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Classical Economics and the Great Irish Famine: *A Study in Limits*

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For most of the 19th century the English answer was to ignore the hate and crush the crime which [the land system] produced. In the forty years before 1870 forty-two Coercion Acts were passed. During the same period there was not a single statute to protect the Irish peasant from eviction and rack-renting. -- Winston Churchill, *The Great Democracies*, p. 343.

Abstract: *The Great Irish Famine resulted from two massive failures: the blight that destroyed the potato crop and the non-interventionism of the English government. The first failure, which also occurred in other European countries, was devastating for the Irish who depended on the potato as their main source of nourishment. The second failure was a human failure because English government policy was instructed by classical economics to let the market clear the surplus population from the land and was reinforced by the anti-Irish racism common in England at the time, even among classical economists, notably Nassau Senior and J.S. Mill.*

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The Great Irish Famine of 1845-1850 represented the *greatest* crisis in the history of England's relationship with Ireland (Mill 1979a, p.35). For Ireland the Famine was the *greatest* social catastrophe in its entire history (Póirtéir 1995a, p. 1). This conjoined crisis/catastrophe represents the first *limit*. In 19th-century Europe, Ireland after the Great Famine was *unique* in terms of the scope of its post-Famine psychological trauma, its demographics, and its connectedness to its emigrant sons and daughters (Gray 1995b, p.117)—the second *limit*. In both instances, *limit* is used not in the usual mathematical sense but rather to characterize the Great Famine as an extraordinary event of enormous, tragic consequences that even today merits serious scholarly inquiry.

The *laissez-faire* doctrine of classical economics and its practice were never more *dominant* in English history than between 1817 and 1870 (Viner, p.v)—the third *limit*. Here *limit* is used in similar fashion: to underscore the especially significant role of classical economics in shaping English government policy regarding the Irish question (Viner, p.v; Cosmopolite, p.2). Put differently, had the classical economists of that period played no such role in policy making, there would be no *limit* three and no basis for exploring their role in the Great Famine. Instead, the Great Famine became the *ultimate* 18th-century test of the classical doctrine

that unfettered markets sort out all conflicts and serve the common good and that government officials ought not meddle in economic affairs—the fourth *limit.* Here *limit* is used in a somewhat different sense, referring in this instance to the intersection of *limits* one, two, and three.

With the Great Famine we have what Becker (1953, p. xvii) describes as "that valuable social tool, the limiting case." If in the face of the unprecedented human tragedy befalling British subjects in Ireland, classical economists in England were unwilling to accept that at times markets fail and government intervention is necessary, what would have convinced them that "the invisible hand" is rhetoric and that a sound economics cannot be constructed without regard for the central problem of unmet human material need? The answer came some 80 to 85 years later in the form of the Great Depression and the Keynesian Revolution, which finally exposed the flaws in classical economic theory and made clear that government must intervene whenever markets break down and huge numbers of human beings suffer the hardship of unmet material need.

This article is organized in five parts. The first part addresses the scope of the Great Famine and the response of the English government, in order to confirm as authentic the claims referred to as limits one and two and to set aside the counterclaims of some revisionist historians. The second part identifies the leading classical economists in England during the early and mid-1800s and presents the central tenets of classical economics. The role of classical economics in the Irish land question is examined in the third part. In the fourth part, the elitism, false stereotyping, racism, and anti-Catholicism characteristic of England and classical economists are reviewed. In part four, it has been necessary to quote several sources at length because those very words are centrally important in establishing the extent of the hostility and prejudice in England among classical economists. Parts two, three, and four present evidence to authenticate the claims referred to as limits three and four. All of the evidence, taken together, supports the proposition that the Great Famine is the limiting case that precedes and in a sense foretells the ultimate collapse of classical economics during the Great Depression.

The final comments in part five take the form of five general conclusions. The first relates to limits one and two and answers this question: "Why do we call the famine of 1845-1850 the Great Famine?." The other four conclusions are relevant to the third and fourth limits and answer this question: "What role did classical economics and classical economists play in fortifying the response of the British government to the unprecedented need of the Irish people during the Great Famine?"

The Great Famine: Its Toll on the Irish People and the Response of the English Government

Following the failed rebellion of 1798, the Act of Union in 1801 made England and Ireland one country, and made the Irish people British subjects. At first, the Irish had hopes of greater justice through Catholic emancipation, which they expected to follow the Act of Union immediately. But emancipation was not forthcoming until 1829, and then only after a difficult struggle. Free trade between England and Ireland resulted in none of the expected English investment in Ireland. Indeed, Ireland became a market for surplus English production. As a consequence Irish industry collapsed, and with that collapse came widespread unemployment (Woodham-Smith, pp.15-16). As Karl Marx observed in 1860, "every time Ireland was about to develop industrially, she was crushed and reconverted into a purely agricultural land" (Sheehan, p.8).

The Famine followed sixteen years after emancipation. At first (fall 1845) the English government under Tory Prime Minister Robert Peel responded with some compassion by quietly arranging for the importation of Indian corn (maize) from the United States so as not to arouse his political rivals who feared that such imports would be harmful if free trade in foodstuffs were permitted. A Relief Commission was appointed to provide oversight for the various relief efforts. In March 1846 Peel authorized the sale of maize in Ireland, and three months later eliminated all tariffs on corn. In sharp contrast to earlier years when maize was imported only in very small quantities, Ireland imported 122 tons in 1846. Maize imports climbed to 632 tons in 1847 and then fell off to 306 tons in the following year (Bourke, p.1).

Peel was replaced as prime minister by Whig John Russell following the repeal of the protectionist Corn Laws. Non-intervention was the unambiguous policy of the Russell government. Food exports from Ireland to England would continue as before, and there would be no public effort made to export or sell cheap corn to the starving Irish. Prior to the Famine, Ireland had been a net exporter of grain, chiefly oats, wheat, and barley. In 1846 Irish grain exports continued to exceed imports, and in the following two years Ireland remained a net exporter of oats (Bourke, p.1).

The ideas of Jeremy Bentham and Thomas Malthus were widely embraced in the English House of Commons; in essence Ireland's suffering was to be permitted in order to exclude some "greater possible evils." Both Tories and Whigs in the Parliament saw the Famine as scientifically inevitable and necessary to clear away the surplus Irish population. A few even said that the Famine was desirable. Put differently, the Famine was seen as a natural corrective for the excessive fertility of the Irish population and for their excessive dependence on the potato (Keneally, pp.105-106).

Under the circumstances, it was necessary to provide English military escort to assure the flow of food exports to England. In April 1846, for example, food was shipped from Conmel in Ireland to England protected by 80 infantrymen and 50 cavalrymen (Woodham-Smith, p.77). Sheehan (p.8) confirms the shipment of wheat, barley, and oats as rent payments to landlords in England by Irish peasants who, failing those payments, risked eviction from the land. The prevailing view within the English government was that nothing should be done to bring harm to an already fragile retail system. Kinealy, who 150 years after the Famine was the first to check the shipping records on food shipments from Ireland during the Famine years, stated that in 1847 alone 4,000 ships sailed *from* Ireland carrying food shipments (*Sunday Business Post*, p.30). In late 1848 it became necessary to enlist the military to protect rent collectors (Nowlan, p.177).

The Russell government in August 1846 approved a new round of public works projects that were to be funded entirely from Irish resources. In other words, Ireland was expected to deal with the problem entirely on its own. In December 1846 a total of 441,000 people were employed on public works projects, mainly road building and repair. By the following March, the numbers had climbed to 714,000 people for whom work on these projects was their only means to earn the cash necessary to purchase food. It has been estimated that a total of 3 million people were supported by these projects when employment reached its peak in March 1847. This form of relief was fraught with difficulties, including the employment of starving women and children who were not strong enough for the demanding physical work. This type of relief, however, greatly exceeded the maximum number of people—an estimated 250,000—for whom the wages being paid, adjusted for inflated prices, would be sufficient to purchase the food necessary to alleviate their extreme physical hardship. In spring 1847 Whig government policy shifted away from public works projects toward soup kitchens (Kissane, pp. 45,59).

