with the landlord and his agents did much to ensure that the preference survived. By the time, when, during the nineteenth century, the possibilities of the economic development of the country began to be taken seriously, the social habits of generations were so deeply rooted that another two generations were necessary for their eradication.

It was Frederic Seebohm's view that the intention under the Irish settlements in the seventeenth century had been to establish feudal tenures similar to those obtaining on English manors:

> . . . the great wrong done to the Irish peasantry, and therefore to the Irish nation, did not so much consist in the abolition of the old Irish tenures and the intoduction of English ones in their places, as the neglect or refusal on the part of England

33. K. H. Connell, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

> and Anglo-Irish law to recognize the just rights of the Irish under those very feudal tenures which England herself forced upon them.[34]

Such a system, in the Irish context, could have provided a security of tenure that future experience proved to be lacking. This is not all, however. Feudalism carried with it not only tenurial, but also personal dependence, for a distinctive element of feudal society was the close social relationship between the lord and his vassal.[35] This source of social unification was conspicuously lacking in Ireland, left exposed to a largely unbridged duality imposed by differences of religion and of ethnic origin. So that, although many of the features of Irish society—the heavily rural and partially closed economy, the lack of large urban markets, great estates, dependent tenantry, and a large degree of local automony—were appropriate to a quasi-feudal system, this failed to materialize. No adequate new form of social organization took the place of the traditional one after the settlements, though the latter was inappropriate to the new situation. Few technical innovations were introduced to agriculture, or new forms of artisanry proposed, by paternal landlords. Those landlords who did so met with difficulties. Where there is little capital, and there are few small proprietors, wrote Nassau Senior,

> . . . society is divided into the very rich and the very poor, with scarcely any intermediate class. The land is cut into small holdings, because it is only in small holdings that a tenant without capital can cultivate it. And this very subdivision renders the landlord often unable, and almost always unwilling, to employ on it capital of his own. The productiveness of his estate might be doubled by an extensive drainage, but the consent, perhaps the co-operation, of the tenants is necessary; and a poor, ignorant, and suspicious population believe either that what is beneficial to their landlord must be mischievous to themselves, or, that, if their consent is to be asked, it must be paid for. Their health and efficiency might be improved by improving their residences; but he finds them ready to inhabit the hovels which they can raise with their own hands, and doubts whether, if he were to build for them, he would be repaid. The land which a family with little capital can cultivate does not, except during a small part of the year, afford profitable employment, for their whole time. If it were their own, indeed, they might, and probably would, keep constantly at work on it, and so gradually improve it; but they have no motive to treat thus another man's land.[36]

It seems clear that in Ireland the socially cohesive relationship of patron and client that, in other societies, has provided a political and economic security otherwise unattainable, was scarcely developed except on an informal basis. On the contrary, the feeling of division in society was reinforced by the fact that many

34. F. Seebohm, "The Land Question: Part I, English tenures in Ireland", *Fortnightly Review*, N.S., Vol. VI, 1869, p. 627, quoted R. D. Collison Black, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

35. Cf. Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law*, Cambridge, 1923, I, pp. 66–67; H. Pirenne, *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe*, London, 1958, pp. 8–9; *Feudalism in History* (ed. R. Coulborn), Princeton, 1956, pp. 4–5, 16–17.

