

Book Reviews

HILARY TOVEY and PERRY SHARE, 2000, *A Sociology of Ireland*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, IR£25, €31.74.

According to its authors, this book has two aims. The first is to offer an interpretation of the development of Irish society. The second is to provide an introduction to the discipline of sociology. Underpinning both of these is a particular vision of the nature of sociology. This regards all sociologies as in part at least national ones. The concern of sociology is to understand the particular society that the sociologist is a part of rather than interpreting it as a distorted version of some kind of amorphous modern society that is only inhabited by social theorists. As such this perspective involves taking Irish society seriously as a society in its own terms and not as an inferior or defective version of supposedly modern societies such as the United States, Germany or Great Britain. This is a useful and important starting argument all the more significant for the fact that it had to be made. It is an odd reflection on the institutional status of Irish sociology and of the status within that of work on Ireland that the authors feel the need to articulate and defend this position. It is unlikely that a textbook on British, American or Australian society would have to begin in this manner. But then senior professors in these countries would have achieved their position on the basis of research and interpretative work done of the countries in which they are employed, a situation that generally speaking does not apply in Ireland.

The first claim of the book is pursued through the argument that there is more than one way to become a modern society. There are in fact a variety of routes through which a society can modernise. The authors emphasise the importance of distinguishing the different paths to modernity and of distinguishing what is most notable about the path taken by Irish society. Here they place particular emphasis on the role of the state, rather than, for example, the market, in managing the process of economic development and in effect managing the road to modernity. Considerable importance is also placed on the development of Irish agriculture and the food industry as these have modernised in ways that are often not anticipated by what the authors' term as those working with "narrow and limiting conceptions" of modernity.

The second aim is pursued through a series of chapters that are concerned with introducing key areas of sociology. There are very good wide ranging chapters on a range of classic and conventional sociological topics such as class, education, gender, the family and sexuality, crime, and community and newer topics such as consumption and environmentalism. These are impressive works of synthesis, not least in the breadth of their coverage and in their willingness to treat the reviewed work as part

of a serious and ongoing project to understand Irish society. They are also distinguished by a respect for the work of sociologists who have written about Ireland. These include Richard Breen and Chris Whelan on social mobility, Kathleen Lynch on education, the late Vincent Tucker on medicine, and Tom Inglis on religion and sexuality. These chapters clearly establish that there is a serious, impressive and evolving body of sociological work on Ireland. The breadth and depth of their coverage means that they are essential reading for anyone interested in Irish society or Irish sociology.

There is also an excellent chapter that traces the origins of the discipline from the tradition of Social Inquiry represented by the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society to the variety of approaches that now characterise Irish sociology. In the process it is good to see the importance given to the Sociological Association of Ireland as a focus for debates about the nature of sociology and as a forum for voices and perspectives other than those from state supported research institutes. The chapter also traces how the dominance of intellectual life by economists and historians in a sense freed sociology to develop different understandings and purposes. The price of this has been that sociologists have been unable to break into the marketplace of ideas and cultural interpretations in Ireland. The perspectives of sociologists often have difficulty getting a space in intellectual interpretations of the past and policy debates about the present.

The introductory chapters are perhaps the most successful. They are also ironically the ones in which the interpretative dimension of the text is largely absent. Moreover, while these chapters are introductions they are not introductory in the sense that they will necessarily be easily read or readily comprehended by newcomers to the discipline, such as first year students. It appeared to this reader at least that many of the chapters are cast at a fairly complex level and presupposed some knowledge of sociology and its language and perspectives. In a sense the significance of many of the debates covered in the text may only be apparent to those who already have some passing acquaintance with them.

The interpretative perspective through which the book is framed is also not entirely satisfactory. It is not wholly clear what the authors mean by "modern" and "modernity". While this difficulty is endemic in the relevant literature some clarification would have been useful in the text. Is the term "modernity" an empirical description of a society, in which case it would be useful to know what its significant indicators are and why these are the relevant ones. For example, the authors say in an early chapter that modern society is urban, rational, industrial and usually capitalist. This is fair enough, though others might add characteristics such as secular. But it gets confusing when they go on to talk about varieties of modernity. Are they arguing that there are different ways to be modern, are there different combinations of the urban, rational, industrial and capitalist characteristics that can characterise a "modern" society? If this is the case then the analytic utility of a term like "modernity" seems to lose some of its coherence and much of its significance. The introduction, in a later chapter of the book, of Giddens's term, "high modernity" does little to sort out this confusion.

Alternatively, there is the possibility that the terms "modern" and "modernity" are ideological ones. In this sense some societies (the usual suspects are Britain, Germany and the United States), are presented as already there, the rest of us are only along the way though, with faltering steps and on different routes. If this is the case then the debate about modernity seems to reproduce all of the problems that we had with

modernisation theory in the 1960s.

Hanging over the entire project also is a peculiar and particular absence and it is one that the book shares with much sociology in the Republic. This is the lack of any extended consideration of Northern Ireland. If gender was once the blind spot for sociology, then certainly for Irish sociology and arguably for British sociology also, Northern Ireland has replaced it. This is not an argument that the text should have covered the whole island. This would hardly have been consistent with the view of sociology outlined in the text. But any interpretation of issues such as national identity, nationalism, cultural change, crime, and the media needs to make some reference to the impact of the Northern conflict on these areas. It is, for example, relevant to ask what effect the experience of conflict in Northern Ireland has had on our sense of identity and did it, for example, frighten people, intellectuals in particular, into post-nationalism? Whatever the answer it is undoubtedly the situation that sociology in the south ignores the North and that is in itself worthy of some consideration in a book like this.

Finally, it is perhaps relevant to point out that because the book has two separate aims there are in fact two separate books here striving to get out. One is a straightforward introduction to sociological material on Irish society, the other is an interpretation of Irish society. This is not uncommon in books about Ireland. Joe Lee's *Ireland 1912-1986* was a somewhat similar hybrid. Does this reflect the generosity of publishers in that they are prepared to give readers two books for the price of one? Or is it that they are unwilling to take chances on books with an interpretative angle to them? This may require sociologists in Ireland to conceal their interpretations as introductions and in the process undervalue them.

University College, Cork

CIARAN Mc CULLAGH

KIERAN ALLEN, 2000. *The Celtic Tiger: the Myth of Social Partnership*, Manchester: Manchester University Press. IR£13.00, €17.76.*

Ireland has been enjoying an unprecedented period of growth in recent years, on a scale that would scarcely have been believable fifteen or even ten years ago. The twin evils of large-scale unemployment and involuntary emigration have been abolished, for the time being at any rate. While many factors are relevant to explaining Ireland's economic successes, social partnership has been widely identified as a critical element. The combination of pay moderation and tax concessions has undoubtedly enabled the benefits of growth to be more widely shared in the form of increased employment, and the institutionalisation of a consensus-oriented process at the heart of economic management has contributed to an environment conducive to promoting further industrial investment.

Increasingly, though, the weaknesses and even limits of the model of social partnership have become apparent. The scale of income inequalities is, in comparative terms, closer to that found in the USA than that of much of continental Europe. While

*For an earlier review of this book see Kirby (2001), *The Economic and Social Review*, Vol.32, No. 1.