Feeding the starving masses at soup kitchens began in Ireland in late 1846, spearheaded by the Irish Society of Friends (Quakers). With the government program in place, soup kitchens were feeding 3 million people by August. In September the government program was terminated abruptly because the potato crop that year was relatively free of the blight. Having weathered the crisis, the government returned to its usual policy of handling relief through the workhouse system (Kissane, p.71).

Prior to the Famine, there was considerable resistance to introducing a poor law in Ireland. Among the reasons given were that it would transform charity into duty, encourage further growth of a servile population, impose a tax on production to support idleness, weaken the work ethic, and make the poor co-proprietors of the land, leaving in its wake a population with no interest in pursuing knowledge or science (McDowell, p.41).

Even so, a poor law was passed in 1838, but due to Irish resistance only 38,000 people were being served through this system in 1846. By the following January, more than 100,000 were being housed in Ireland's workhouses. Later that year the English government adopted the Poor Relief Act, which allowed it to rely increasingly on the workhouse system in part because the system was supported by taxes imposed on lands and buildings in Ireland. The English taxpayer, therefore, would not be forced to subsidize relief for the Irish. A Poor Law Commission was established to provide oversight. Though workhouse capacity increased from 100,000 in 1846 to 250,000 in 1849, many seeking admission could be accommodated only through overcrowding. Sanitary conditions deteriorated, and disease followed, made worse by various epidemics, including dysentery, that afflicted the general population (Kissane, pp.9, 107).

The workhouses were intended to house mainly the aged, the infirm, and widows with two or more children. Able-bodied men were to be supported by outdoor relief, which permitted them to live outside the workhouse but still receive food allotments for two months. However, anyone with land holdings greater than one-quarter acre was ineligible for any relief under the new law, thus forcing many to choose between the giving up their holdings or starving. By summer 1849, 800,000 people were receiving assistance in the form of outdoor relief (Kissane, p.89).

Many did surrender their holdings, which had the effect, intended or otherwise, of transforming Irish agriculture into larger and therefore more efficient holdings following the central tenet of English government policy that subordinated relief of the suffering masses to economic development. Between 1841 and 1851, farms smaller than five acres dropped from 45 percent of all farm holdings to 15 percent at the same time farms larger than 15 acres climbed from 19 percent of all holdings to 51 percent ("Effects of Famine," p.1). The Encumbered Estates Act of 1848, amended in the following year, made it much easier to sell and transfer the estates of impoverished Irish landlords. Five million acres representing one-quarter of the arable land in Ireland changed hands in the years following the Famine (O'Connor, p.142). John Stuart Mill (1981b, p.333) called this act "the greatest boon conferred on Ireland by any Government." According to Kevin O'Rourke (1994, p.312), "the Famine served as a sort of speeded-up enclosure movement."

Mortality in the workhouses was so high both for the inmates and the staff throughout the entire 1847-50 period that the bodies were buried in mass graves. One estimate put workhouse mortality in excess of 200,000 (Guinnane, p.3). During the Famine, a provision of the Anatomy Act of 1832 allowed the unclaimed bodies of people who died in the workhouses to be transferred to medical schools for use in anatomy classes. Disciples of Bentham were responsible for adding this provision to the 1832 Act (O'Connor, pp.147-149,151).

Thus, at a critical time in the Famine, the English government shifted its policy from intervention supported by funds supplied by the English government to non-intervention in the face of the desperate and overwhelming needs of their British subjects in Ireland, forcing the Irish to fend for themselves. Following Snell we undertake to demonstrate that this policy of non-intervention was influenced by and based squarely on the *laissez-faire* doctrines of English classical economics, the Malthusian argument, and anti-Irish prejudice (Snell, p.15). Toward the end of the Famine, one English observer known for his humanitarianism said that in the midst of "an abundance of cheap food...very many have been done to death by pure tyranny" (quoted in Gray 1995a, p.102).

The population of Ireland declined dramatically. In 1841, the population was 8,175,124 (Hamrock, p.77). Between 1845 and 1850, the population fell by about 2 million: 1 million died and 1 million emigrated (Sheehan, pp.7-8). Between 1845 and 1855, a total of 2.1 million emigrated (Kissane, p.153). Churchill (p.99) in 1965 put Famine-induced emigration at more than 1 million.

Guinnane in 1994 (p.303) asserted that more than 1 million died and even more emigrated. However, three years later he stated that there are no reliable statistics available to confirm which estimate of the death toll—1 million, 1.2 million, 1.5 million—is most accurate. Even so, he seems to accept Boyle's and Ó Gráda's estimate that more than 1.1 million died, 623,000 emigrated, and 315,000 fewer were born. Their estimates indicate that the Famine reduced the Irish population by slightly in excess of 2 million. The decline in population from the Famine was disproportionately higher in the western and southern counties (Guinnane 1997, p.86), which were predominantly Catholic.

Starvation and malnutrition exposed the Irish to various deadly diseases, including scurvy due to a vitamin C deficiency, anemia, typhus, relapsing fever, cholera, and dysentery (Póirtéir1995a, pp.85,100). The Famine also triggered a wave of violence, most notably murder (Guinnane 1997, p.52). Non-violent offenses against property increased three-fold during the Famine years (Póirtéir1995a, p.68). Martial law was imposed in parts of Ireland, and 16,000 additional troops were deployed to deal with the violence ("The Great Famine in Ireland," p.6). Many of the Irish who were convicted of crimes were transported as indentured laborers to England's colonial possession Australia. The National Archives of Ireland's own database on transportation (www.nationalarchives.ie/transp) indicates that approximately 15,227 people were transported to Australia; this estimate includes convicts and free settlers, many of whom elected transport to accompany a convicted family member. Keneally (p.33) describes this emigration as "the worse kind of exile, the unchosen one; the exile of chains."

The ships taking emigrants from Ireland to Canada and the United States became known as "coffin ships" because many died of communicable diseases during the voyage. In contrast to earlier emigrations from Ireland, among those who fled during the Famine were large numbers of the very young and the very old who had been weakened by fever and malnutrition before starting their voyage (Litton, p.100). In 1847 alone, an estimated 25,000 of the 100,000 emigrants on British ships to Canada died en route or within six months after their arrival (Gallagher, p.211). In 1997 the first national memorial to the Famine was dedicated in one of the western counties—County Mayo—where the starvation and emigration were most severe. Fittingly, the memorial is a metal sculpture of a coffin ship.

The Leading Classical Economists in England and Their Central Tenets

The English classical period in economics began with Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations, reached its peak with David Ricardo's *Principles*, and ended with J.S. Mill's *Principles of Political Economy*. Ricardo is significant because arguments that were persuasive in English political affairs derived substantially from his works. Three others in England considered themselves Ricardo's disciples or adherents: Edward West, James Mill, and J.R. McCulloch. The other major contributors to classical economics in England were Thomas DeQuincey, Nassau Senior, J.E.Cairnes, Henry Sidgwick, J.S. Nicholson, R. Torrens, Malthus, and his follower Thomas Chalmers (Schumpeter, pp.69-71). Both James and J.S. Mill (hereafter simply Mill) regarded themselves as students of Bentham, a leading articulator and defender of utilitarianism, which was the source of the sociology of many classical economists. Schumpeter identified their sociology as "a branch of the tree of Natural Law [defined by him as 'every individual accordingly acts in the interests of the whole if he pursues his personal interests'] unsurpassed in its baldness, shallowness and its radical lack of understanding of everything that moves man and holds together society" (Schumpeter, pp. 90, 87-88). Mill's *Principles* and Henry Fawcett's *Manual* formed the main ideas of most English economists during the second half of the 19th century until Alfred Marshall's *Principles* (Schumpeter, pp.71,78-80; Gide, p.359).