36. Nassau Senior, *Journals, Conversations and Essays Ireating to Ireland*, London, 1868, I, pp. 27–28.

landowners were never, or were rarely, resident on their estates; and that landlords' agents, middlemen, rent-collectors, solicitors, and the like, based their claim to higher social status on the degree to which they demonstrated their separation from the Irish community they lived in (though many were themselves Irish), and their identity with the interests of the landlords they served. The interplay of factors such as these produced a situation which, if it was not inimical, was at any rate not conducive to the emergence of that entrepreneurial activity, technical innovation, individualist outlook and material acquisitiveness, supposed by many to be both the prelude and the accompaniment of economic growth. There were, of course, notable exceptions to the generalized picture of economic stagnation in nineteenth-century Ireland. Many contemporary commentators were at pains to draw attention to them. In Dublin, in Cork, in the north-east of the island, there was industry. Rural prosperity was greater in Ulster and in some of the southern baronies than it was elsewhere; and as far as the former was concerned, an explanation was found in the dominantly Presbyterian, rather than Catholic, population—yet Catholics shared Ulster's prosperity. In any case, Cullen argues persuasively that eighteenth-century Ireland was generally prosperous by contemporary standards, and sees the following century's failure to maintain prosperity largely as an outcome of Ireland's dominantly agricultural character and lack of natural resources.[37] Other nations, nevertheless, have overcome similar handicaps. There may be significance in the fact that areas of relative prosperity, like Ulster and the Wexford baronies of Bargy and Forth, were often peopled by those whose social traditions largely stemmed from sources outside Ireland. We may therefore ask whether there were features of Irish traditional and customary life, as there were in many peasant societies, that barred the way to rapid economic development.

II

An unequivocal answer to such a question cannot be hoped for, though intensive sociological study of documentary sources may ultimately take us some way towards one. There are, nevertheless, readily observed indications of the form such social obstacles may have taken. Many are similar to those known to have influenced the course of events in other underdeveloped economies. The Irish were not subject, as we have seen, to an institutionalized form of the patron-client relationship that often emerges from the interplay of landlord and tenant interests.[38] No doubt, there were aspects of Irish traditional, or peasant, society in which the dependency relationship played a significant part; yet it was not its chief characteristic, partly because Irish landlords were reluctant to accept the responsibilities of the patron's role, and partly because they saw little political

37. L. M. Cullen, *Anglo-Irish Trade 1660–1800*, Manchester University Press, 1968.

38. We have discussed some aspects of this matter, as it relates to Brazilian society, in B. Hutchinson, "The patron-dependant relationship in Brazil," *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. VI, No. 1, 1966, pp. 3–30.

advantage to be gained from its exercise. Since most of the usual patron figures were absent, the economic and social security provided by patronage in some peasant societies was not forthcoming. It is true that the dependent attitude of mind bred by a fully developed patron-client relationship may hamper economic initiative. To this extent, the Irish were at an advantage. On the other hand, the coincidence of persistent insecurity with a social and economic setting that discouraged (if it did not render impossible) personal initiative meant that protection had to be sought in other ways. It seems likely, for example, that the parish priest assumed a protective, or patron's, role in relation to his flock;[39] but he had few, if any, material resources, or means to obtain them, and his interventions on his parishioners' behalf must have been either religious and spiritual; or moral, in the defence of their material interests at the local, or sometimes national, political level. He was in no position to come to the material aid of his parishioners as, in a quasi-feudal society, a patron was able, indeed was in duty bound, to assist his dependants. Irish communities, in general,[40] had to rely largely on their own resources. Security against ill-fortune was therefore sought, in this as in other peasant societies, in a variety of forms of mutual aid. In its most comprehensive form, mutual aid recruited the entire adult population of the community to ensure its functioning; but this was comparatively rare. As is to be expected, the common forms of cooperation involved kinsfolk only, or kin together with neighbours and friends. Maxwell quotes an example:

> A farmer who was desirous of having his turf or hay cut would have an announcement to that effect made at the parish chapel on Sunday, and then, on the appointed morning, all his neighbours and friends, some of whom had perhaps to travel ten or twelve miles, would assemble for the purpose of assisting in the labour, which they would rapidly complete in some four or five hours. No wages would be offered on these occasions—indeed, they were not expected—but the farmer provided a feast at the end of the day with dancing and a piper.[41]

So many peasant communities developed a similar system of cooperation (a system in which community membership was alone sufficient qualification for the duty of mutual aid to be imposed)[42] that the scene she describes is a familiar one. Nevertheless, many other communities restricted the obligations of mutual aid to kinsfolk, as these were locally defined. Some such restrictions may have

39. Cf. K. H. Connell, *Irish Peasant Society*, Oxford, 1968, pp. 144–148.

40. On the other hand, there were exceptional landlords, among them those mentioned by Arthur Young, who felt responsibility for their tenants' well-being, and came to their aid. The Edgeworths of Co. Longford are a familiar example.