Mill is of interest for two reasons: (1) his *Principles* was published in the midst of the Famine; and (2) his circle of friends and companions included many eminent English authors and public figures (Haney, p.445). For these two reasons, along with evidence gleaned from Mill's unsigned newspapers editorials in 1846 regarding the Famine (addressed later), we have concluded that Mill's voice was heard and listened to in the formation of English government policy. Senior too is of interest because he was an advisor to the English government during the Famine

(Gray 1995a, p.88). Jevons, though only ten years old at the start of the Famine, is included because he is one of the leading classical economists in the second half of the 19th century, a great admirer of Senior (Leslie, p.158), and a utilitarian, but at odds with Mill (see Jevons 1957, pp.23-27,275-277). One other reason for including Jevons is taken up later.

The achievements of classical economics during the first two decades of the 19th century, especially the contributions of Ricardo and his followers, were enthusiastically embraced by literally all scholars of that period. The seven fundamental laws of classical economics were (Gide, pp.359-371): (1) law of self-interest (the hedonistic principle); (2) law of free competition (*laissez-faire*); (3) law of population (population growth determines living standards of working class); (4) law of demand and supply (demand and supply and price vary together); (5) iron law of wages (wages are determined by the cost of rearing the worker); (6) law of rent (when there are two costs of production, the higher cost determines the price, thereby yielding an unearned increment or rent); (7) law of international exchange (the free trade doctrine). Of all classical economists, Mill seems most obsessed with the law of population (Gide, p.363). In his *Principles* (1981b, p.368) Mill asserts that "little improvement can be expected in morality until the producing large family is regarded with the same feelings as drunkenness or any other physical excess." Later in life when he aligned himself with socialism, Mill (1981a, p.239) admitted that he and his colleagues "dreaded the ignorance and especially the selfishness and brutality of the mass." In a letter to Henry Chapman written in March 1847, Mill predicted that if the poor law were amended to allow the Irish to receive relief without entering the workhouse, they "will just set about peopling again, and will replace even 2 million in half a generation." "Repression of population," Mill (1981c, p.713) asserted in an April 1847 letter to John Austin is "the grand source of improvement" (1981c, pp.710,713).

The ideas of classical economics spread far and wide in England, though often with considerable distortion and misunderstanding. While visiting Ireland in 1847 for the *Manchester Examiner*, Somerville filed a report in which he offers this defense of political economy.

> *Political economy is in itself the very essence of humanity, benevolence, and justice. It is its conflict with selfishness, error, ignorance, and injustice that makes it appear otherwise to some eyes at some times.* (Somerville, p.134)

Ó Gráda (1994, pp.193-194) reports that the strict version of classical economic thinking, "which emphasized the dangers of relief...was aired repeatedly in Parliament, and by influential journals such as *The Economist* and the *Edinburgh*

Review." British Treasury official Charles Trevelyan, who was in charge of famine relief in Ireland, embraced the *laissez-faire* argument, claiming that the Famine was an artificial condition brought on by state meddling in economic affairs and that high grain prices were providential in that they would reduce market disequilibrium (Gray 1999, p. 252). Trevelyan's espousal of an unfettered market in Ireland at the time of the Famine is recorded in his official correspondence in 1846.

> *It forms no part of the functions of government to provide supplies of food or to increase the productive powers of the land. In the great institution of the business of society, it falls to the share of government to protect the merchant and the agriculturist in the free exercise of their respective employments, but not itself to carry on those employments; and the condition of the community depends upon the result of the efforts which each member of it makes in his private and individual capacity.* (Trevelyan, p.51)

Even today the political economy of the period before and after the Famine, as expressed by Smith and tempered by Methodism, is held in great esteem for essentially the same reasons (see, for example, Himmelfarb, pp.1-8).

Classical Economics and the Irish Land Question

Just as there are two Irelands today, there were two Irelands prior to and during the Famine. In the predominantly Protestant Northern Ireland (Ulster), the tenant farmer as cultivator of the soil had secure tenure and was entitled to compensation for improvements whenever the land was sold. In the other three provinces (Munster, Leinster, and Connaught), where the population was overwhelmingly Catholic, the tenant farmer could be evicted at the whim of the landlord, was entitled to no compensation for any improvements made to the land, and the rent charged by the landlord was determined by competition among tenant farmers (Heaton, pp.455-456). Thus the Irish land question really is the Irish *Catholic* land question.

Among English economists in the first half of the 19th century, there were two ways in which agriculture in Ireland was to be transformed to make it more productive and efficient. One view held that property is an absolute right and that the transformation required a capitalist system of agriculture in which smaller holdings were replaced by larger, more efficient holdings through land clearance and emigration, which in turn would reduce the surplus population. Ricardo, Senior, and Robert Lowe held this view, and Torrens was its "most indefatigable publicist." To illustrate, it is widely reported that Malthus said the following to Ricardo:

"...the land in Ireland is infinitely more peopled than in England; and to give the full effect to the natural resources of the country, a great part of the population should be swept from the soil" (quoted in Kinealy, p.16). According to Senior, the surplus Irish population in 1847 numbered 2 million (see Gray 1995a, p.98). Senior opposed any government assistance to the displaced tenants whose needs would be met through rapid emigration (Black, p.21), and along with others was convinced that relief for the suffering masses was subordinate to economic development, even in a social catastrophe (Gray 1995a, pp.88-89).

The other view held that property rights are subordinate to human wellbeing and that the English government should intervene to improve the status of tenant farmers. Mill held aspects of both views. In his *Principles*, however, he argues that the right to fair compensation for land taken by the state is the landowner's only absolute right (Lebow 1979, pp.3-7).

By calling attention to these two views and characterizing them as the difference between the interests of society and the rights of the individual, Lebow (1979, pp.3-5) in effect points to the One-Many dichotomy in which economic decision-making may be left entirely to individuals who interact with one another in a strictly self-interested manner through a system of markets (the Many) or may be given over to a public or private group which acts with sympathy, generosity, and benevolence (the One).

Just as there are two sides to Smith—the one who in *Wealth of Nations* understood so well the role of self-interest in economic affairs, and the other in *Moral Sentiments* who acknowledged the significance of sympathy, generosity, and benevolence—there are two sides to Mill. Lebow (1979, p.13) identifies the two as Mill the pragmatist and Victorian libertarian, and Mill the political economist, and finds evidence of both in Mill's *Principles*, including even the later editions. Mill, in other words, was conflicted. At times he favored the market, at other times state intervention. As with Smith, Mill's conflict was heightened by the philosophy of individualism, the dominant philosophy of the 19th century England and the foundation of classical economics and the market system in which "individual" means "self" to the exclusion of others.

Haney (pp.470-475) also distinguishes two sides to Mill, the first who is a strict utilitarian wherein decision-making is determined by the course of action which yields the most utility, and Mill the idealist and optimist who with regard to production embraces the fundamental laws of classical economics (the Many), but with regard to distribution admits that the market system can be improved through human intervention (the One). The two sides have been compared to the two faces of the head of Janus, the one face looking backward to the past, the other looking forward to the future. In this regard, however, Mill is "confused between the old and the new times." Gide and Rist (p.358) as well recognized Mill's two sides.

During the first half of his life, Mill was an individualist who was deeply committed to utilitarianism. During the second half, he was a socialist who remained a champion of individual liberty.

Mill (1981a, pp.111,113) himself says that in his youth for "two or three years" he was a "mere reasoning machine," and that his zeal for what he thought was the "good of mankind" was not rooted in "genuine benevolence, or sympathy with mankind." As a young man Mill was no advocate of democracy, at least not for Ireland:

> *There is much to be said about Ireland. I myself have always been for a good stout Despotism—for governing Ireland like India. But it cannot be done. The spirit of Democracy has got too much hold there, too prematurely.* (Mill 1981c, p.365)

Mill's socialist inclinations are reflected in his three main interventionist recommendations: (1) replace the wage system with producer cooperatives; (2) confiscate rent by a tax on land; (3) reduce inequalities of wealth by restricting inheritance (Gide, p.374). His second and third recommendations call for state intervention or *public* group control of decision-making. His first advocates private group decision-making.

Both Mills also are present in his unsigned editorials in the *Morning Chronicle* of London—he wrote a total of 43 between October 1846 and the following January (Mill 1981a, p.243). In his editorial of October 10, 1846, Mill identifies the problem as one that is rooted in the cottier-tenant system, which divides the produce of the land between the landlord and the laborers, and wherein competition among the laborers regulates that division. Mill (1979a, pp.3,7) insists that the landlord has no substantial claim to his share because he "gives no equivalent for his rent." Three days later, Mill (1979a, p.11) firmly opposes clearing the land—by removing the peasants and turning it over to the capitalist-farmer—as "a thing which no pretense of private right or public utility ought to induce society to tolerate for a moment." On October 14, 1846 Mill (1979a, pp.13-16) writes that there is only one scheme for addressing the problem that does not involve "getting rid of the people." He recommends relocating the peasant population to the wastelands of western Ireland and granting them fixity of tenure. On the following day, Mill (1979a, p.19) estimates that in two to three years, one-quarter to one-third of the Irish peasantry could become owners of productive land by draining and enclosing the bogs which, Mill asserted, can be done without capital. On October 21, Mill (1979a, pp. 22,27) clarifies that his plan calls for no confiscation of property. Rather he intends that those landlords whose lands are taken away be compensated in full either by tenant or the state, and that the land could be held in

common (Lebow 1979, pp.6-7). The last concession effectively recognizes the importance of commonage in the Irish culture, even though in England the commons had been enclosed for some time. On December 2, Mill (1979a, pp.30,33) rejects the scheme which effectively coerces emigration by insisting that all emigration be voluntary. In this editorial Mill re-states his own estimate that it is ten times more costly to transport people to Canada than it is to settle them on the wastelands, thereby re-affirming his settlement recommendation. Writing to Alexander Bain in January 1847, Mill (1981c, p.707) claimed that Prime Minister Russell "subscribes openly to almost all of the premises" about Ireland which he published in the *Morning Chronicle.*

In the 1848 edition of his *Principles*, Mill devotes two chapters to peasant proprietorship but elsewhere in that edition and in later editions retreated from his criticisms of Irish landlords. In later editions he also withdrew his support for fixity of tenure for Irish peasants as he realized that his scheme for reconstructing the Irish economy on peasant proprietorship would expropriate the Irish aristocracy and therefore was unacceptable politically (Lebow 1979, pp.6-7).

A bill to begin reclamation in the west of Ireland was withdrawn by Russell in early 1847 without objection on grounds that the House of Lords opposed it. At the same time, a £9 million colonization scheme to relocate 2 million Irish—Catholics only, along with a proportionate number of priests—to reclaim land in Canada was presented to Russell by 80 leading peers, members of parliament, and landowners. Russell rejected that scheme as well on grounds that the starving masses in Ireland would emigrate without any such intervention by the English government (Canon O'Rourke, pp.248-250). Several months earlier, Russell reaffirmed his policy regarding food supplies:

> *As a general rule...we shall still take care not to interfere with the regular operations of merchants for the supply of food to the country, or with the retail trade, which was much deranged by operations last year.* (Russell, p.1)

Thus, by both word and deed Russell clearly is non-interventionist: the problems of the starving people of Ireland are left to the market (the Many).

In his 1868 pamphlet *England and Ireland*, which according to Black (p.53) was "probably the most influential single contribution to the extended debate on Irish land problems which was carried on in England between 1865 and 1870," it is Mill the "new" political economist who prevailed and endured (Lebow 1979, p.13):

> *In Ireland alone the bulk of a population dependent wholly on the land, cannot look forward with confidence to a single year's occupation of it: while the sole outlet for the dispossessed cultivators, or for those whose*

competition raises the rents against the cultivators, is expatriation. So long as they remain in the country of their birth, their support must be drawn from a source for the permanence of which they have no guarantee, and the failure of which leaves them nothing to depend on but the poorhouse. (Mill 1979b, p.6)

When, as a general rule, the land of a country is farmed by the very hands that till it, the social economy resulting is intolerable, unless either by law or custom the tenant is protected against arbitrary eviction, or arbitrary increase in rent. (Mill 1979b, p.19)

...The rule of Ireland now rightfully belongs to those who, by means consistent with justice, will make the cultivators of the soil of Ireland the owners of it; and the English nation has got to decide whether it will be that just ruler or not. (Mill 1979b, p.22)

The immediate cause of his permanent change to Mill the "new" political economist was the very real threat of the Fenian Movement in Ireland to confiscate the land and declare independence from England (Lebow 1979, p.13). Mill himself, while a member of Parliament in 1866, said that on the issue of the governance of Ireland he was effectively silenced at least temporarily by the Fenians for fear that "any attack on what Fenians attacked was looked upon as an apology for them" (Mill 1981a, pp.276-277). Land reform, in other words, was required to maintain Ireland as an English colony.

Elitism, False Stereotyping, Racism, and Anti-Catholicism

There is, however, a third, darker side to Mill: the Mill who blames the Irish for their own problems through elitism and false stereotypes, and who belittles their Catholic faith. This is what he says on December 2, 1846 in an unsigned editorial in the *Morning Chronicle*:

We have said it already and we repeat it—the Celtic Irish are not the best material to colonize with. The English and Scotch are the proper stuff for the pioneers of the wilderness. The life of the backwoodsman does not require the social qualities which constitute the superiority of the Irish; it does require the individual hardihood, resource, and self-reliance which are precisely what the Irish have not. ... Instead of insisting, John Bull-like, upon owing everything to himself, the demand of his nature is to be led and governed. He prefers to have some one to lean upon ... Even in the United States the Irish are the most riotous and unmanageable part of

the population. An Irish peasantry have already graduated but too well in Lynch law.

The fittest place for the Irish peasant is Ireland. It is there that the greatest number of improving influences can be concentrated upon him. Landed property **there** *would precisely supply what wants to the formation of his character. What is good for him is that all the influences of civilization should be preserved and increased, but that he himself should be gently lifted up and placed* **within** *the pale, instead of being left outside of it.* (Mill 1979a, pp.30-31; emphasis in the original)

The false stereotyping does not end there, as is seen in Mill's editorial of December 7, 1846:

It may require a hundred thousand armed men to make the Irish people submit to the common destiny of working in order to live. ... We must give over telling the Irish that it is our business to find food for them. We must tell them, now and for ever, that it is **their** *business.* (Mill 1979a, p.35; emphasis in the original)

Mill, apparently, dismissed the long-standing role of Irish agriculture in feeding the English. Prior to the Famine, Ireland was the largest single supplier of wheat, oats, and barley to Britain, due, ironically, in large measure to the growth and consumption of the potato by the Irish. According to Kinealy (p.4) an estimated 2 million people in Britain were fed with food imported from Ireland. This estimate matches Senior's estimate of the size of Ireland's surplus population cited earlier (see Gray 1995a, p.98). Thus, estimates of excess population depend substantially on whether food exports *should* continue or *should* be re-directed toward domestic consumption.