41. C. Maxwell, *op. cit.*. pp. 120–121, citing Croker, *Researches in the South of Ireland.*

42. The literature, of course, is abundant. Examples are, for the USA, W. Gee, *The Social Economics of Agriculture*, New York, 1954; for Portugal, Jorge Dias, *Vilarinho da Furna*, Pôrto, 1948; for Brazil, C. Caldeira, *Mutirão: formas de ajuda mútua no méio rural*, São Paulo, 1956. R. Redfield observed it in Mexico: *Tepoztlán—a Mexican Village*, Chicago, 1930; but Cf. O. Lewis, *Life in a Mexican Village*, Urbana, 1963, p. 142.

operated in traditional Irish society, and the critical importance of the family as the basic unit of Irish social organization (and of mutual aid) was emphasized by Arensberg in his study of Co. Clare:

> . . . cooperation is woven deeply into the countryman's habit and sentiment. . . . In every case an extended family relationship was involved. The countryman is a family man in this cooperation with his fellows, as well as in his work at home. . . . No man mowed for all his relations, that was not necessary. One man had mowed, not for a relative, but for a boon companion. Furthermore, the bachelors, whom no one had helped, had been able to help no one. The two "strangers", who had moved into the townland, in one case fifty years before, in the other thirty, had no relatives "on this side". . .[43]

The assumption that a study of a limited area of Co. Clare in the 'thirties of this century can provide us with an understanding of a "traditional" Ireland of an earlier historical period, cannot support much weight of argument. It seems likely, nevertheless, that mutual aid and cooperation, whatever the basis on which they were organized, played (as they still play in certain parts of Ireland) a significant role in the economic life of the community. We may suppose that in Ireland, as in similar communities, the chief function of mutual aid was not that of easing a man's personal burden of labour: it was that of providing a degree of security to the people that was not obtainable from an individual patron, nor from the state, nor from the natural environment of climate and soil in which they lived.[44] But such a system, firmly entrenched, generally constitutes an impediment to economic change and development, especially in so far as the latter depends upon technological development. For in this sense, mutual aid, in the simpler forms of social organization, has an essentially static character. Work that is shared must be work that is familiar to those collaborating in it, or it will not go easily. The maintenance of traditional technical methods, already sustained by the power of human inertia, is assured by the necessity for familiarity; and the elaboration of technological improvement, and its adoption if suggested, will be rare features of an economic life organized on such a basis. Nor can a system of mutual aid provide a setting in which great diversity of individual wealth can be easily tolerated. "If there is one vice the Irish really abhor, it is that of success."[45] The economic life of such a community, susceptible for reasons of economic and social stability to the fear of nonconformity, discourages man from seeking an economic surplus beyond what is usual. He who achieves a prosperity noticeably greater than his neighbours' exposes himself to their jealousy; and in some communities

43. C. M. Arensberg, *The Irish Countryman*, New York, 1937, p. 66.

44. "The climates of Ireland are more favourable to grassland than to arable farming, and crops are won with a hard struggle in many years: it is perhaps not remarkable that the Irish speak of 'saving the harvest'." T. W. Freeman, *Ireland: a general and regional geography*, London, third edition, 1965, p. 52.

45. Brendan Behan to Alan Bestic, in the latter's *The Importance of being Irish*, London, 1969. p. 27.

to the retribution of the supernatural. It therefore becomes the more likely that, when an abnormally generous surplus depends for its existence, wholly or partially, upon community aid freely given, it will be neither sought by the individual nor tolerated by the community. Poirier comments as follows:

> Dans les sociétés préindustrielles, les producteurs n'ont pas pour ambition d'augmenter indéfiniment leur production, bien au contraire . . . la création du surplus disponible est jugée temeraire: elle sucite la jalousie des membres du groupe, qui voient l'un des leurs se differencier des normes, et elle éxpose à la jalousie des invisibles. L'idéal est bien plutôt une médiocrité relativement confortable—et confortable surtout moralement. On ne recherche pas le maximum, mais l'optimum. Tout l'appareil social joue comme un rouleau compresseur qui nivelle les initiatives. . . . L'idéal est que chaque membre du groupe demeure à sa place.[46]