Approximately 75 percent of the cultivable land in Ireland at the time of the Famine was used for growing grain, nearly all of which was shipped to England. For the most part, the pigs, cattle, and sheep raised in Ireland were shipped to England for consumption there or in its colonies (Gallagher, p.20). As consumption of the potato grew across Ireland, oats increasingly became a cash crop (Póirtéir 1995a, p.20).

According to the House of Commons, for the three-month period ending in early February 1846 a total of 258,000 quarters of wheat, 701,000 hundredweight of barley, and 1 million quarters of oats and oatmeal were shipped from Ireland to England to pay the rent. This flow of food exports from Ireland continued at the same pace after that date (Woodham-Smith, pp.75-76). In 1847 a census of agri-

culture established that produce valued at nearly £45 million sterling—sufficient to feed more than twice the Irish population in excess of 8 million in 1841—had been raised, with much of it exported to England to pay for manufactured goods or bought by absentee landlords with the rents paid by Irish tenant farmers (Mitchell, p.156).

In his *Economic Thought and the Irish Question:* 1817-1870, published in 1960, Black (p.30) refers to the *Morning Chronicle* ten times, calling attention to Mill's editorials in late 1846, though Black does not state that the editorials were unsigned. Much more significant, though, is Black's identifying the *Morning Chronicle* as "important...in molding informed opinion" (Black, p.104):

Even in the late 1860s, Mill's elitism and stereotyping are reflected in his own words.

> *I see nothing that Ireland could gain by separation which might not be obtained by union, except the satisfaction, which she is thought to prize, of being governed by Irishmen—that is, always by men with a strong party animosity against some part of her population: unless indeed the stronger party began its career of freedom by driving the whole of the weaker party beyond the seas. In return, Irishmen would be shut out from all positions in Great Britain, except those which can be held by foreigners. There would be no more Irish prime ministers, Irish commanders-in-chief, Irish generals and admirals in the British army and fleet. Not in Britain only, but in all Britain's dependencies—in India and the Colonies. Irishmen would henceforth be on the footing of strangers. The loss would exceed the gain, not only by calculation, but in feeling. The first man in a small country would often gladly exchange positions with the fourth or fifth in a great one. (Mill 1979b, pp.32-33)*

> *...the Hungarian population, which has so nobly achieved its independence, has been trained of old in the management of the details of its affairs, and has shown, in very trying circumstances, a measure of the qualities which fit a people for self-government, greater than has yet been evinced by Continental nations in many others respects far more advanced. The democracy of Ireland, and those who are likely to be its first leaders, have, at all events, yet to prove their possession of the qualities at all similar.* (Mill 1979b, p.35)

Mill's remarks about the benefits of English citizenship for the Irish are deceivingly simple. The Penal Laws enacted after the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 barred Catholics from the army, navy, the law, and commerce. Catholics were not allowed

to vote, hold any office under the Crown, or purchase land. Any land owned by a Catholic was divided among all of his sons, unless the oldest became a Protestant who then would inherit all of the land. Catholics were not allowed to attend school, keep schools, or send their children to be educated abroad. Practicing their Catholic faith was forbidden, informing was encouraged, and hunting priests was regarded as sport. In the *Irish* House of Commons, and to the Protestant establishment in Ireland, the Catholic peasant was "the common enemy" (Woodham-Smith, pp.27-28). Edmund Burke described conditions for Irish Catholics as "a degradation of a people, and the debasement in them of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man" (quoted in Woodham-Smith, p.27, from Burke's letter to Langrishe). Writing in 1844, Senior (1868a, p.34) asserted that the Irish Catholics were "forbidden ...to be anything but the serfs of a Protestant aristocracy."

The Penal Laws were not completely erased until Catholic Emancipation in 1829, barely sixteen years prior to the Famine. Even so, in order to vote *after* Emancipation it was necessary for a tenant to hold a yearly lease valued at ten pounds which was five times higher than the requirement prior to Emancipation. The effect was to disenfranchise all but 1 percent of the Irish population (Keneally, p.8). It was not until 1838 that the tithes that were imposed on Catholic tenants, collected by the armed forces of England, and used to support the Established (Protestant) Church of Ireland, were abolished (Black, pp.9,22). While admitting that in England and Scotland there is a strong anti-Catholic element, Mill himself displays his own anti-Catholic sentiments:

> *In any Continental complications, the sympathies of England would be with Liberalism; while those of Ireland are sure to be on the same side as the Pope—that is, on the side opposed to modern civilization and progress, and to the freedom of all except Catholic populations, held in subjection by non-Catholic rulers.* (Miller 1979b, p.30)

Mill surely is not alone in this regard. Senior in 1844 identified one of the major causes of the misery of the Irish people as their own indolence:

> *Even in Ulster—the province in which, as we have already remarked the peculiarities of the Irish character are least exhibited—not only are the cabins, and even the farmhouses, deformed (within and without) by accumulation of filth which the least exertion would remove, but the land itself is suffered to waste a great portion of its productive power. We have ourselves seen field after field in which the weeds covered as much space as the crops. From the time that his crops are sown or planted until they are*

> *reaped, the peasant and his family are cowering over the fire, or smoking or lounging before the door—when an hour or two a day, employed in weeding their potatoes, or oats, or flax, would perhaps increase the produce by one-third.* (Senior 1868a, p.44)

Senior in 1844 also approvingly quoted a pastoral letter on tithes by Bishop Doyle of Ireland in which the sources of the evils besetting the Irish people are identified as their "own worthlessness," their "own drunkenness," and their "own want of energy and industry" which can be reversed if "men become sober and industrious, abstaining from evil and doing good, each in the state of life or called wherein Providence has placed him, such a people, without almost any aid from law or government, would enjoy comfort and happiness" (Senior 1868a, pp.48-49).

Thus, just before the Famine, Senior argued that if only the Irish tenant farmers would become more like the English working class and embrace the well-reasoned tenets of English classical economics, grounded in the Enlightenment philosophy of individualism, the Irish question would be resolved. Madden (pp.319-320) in 1843 literally scorned the Irish for their hostility to individualism.

Just prior to the Famine, Madden, in his *Ireland and Its Rulers: Since 1829*, said the following:

> *The heroism of the Irish character is not to be questioned; but it is much to be regretted that Irishmen as* **individuals** *are not more stern in their self-control, and more averse from dependence upon other sources of welfare, than are to be found in a man's own virtue, his own talents exhibited in his own manner, his own opinions formed by his own examination, his own resources extended by his own efforts, in short that Irishmen will not individually depend enough upon themselves.* (Madden, p.320)

> *(Levity) is the cause of much of his gaiety and brilliancy; and is also the source of his laziness—his indolence– and his shocking indifference to cleanliness.* (Madden, p.328)

> *In religion the Irishman disliking the cold and abstract metaphysics which by some Whig divines is called "Christianity," he is a spiritualist and not a rationalist, and oftentimes ridiculously superstitious, is never an abominable infidel.* (Madden, p.334)

Based on a visit to Ireland shortly before the Famine, Alexis de Tocqueville remarked that:

> *All of the Irish Protestants whom I saw...speak of the Catholics with extraordinary hatred and scorn. The latter, they say, are savages...and fanatics led into all sorts of disorders by their priests.* (quoted in Gallagher, p.28)

At the time of the Famine the Irish were characterized in the British press as freeloaders (Donnelly, p.4). Worse yet, racial and cultural stereotypes were commonplace in the British print media (Gray 1995a, p.100). For instance, *The Times* of London in its lead editorial on September 22, 1846, offered this opinion sneering at the faith of the Irish peasant:

> *Why was it that the prospect—the certainty of a great calamity, did not animate to great exertions? Alas! the Irish peasant had tasted of famine and found that it was good. He saw the cloud looming in the distance, and he hailed its approach. To him it teemed with goodly manna and salient waters. He wrapped himself in the ragged mantle of inert expediency and said that he trusted to Providence. But the deity of his faith was the Government—the manna of his hopes was a Parliamentary grant. He called his submission a religious obedience, and he believed it to be so. But it was the obedience of a religion which by a small but material change, reversed the primaeval decree. It was a religion that holds "Man shall* **not** *labor by the sweat of his brow." ... For our own parts, we regard the potato blight as a blessing* (The Times 1846, p.3).

The Times of London on March 26, 1847, condemned the Irish for displaying "a crafty, a calculating, a covetous idleness [and] a thorough repudiation of all self-exertion," and offered the following assessment of the current conditions in Ireland:

> *But what art, what policy, what wealth is cunning enough, wise enough, rich enough to assuage the moral evils and stay the moral disease of a vast population steeped in the congenial mire of voluntary indigence and speculating on the gains of a perpetual famine?* (quoted in Donnelly, p.75)

The *Protestant Watchman* of Dublin in a May 1848 letter advised Prime Minister Russell that the Irish are ignorant of the true God, superstitious, and idolatrous (which the letter labeled "spiritual whoredom"), all of which are attributable to popery, which in turn accounts for the miseries besetting Ireland (Killen, pp. 188-190). Gray (1999, pp. 337-338) asserts that it was not so much the policies of the

English government that accounted for the miseries of the Irish people during the Famine but the general conviction across British society that the potato blight was an Act of Providence punishing the Irish for their moral wickedness. The providentialist argument, however, is a futile attempt to cover up the real reason for not intervening aggressively to relieve the suffering of the Irish people—the racism and religious prejudice that pervaded British society for a very long time and that blamed the victim for the crime.

On October 4, 1848 *The Times'* racism, elitism, and false stereotyping again come to the fore:

> *There are corners of Ireland which are the Ultima Thule of civilization, and where a Cimerian gloom hangs over the human soul. The people there have always been listless, improvident, and wretched, under whatever rulers. Ever since the onward Celtic wave was first stopped by the great Atlantic barrier, these people have remained the same, and their present misfortune is that they are simply what they have always been, and that from want of variety and intermixture they have not participated in the great progress of mankind. When we see a dense population on one of the finest shores of the world, with an inexhaustible ocean before their eyes, yearly allowing immense shoals of fish to pass visibly before their eyes, with scarcely to exact a toll from the passing masses of food, we must either rebuke their perverseness or pity their savage condition. We do pity them, because they have yet to be civilized. In Canada we have Indians in our borders, many of who we yearly subsidize and maintain.* (The Times 1848, p.1)

Litton offers several reasons why the starving masses did not turn to the plentiful ocean fish available along the west coast where the Famine hit hardest. Sea fishing is dangerous work made even more hazardous by the rocky shoreline along the west coast and by bad weather. The boats used for fishing were rowboats which were too flimsy for fishing far from the shoreline. The potato was an important source of food for fishermen, too, and with the crop destroyed by the blight they were so weakened by the famine as to be unable to row. Without fish to sell many fishermen could not afford the tar and canvas supplies necessary for routine repairs and maintenance. Thus many sold their boats and nets to purchase food. Additionally, most of the rivers and streams were under landlord control, which meant that any unauthorized person fishing in those waters was subject to prosecution for poaching (Litton, p.46). Further, the potato was prepared and eaten for all three daily meals, and for that reason over time the Irish peasant did not know how to prepare other foods such as wheat, barley, oats, and maize (Woodham Smith, p.76).

Maize imports, as indicated previously, rose dramatically in 1847-1848. Native Americans ground maize seeds into flour to make a flat bread that was cooked on embers, roasted the ears whole, and steamed them in an earth oven. Dry grains were soaked in wood ash and lime to remove the hull and then were dried and ground to make tortillas ("Natural Food," p.13). Though promoted as a cheap substitute for the potato, maize was not the potato's nutritional equivalent and exposed those who ate it to certain vitamin-deficiency diseases (Gray 1999, pp.118-119). The principal vitamin deficiencies associated with consuming maize are niacin and tryptophan which is a precursor from which the body synthesizes niacin. These two deficiencies in turn are the causes of pellagra. Symptoms of the advanced-deficiency stage of pellagra include scarlet stomatitis, glossitis, diarrhea, and mental aberrations ("Niacin Deficiency," p.1). Further, the imported maize had to be transported from ports of entry and distributed principally to the southern and western counties of Ireland where the need was greatest. There were no such distribution problems with the unblighted potato, which was grown by literally every peasant family on its own land.

In what at first seems a defense of British non-interventionism, contemporary writer Nicholson argued that because Irish peasant women were unable to prepare foods other than the potato for their families, the Irish Famine was a crisis of motherhood. However, her deeper meaning was that trade and land-reform legislation for Ireland did not have nearly the transformative potential of the Irish mother (Bigelow, pp. 134-141).

Writing for the *Edinburgh Review* toward the end of the Famine, Senior uses the false stereotype to belittle the Irish:

> *Though the food, the lodging, and the clothing of the workhouse are, and indeed must be, far superior to those of the cabin, or even the cottage; yet, such is the dislike among the Irish peasantry of cleanliness, of order, of confinement, and of regular work, however moderate—such their love...of a combination of dirt, smoke, and warmth—that all but the really destitute avoided it, and none were willing to become destitute in order to be entitled to it.* (Senior 1868b, p.221)

Plainly, Senior's view is that there is something *seriously wanting in the Irish.* Hudson suggests the significance of the false stereotype in Europe:

> *Racism, may, in fact, find its most nourishing psychological sources in the consciously high-minded effort to reduce or erase the sense of (cultural) difference. To be alarmed by the difference of cultural Others represents something close to a human norm; to deny the legitimacy of this cultural difference has been the peculiarly poisonous inclination of modern European ideology.* (Hudson, p.329)

Years later O'Connor was led to an entirely different conclusion than Senior's based on his study of the workhouse system from its very beginnings in Ireland in the early 18th century: that there was something *seriously wanting in the system.* O'Connor describes the system as "a makeshift affair, least efficient in the areas in which it was most needed, and absolutely incapable of dealing with the complete breakdown of the social fabric of Ireland" during the Famine (O'Connor, p.123).