The individual in consequence may feel himself tied also to a territorial locality. The countryman, short of moving away to the city (and not always then), cannot evade his community's demand for social and economic conformity by transferring his allegiance elsewhere. On the one hand, many Irish people felt a bond of loyalty to their natal community that was difficult to break. This had its counterpart at the community level in the latter's reluctance to accept in its membership a renegade from another quarter: for however his physical presence might be tolerated, he remained a non-member playing little, if any part in mutual aid or in other forms of reciprocal obligations.[47] How far, in Ireland, these feelings went further, producing active distrust and suspicion, is difficult to estimate. But it would have been by no means unusual in a peasant community.[48] There is little doubt that widespread distrust of strangers (that is, distrust of people not resident members of the community) may handicap entrepreneurial and commercial enterprise, which depends for its success on relationships which, if in a sense impersonal, nevertheless presuppose a degree of mutual trust.

Traditional forms of community cooperation in the Irish rural economy, then, while they made their contributions to economic security, at the same time discouraged technological innovation, and made personal economic advancement contingent upon emigration, either to the city, or abroad. Some notion, perhaps even an explicit realization, of these circumstances may have been a source of the lack of material ambition to which we referred earlier; and its lack, whatever its source, could make a static economy generally acceptable. But the strait-

46. J. Poirier, "Les fonctions sociales de l'ostentation économique," *Revue Tiers-Monde*, IX, No. 33, 1968 p, . 12.

47. Cf. C. M. Arensberg, *op. cit.*. pp. 83, 107–108.

48. We may cite an example from rural Greece: "The critical unit of social organization in the community is the family, whether in its elementary or extended form. . . . Indeed, between men who are unrelated by kinship or marriage there is deep distrust which in practice prevents any effective form of cooperation." J. K. Campbell, "Honour and the Devil", in *Honour and Shame: the values of Mediterranean society*, (J. G. Peristiany, ed.), London, 1965, p. 142. See also, J, K. Campbell, *Honour, Family and Patronage*, London, 1964, *passim*.

jacket (perceived, perhaps, only by the potential social deviant) that was imposed by a system of community mutual aid, restricted behaviour in another and, it may be, more significant fashion. Better, the necessary restrictions of mutual aid were reinforced by an allied set of beliefs and expectations (as to what was desirable in individual behaviour) that stemmed from the family, and its central position in Irish social organization.[49] The family in Ireland, as elsewhere, was the means employed by the community largely to mould the personality of its members; and it laid down the limits within which behavioural variation was permitted. But if a pervading sense of family and kinship solidarity, and the guidance to acceptable behaviour that it provided, gave to the individual a sense of security, it put a premium on social conformity. It was through patterns of deference, to age, to the father, to the mother and to other senior kin, that to a great extent conformity was secured. Indeed, age dominance was such that the achievement of adult status was decided, not by an objective criterion of chronological age, but at the moment when the father chose (or from ill-health or death was obliged) to give up to his son the control of his farm or other property. Until this happened, perhaps in extreme old age, his sons remained "boys", their social standing low and their independence minimal, often into middle age and beyond. Moreover, their continued dependence was partially secured by the lack of a foreseeable order of succession among the sons. There was, it appears, no law, no convention, of primogeniture. The father was free to pass the control of the property to any of his sons; and in order the longer to retain his personal influence, he could conceal until the last possible moment the identity of the son on whom his choice had fallen. We may remind ourselves of Abegglen's view that in some societies the institution of primogeniture contributed appreciably to the course of industrial development.[50]