The *Illustrated London News* in April 1852 assaulted the Irish "...for their own indolence, their own religious and party feuds, and their own listless reliance upon the easily raised but miserable root, the potato," which were at the very heart of the miserable conditions in Ireland (Killen, postscript, not paginated). In 1861, Senior's anti-Catholic sentiments are further exposed:

> *(The Irish people) still depend mainly on the potato. They still depend rather on the occupation of land, than on the wages of labor. They still erect for themselves the hovels in which they dwell. They are still eager to subdivide and to sublet. They are still the tools of their priests, and the priests are still ignorant of the economical laws on which the welfare of the labouring classes depends. They are still the promoters of early and improvident marriages; they still neglect to preach to their flocks the prudence, parsimony, industry, cleanliness, and other self-regarding virtues, on which health and comfort depend; they are still the enemies of emigration; they are still the enemies of every improving landlord; they are still hostile to a Government which has seized the property of their Church—which refuses, or at least neglects, to provide for the spiritual instruction of the great mass of the people, and everywhere, except in the workhouses and in its gaols, ignores the existence of a Roman Catholic clergy.* (Senior 1868c, pp.viii-ix)

Writing in 1874, Canon O'Rourke (p.110) asserts that at the time of the Famine, the most influential portion of the English newspaper press denounced the Irish for "their ignorance, their laziness, and their want of self-reliance." Though his reports to the *Manchester Examiner* in general are sympathetic to the plight of the Irish, Somerville is not free of prejudice. In March 1847 Somerville said the following about Galway, one of the most devastated counties:

> *The higher classes of people have such a contempt for trade, that they would eat the family estates to the bare rocks rather than earn a living, unless it be in the army or as a priest, parson, or doctor. The poor people imitate them, and will not trade unless compelled. When compelled to try mercantile life in a small way, they have no capital to begin with, and con-*

sequently have no profits, or very small ones. If they get a good return on some adventure, they enjoy themselves, and do not think of enlarging their trade. (Somerville, p.67)

In an April 1857 letter to his younger sister when he was 22 years old, Jevons characterized the Catholic religion in these terms.

I must say...that whether considered as a spiritual religion or a practical system Roman Catholicism is very disgusting and only better than irreligion. The good in it chiefly exists independently and almost in opposition to its principles, as indeed in some other religions. (Jevons Vol.2, p.277)

In another letter to his sister written two years later following a visit to Peru, Jevons offers these views about Catholic religious symbolism and art, and about "native Indians" and "negroes":

The Roman Catholic religion, imported from Spain here, gained vast power, wealth, and extension among a population formed to a great extent of native Indians, low in the scale of intelligence, and of negroes who are worse. As a consequence the religion became debased into something which I can only regard as a bad form of idolatry. The churches are remarkable in the architectural point of view for an extreme and absurd abundance of ornament and colours, but the altars inside, before which the people worship, are what excite and disgust one most. They consist of large complicated erections, gilded and profusely covered with carving in every part. Often they are loaded with large quantities of pure silver, in the form of candlesticks and of ornament of senseless and indescribable form. When silver was not to be had the commonest tinsel was substituted. The eyes are indeed attracted and dazzled by this tawdry and barbarous pile of decorations, but they rest with disgust upon the images which are placed in the niches and peep out from every side... (Jevons Vol.2, pp.378-379)

In a lecture on population in December 1875 at Owens College, Jevons offers these remarks about famine, war, and lifestyles as checks on population, and about Native American Indians and the people of Ireland.

In other (outside England) portions of the world famines come in as one means of check; and in fact in certain stages of society it is a normal check of population—a famine comes to be looked upon as a kind of natural event. ... [W]ar is...a normal state of things, in early societies. The North American Indians, for example, their only serious occupation, their

> *only amusement, was war. ... Then there is the way people live—the way the Irish live, especially in some of our large towns and in some part of their own country, makes it a priori probable that they die fast.* (Jevons Vol.6, p.59)

The remarks in Jevons' letters to his sister could be dismissed as the views of a very young man. But coupled with statements made in a lecture to university students when he was much older, Jevons is seen as a person who, though he had achieved elitist status as a university professor, had not yet thrown off the racism and false stereotyping of his youth. Further, his implying some 25 years later that the Famine was a "natural event" when it had become clear that it truly was a human catastrophe, indicates a contempt for the Irish which for a long time had been commonplace in England (Waters, pp.98-108).

At the time of the Great Famine, the English press published sketches, cartoons, and squibs that were demeaning and explicitly racist (see Curtis, pp. 6-102, *The Great Irish Famine*, pp.30-42, and Punch Comments, not paginated). More than 100 years later, Black (p.240) depicted the Irish as "poor, ignorant, and suspicious," and Churchill demeaned the Famine-period Irish and their faith.

> *The deep hold of the Roman Catholic Church on a superstitious peasantry had tended on political as well as religious grounds to be hostile to England.* (Churchill, p.344)

In the 1990s, McDowell characterized the pre-Famine Irish in these terms:

> *Given a scrap of land the Irish peasant could throw up a cabin to shelter his family and grow the potatoes which formed their staple diet. Now the Irish land system permitted a man to obtain with delusive ease the basis of a meagre and uncomfortable life. The easy-going and unenterprising methods on which most Irish estates were managed, the desire for quick returns during the (Napoleonic) war at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the wish of the Irish farmer to secure labour without bothering about money wages, and the anxiety of many landlords to increase their political prestige and pull by multiplying freeholders on their estates encouraged sub-division. ... And charity or cupidity frequently induced an occupying tenant to allow some houseless person, who offered him a tempting rent for a place on which to erect a hut and plant a few potatoes, to share his holding ... But it was hard to eradicate the consequences of a long period of thoughtless selfishness and lazy generosity.* (McDowell, pp.5-6)

Lebow identified the six negative characteristics associated with the stereotypical native in the minds of the colonizers: indolent, complacent, cowardly, violent, uncivilized, and incapable of hard work. The positive characteristics associated with this stereotype were: hospitable, good-natured, talented in song and dance, and curious but having only a short attention span. These stereotypes were applied by the colonizers to the native populations of Indonesia, Algeria, Black America, Burma, Nigeria, and Ireland (Lebow 1979, p.104). Only in the case of Ireland and England are both the colonizers and natives racially alike.

England's policy regarding Ireland was driven by the premises that the Irish know that they need a strong colonial government because they are unable to govern themselves, and that their interests are served best by such a government. In a report from Dublin dated January 6, 1846, and published by The Times of London, Thomas Campbell Foster, who had been commissioned by the newspaper to investigate conditions in Ireland, makes these premises explicit:

> *With a firm and determined hand put down agitation, whether that agitation be Orange or Repeal. If necessary, fear not to do it despotically. Remember you are dealing with a people who in the mass are almost uncivilized. Like children they require governing with the hand of power. They require authority, and will bear it. A more enlightened community would not require it and would not bear it* ("The Famine," p.4).

This policy in the 19th century introduced a tension in England between two alternatives and two contradictions for policymakers. The one alternative advocated segregation and colonial rule for the Irish whose best interests thereby could not be assured. The other alternative proposed integration and self-rule for a people incapable of governing themselves. Additionally, there existed tension between the central importance of freedom and justice to the English, and England's need for colonies to ensure its power and survival. These tensions were resolved in the case of Ireland through the stereotypical images used to characterize the Irish (Lebow 1976, pp.106-112).

Final Comments

We have construed the intersection of classical economics and the Great Famine in terms of four *limits*. First, the Famine represented the *greatest* crisis in the history of England's relationship with Ireland and for Ireland the *greatest* social catastrophe in its entire history. Second, in 19th century Europe, post-Famine Ireland was *unique* in terms of the scope of its psychological trauma, demographics, and connectedness to its emigrant sons and daughters. Third, the *laissez-faire*

doctrine of classical economics and its practice were *never more dominant* in English history than between 1817 and 1870. Fourth, the classical economists of that period were influential in shaping English government policy regarding the Irish question and thus the Famine is the *most severe* test of the tenets of classical economics in 19th century England and the character of its supporters. If Smith's *Moral Sentiments* had taken hold among classical economists, surely sympathy, generosity, and benevolence would have been evident in their public statements and policy recommendations during the Famine and afterwards. The fact that *Moral Sentiments* has not taken hold today among neo-classical economists suggests that they have paid too little attention to the lessons of economic history.

Given these *limits*, it is tempting to construe the evidence in a way most favorable to one side or the other. In this regard, however, we concur with Kissane (p.171): "the British government was not guilty of genocide during the Famine. Prudence argues that at such a distance from the Famine our conclusions should be carefully measured. In our final remarks we hope to draw from the available evidence only what that evidence will reasonably support".

First, the Famine had an enormous impact on Ireland not just during the Famine years but for many years thereafter. Accurate figures on the number of people who died, emigrated, or were not born, are not available because complete primary-source records simply were not kept. Even so, the overall population of Ireland declined by at least 2 million, mostly in the predominantly Catholic western and southern counties.

Second, while Peel was prime minister, English policy was directed more toward relieving the hardship brought on by the potato blight through direct government intervention, even when it meant repealing the Corn Laws which protected English agriculture, and supplying the Irish with cheap corn which had been quietly imported from the United States. When Russell replaced Peel as prime minister, the policy of the English government turned in the direction of non-intervention on grounds that intervention would only make the crisis even worse. A successful government effort to feed the starving Irish through soup kitchens the Russell government had established in spring 1847 was terminated suddenly by the same government later that year on grounds that the potato crop that season was relatively free of the blight.

The non-interventionist bent of the Russell government, instructed by the tenets of classical economics, was re-affirmed when there was a general failure of the potato crop in 1848 combined with several deadly diseases that decimated the population. Soup kitchens were *not* re-established. Rather, the government retreated to its usual method for handling relief—the workhouse system. Overcrowding in the workhouses furthered the spread of contagious diseases, turning the workhouse for many into a death house.

Third, the decision to not provision the needs of the starving population of Ireland was not principally a matter of the cost of supplying those provisions. The English government was:

> *...paralysed by doctrinaire ideology and bureaucracy, and proved incapable of formulating and implementing pragmatic policies to manage a crisis which should have been well within the capacity of the then mighty British Empire. In terms of finance, the resources provided were inadequate. They amounted to about 7 million pounds, as against 8 million pounds provided from Irish sources, mainly Poor Law rates, and a further 7.5 million pounds in remittances from emigrants. Moreover, in accordance with the policy of minimal state intervention, most of the 7 million pounds was in the form of loans, but these were later cancelled to some extent. The state contribution seems minimal when contrasted with the 20 million pounds allocated a few years earlier to compensate West-Indian slave-owners for emancipation, or with almost 70 million pounds invested in the futile Crimean War in the mid-1850s.* (Kissane 1995, p.171)

In what strikes us as understatement, Póirtéir, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Famine, declared:

> *We find many of the theories of the political economists [at] the time [of Great Famine] uncaring, the administration of relief far from adequate and the mass evictions and emigration hard to accept.* (Póirtéir 1995a, p.10)

Fourth, the non-interventionist policy of the Russell government was reinforced by racism and religious bigotry in England, which made it easier and more convenient to blame the Irish for their own misery. Non-interventionism reinforced the racism and religious bigotry in circular fashion. Further, the racism and religious bigotry of such notables as Mill, Senior, and Jevons gave that racism and bigotry a certain acceptability which calls to mind the "gentlemen's agreement" that made anti-Semitism acceptable in the United States years later. In the English press, the Irish during the Famine at times were portrayed as cunning, brutish, and with monkey-like facial features thereby de-humanizing them in the minds of their readers and giving greater legitimacy to non-intervention.

The racism and bigotry evident in Jevons indicate that even well into the second half of the 19th century, when it no longer could be argued that the English were unaware of the destructive dimensions of the Famine, Jevons's prejudicial views still were acceptable even among the educated elite. There is an important

lesson here for contemporary economists that feminist and black economists have been espousing for several decades: the premises that guide and direct one's teaching and research determine the findings and conclusions that are drawn from those activities. Exposing the racism and religious bigotry in Senior, Mill, and Jevons is a warning to economists today that all of us in the profession—even the best-known and most highly respected—are flawed human beings whose teaching and research can be distorted by personal values, especially ones that are unbecoming and normally are hidden from view. As stated at the outset of this article, the best remedy for this bias is to state one's values up front with as much transparency as possible, and urge others with different values to address the same body of evidence in order to see if the difference in values makes a difference in the findings and conclusions drawn from that evidence (see Becker 1961, p.10).

Fifth, the difference between the policies of the Peel government at the start of the Famine and the Russell government for the rest of the Famine period resurrects the conflict in Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and his *Moral Sentiments* and reveals something significant about the values of classical economists. That is, during the Famine, when Smith's sympathy, generosity, and benevolence should have been most in evidence, classical economists clearly subordinated relieving the extreme hardship of the Irish to making Irish agriculture more efficient by sweeping the excess population from the soil. In brief, the suffering of the Irish people became the instrument of a more efficient agriculture. Mill's own words written years after the Famine are chilling: " [England] is indebted for its deliverance to that most unexpected and surprising fact, the depopulation of Ireland, commenced by famine and continued by emigration" (Mill 1981a, p.243). And while he applauds the energy of Irish workers—"no labourers work harder in England or America"—and condemns the system of cottier tenancy which robs them of the possibility of improving their living standards, Mill literally in the same breathe denounces the English Parliament's feeding the starving masses as "a stimulus to population," and approvingly interprets the decline in population of Ireland between 1841 and 1851 in terms of self-supporting emigration "brought on by the voluntary principle " (Mill 1981b, pp.319,325). Self-supporting emigration means that the first sibling in a family to emigrate earns enough in the adopted country to send back passage to the next sibling, who in turn does the same for the next one in line. This was my own mother's experience after she emigrated to America in 1919 and my father's following his emigration in 1925.

For nearly all of the Famine years, non-intervention was the preferred policy of the English government both as regards food shipments from Ireland that were owed to English landlords as rent payments from Irish tenant farmers under threat of eviction, and as regards humanitarian assistance to the needy in Ireland. Non-intervention meant that the market would be allowed to continue allocating eco-

nomic resources not where the need was greatest, but where they could be utilized most efficiently and where they were owed as a strict obligation in justice. In that sense, the *tenets of classical economics* were a contributing factor in the extreme hardship of the Famine.

Further, the racism, elitism, and anti-Catholic sentiments commonplace in England at the time of the Famine served as a way to rationalize non-intervention. The Irish themselves were the principal source of their own miseries and until they became fully civilized would continue to be plagued by privation. The one indeed reinforced the other: their own miserable existence was taken as evidence of their personal character shortcomings and justified non-intervention because intervention would only reinforce those shortcomings and lead once again to the same miserable outcome. It was not sympathy, generosity, and benevolence that were embraced by three leading classical economists and presumably others, but racism, elitism, and religious prejudice, which made the government's policy of non-intervention more acceptable in England both at the time of the Famine and retrospectively.

The indictment that "Ireland died of political economy" brought by the Irish insurrectionist Mitchel does not go far enough (quoted in Ó Gráda 1999, p. 6). Ireland also died of racism that made it acceptable for even some of the educated elite to embrace a non-interventionism which was rationalized by and in turn effectively rationalized the dehumanization of the people of Ireland in order to improve the efficiency of Irish agriculture when common human decency would have urged intervention to alleviate their extreme need as long as that need persisted. In the end, even though they were British subjects, the Irish became expendable because they were not as fully human as the English.

Endnote

It is commonplace in economic research to assume that the investigator has removed all traces of personal values from his/her work. As Becker (1961, p.10) implies, that could be a serious error. For that reason, let me state at the outset that I am a first-generation Irish-American, holding dual citizenship in the United States and the Republic of Ireland. My mother and father both were born and raised in County Mayo—the poorest county in western Ireland, where the toll in human lives lost during the Great Famine was staggering. I do not know how many of my own Irish ancestors suffered and died during the Great Famine. What I do know and acknowledge is that my selection of this topic clearly is related to that family background which also very likely influenced the way I have interpreted the evidence presented herein. I concede that someone else sifting through the evidence might come to different conclusions, but I know of no other way to proceed.

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