In traditional Ireland, therefore, the child learnt social values, socially acceptable forms of behaviour, and approved technical methods, that did not, in Arensberg's words, "deviate from the right and traditional pattern, which folklore, adage and the censure of the village support."[51] In this, of course, Ireland did not differ appreciably from the majority of peasant societies. But the combination of general community conformity, the dominance of tradition, the absence of a powerful drive towards the attainment of material goals that lay beyond those traditionally established, was mediated through the dominance of stern father-figures whose pervasive influence had the effect of confining sons to the status of perpetual boyhood. Assuming economic development to be partially a function

49. C. M. Arensberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 121–123.

50. ". . . primogeniture has been credited with facilitating industrial development in Japan. Younger sons were both economically and emotionally drawn to the new urban occupations. These younger sons . . . appear to have been especially responsive and adaptive to the introduction of new styles of life". J. C. Abegglen, "The relationship between economic and social programming in Latin America," in *Social Aspects of Economic Development in Latin America*, (E. de Vries and J. M. Echaverria, eds.), Paris, 1963, p. 268.

51. C. M. Arensberg, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

of the social fostering of new ideas, of entrepreneurial activity and economic individualism (there are of course other relevant factors), Ireland's failure to progress rapidly was caused in part by her inability to make adequate provision for, indeed her opposition to, such things. Nor is this entirely transformed:

> "In our family," said a Dublin woman quoted in a recent sociological study, "if you started to express any ideas of your own, or take on any projects, my father would put a stop to it. He would tell you not to be ridiculous, and he would put you in your place. I am not sure it wasn't a good thing. Perhaps we would have made ourselves ridiculous . . . but sometimes I think we Irish carry it a little far."[52]

The issue for this informant, as for her father, was exposure to ridicule: community condemnation of unconventional or unusual behaviour. Nor was such a preoccupation unlikely in such a social context. Dislike of innovation had as one of its function the preservation of established role relationships; and in particular the lending of community support to paternal dominance:

> "The fathers have an attitude that the sons are always boys who can't do anything right. I know my boys felt that their father thought they were incapable of doing anything on their own. And so they would not do a thing round the house if their father was at home. . . . But if Frank wasn't home, they would go ahead and do a job. . . . That is very common. . . . The fathers think the boys are children even when they are eighteen or nineteen, and they tend to keep them children. They won't let them go off on their own or have a bit of their own head and perhaps make some mistakes, but learn by the mistakes. And I don't think that is very much different than it was in my parents' day."[53]

It can be argued, therefore, that Irish society was one that steered the young, the energetic and the innovating as far as possible towards conformity to patterns of behaviour already established. To the degree that his control was successfully imposed, individual ambition was necessarily thwarted. Restrictions imposed upon the son by a father jealous of his status were not counterbalanced (as they have been in other western societies) by contrary influences emanating from the mother. If the Irish mother's influence upon her son was a powerful one, it operated, nevertheless, in a direction opposed to economic development based upon individual initiative and innovation. Her influence set limits to her son's freedom which, while different from those imposed by the father, were equally difficult to circumvent. They were emotional ties designed to secure, or at any rate having the effect of securing, filial dependence. It is true that it was in the father's interest also to retain as long as possible his sons' subordination; but he went about securing this in a way that concealed his affection for them. In contrast, the mother's relationship with her sons was a strongly affectional one.

52. A. J. Humphreys, *op. cit.* p., 146.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Arensberg's view[54] gives to this relationship a counterbalancing value producing in the son's mind a state of emotional equilibrium. The view that it may just as easily have led to emotional imbalance and a fear of independence seems equally plausible; and if such an outcome was a common occurence, the willingness of people to undertake those forms of economic and technical innovation that are believed to be prerequisite to economic development would have been handicapped still further. It may be that Humphreys is right in suggesting[55] that maternal cushioning of the male's hard lot and of his constant subordination to the father's wishes was a compensation for the long postponement of adulthood. But the mother's reluctance to give up her own form of control over her son's behaviour reduced still further the latter's freedom—may well, indeed, have destroyed his desire for it. Maternal opposition certainly appears to have been important in discouraging young men from marriage; and this in its own turn may have contributed something to the already considerable obstacles facing economic development in Ireland.

> Where the proportion of people unmarried is high, there is a risk that the community's sense of responsibility, or that its realization of the value and importance of the basic unit of society—the family—will be inadequate and that, as a result, its attitude to life may be unprogressive. This may be aggravated by the lesser need for the qualities of hard work and enterprise. Unmarried people are, of course, often active and even leaders in many spheres, but married people generally take a keener interest in the more serious social and economic matters affecting the general well-being.[56]

But if the traditional family, and its influence in restricting individual freedom, discouraged economic enterprise, the advantages of the system were equally notable. A member of the community needed the protection of his family against the encroachment of outsiders, its assistance in the provision of his sustenance. The family, composed of blood relatives and affinal kinsmen with extensions to include more distant kin, constituted a powerful system for the maintenance of standard of living and social status. Irish traditional society, like feudal society,[57] did not understand (or if it understood, did not accept) purely economic relationships among its members, nor the impersonal and merely contractual associations characterizing industrial society. A son could expect his family to support him, to intervene on his behalf, to obtain economic and other opportunities for him; and these advantages were the compensation he received for the control imposed upon him. Moreover, not only was a son justified in expecting his family to aid him: the community would regard with suspicion an enterprise that failed to

54. *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

55. *Op. cit.*, p. 20. See also pp. 162, 163.

56. *Report of the Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1948–1954*, Dublin, 1955, para. 159.

57. Marc Bloch, "The rise of dependent cultivation and seignorial institutions", *Cambridge Economic History of Europe*, J. H. Clapham and E. Power, (eds.), Cambridge, 1942, Vol. I, p. 257.

enjoy family support. For the system was not harnessed to the pursuit of economic efficiency in the sense that we understand the notion. Its purpose was to provide a form of security for the community, whose individual members were unable to seek, or were prevented by convention from seeking, their own means of survival. It nevertheless had its extension to the commercial field. Family businesses had family interests at heart, and gave employment first and foremost to members of the family. Non-family employees lacked security of tenure, and were consequently unlikely to exert themselves beyond the call of duty; and if family interests were the dominant ones, enterprise, innovation and efficiency were likely to go by the board if they conflicted with them. On the other hand, the system had its advantages also for the small shopkeeper who for so long dominated numerically the Irish economic scene. Just as farming was to an important degree dependent on mutual aid and family loyalty for its prosperity, so the shopkeeper relied upon similar feelings for his own. Once again the advantages were reciprocal.

> . . . the country customer who brings his trade into the shop does so in response to the ties of kinship and friendliness. He "goes with" a shopkeeper or publican, most often, as he "coors" with his country friends. This is not his only incentive, but it is his principal one. The social order of which he is a part embraces the town-dwelling shopkeeper; trade follows friendship. Many indeed are the shops which rely almost entirely upon this "family trade". . . . The shopkeeper is bound in his turn to his "family trade". He owes obligation to the "country cousins" who buy from him.[58]

An almost identical relationship is reported by Humphreys for parts of modern Dublin.[59] That personal considerations of this sort have proved resistant to change may indicate their central importance in traditional Irish social organization. In this Ireland differs little from other pre-industrial societies.

III

On the one hand, then, there were obstacles to economic development in Ireland that arose from forces which, operating from outside the traditional social order, had their source in the circumstances of conquest. On the other hand, there existed an entirely different set of forces, tending towards the same end, whose origin can be traced from within traditional Irish society. The combination of the two was doubtless sufficiently powerful to create a situation in which economic enterprise was not likely to have found it easy to operate, even had the purely economic setting been suitable, as it was not. Yet while it is possible to disentangle some main threads in the fabric of Irish socio-economic life as it existed up to the fairly recent past, the mode of their interrelation is not so clear.

58. Arensberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 154–155.
59. *Op. cit.*. p. 98.

To what extent were the internal social obstacles to economic innovation and growth a community response to external handicaps imposed on the Irish population? Was perhaps even the non-materialist character of so much of Irish life a reaction to, or a compensation for, earlier circumstances that had made material acquisition and the enjoyment of consumption for its own sake impossible of achievement? Would Ireland perhaps have followed lines of economic development not dissimilar to those followed by other western European countries had external factors not restrained it? Did the non-materialist philosophy possess an autonomous status, as it were; or were the Irish merely making a virtue of a necessity? What are we to make of the occasional references in the literature to "the peasant's shrewd eye to his own interests"? Could this mean that acts of material acquisitiveness were tolerated—but only within a framework, and according to standards laid down in advance by the community?

Irish traditional life was marked by an insistence upon social conformity not unusual in peasant society. What was perhaps somewhat less usual was the emphasis that was placed—and in much of rural, if not urban Ireland is still placed—upon economic conformity. Admiration was reserved, not for one who by his own efforts emerged above the ruck of his fellows, but for one who conformed to the narrow limits laid down by the community for the material prosperity of its members. Some of the reasons for this lay in the system of reciprocal aid, the strong family loyalty, the aftermath of the Penal Laws. All these influences placed a premium upon traditionalism at the expense of innovation, whether technical or economic; and had as their consequence economic stagnation. In combination with other factors, particularly perhaps those of filial subordination to parents, and even the unquestioning obedience the Catholic Church in Ireland demanded of its flock, the extension of conformity was such that the entire ethos of the society was dominated by it. One of the most obvious, and one of the most far-reaching, consequences of this was the persistent emigrating stream of Irish people whose enterprise and innovating potentialities could find free expression only outside their native country: for although the causes of Irish emigration are complex, there is little doubt that the demands of social and economic conformity meant that Ireland actually offered no defined role for the enterprising. The "successful" man operating within the Irish framework fears to find himself unwelcome, a renegade almost from the standards of conformity according to which the community has been in the habit of conducting its life. These things have their roots in tradition and in historical experience: yet their continued existence depends upon their possessing a functional *raison d'être* in contemporary social organization in Ireland. Is their persistence justified, sociologically speaking? Or have the reasons that gave birth to them ceased to have meaning: in which case may we expect the gradual emergence of a new set of values more appropriate to the course of economic development on which Ireland is now set? We may agree that the aim of every economy, however simple, is the satisfaction of human needs and desires; but these differ from one form of society to another. Communities may well fail to agree amongst themselves as to the goods they

value and wish to obtain; nor will they necessarily opt exclusively for material goods, or put these first in their scale of values. But so wedded are we to our western assumptions that it seems incredible to us that any man, and even less credible that a whole society, could prefer a life of leisure, material "squalor" and dietary limitation to one of continuous work rewarded by material prosperity. There must be some mistake; the people have been deceived by a selfish and dominant élite, or they are incorrigibly lazy. We confuse the quantitative notion of a material standard of life with the qualitative idea of a way of living,[60] and fail to recognize that the ethos of our own society is not necessarily that of others. This failure, reinforced by an unawareness of the essential unity of society and its organization, sees the price of economic growth only in terms of greater conformity to an ideal type of economic man. It blinds us to the fact that for a non-western society the real price is complete transformation.[61]

The dilemma of western civilization is how best to assuage its guilt at the widening gap between its own material prosperity and the material poverty of underdeveloped countries—whose peoples nevertheless respond indifferently to the demands for social transformation made of them. It is possible that the relationship between England and Ireland until Independence was one of the first instances of this *dialogue de sourds* that the world has witnessed; and we have made a preliminary examination of some of the evidence for this view. In doing so we hope to have outlined a possible foundation for a detailed treatment of the argument that "accusations" of indolence, squalor and poverty, until comparatively recently levelled at large parts of the Irish population, were based upon an illegitimate and ethnocentric extension of a foreign system of values to a society differing in many fundamental respects from the society to which the critics themselves belonged. The Irish, in short, were blamed for failing to achieve materialist and rationalist goals in which they were only marginally interested, thus finding themselves in the position of an author criticized for not having produced a book he had no intention of writing.

60. Cf. Raymond Aron, *18 Lectures on Industrial Society*. (tr. M. K. Bottomore), London, 1967, p. 77.

61. *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 129. Cf. J. Poirier, *op. cit.*