

civility shall be referred to in the sense of a *Forschungsbegriff* as a condensate of various discourses that are knowledge-sociologically determined and separate from each other' (p. 93). There are a good many other instances like this in the book. One could also quibble that a large number of the Tudor commentators on Ireland, such as Edmund Spenser, William Herbert and Richard Beacon, whom Lessing cites regularly, are very well known, whereas recourse to less well-known works in manuscript, or works only published from manuscript editions in recent years, would have yielded more novel information. However, this is balanced out by the span of time the texts Lessing has consulted cover. There is use of works from the oft-neglected reign of Henry VII right through to James I and a wider range of other less well-known works which went through the London press in the sixteenth century are also used to good effect.

Overall, this is a significant study on the 'rhetoric of difference' and how Tudor observers in Ireland used it to justify their actions. Readers who are familiar with the relevant literature may find some of the topics Lessing covers quite well known to them, but this is in the nature of a study which aims for a holistic overview. Conversely, substantial sections break new ground in assessing how the 'rhetoric of difference' was constructed, legitimised and used, while the comparative study of Swedish involvement in Finland is a major strength of Lessing's work. As such *Promoting 'English civility' in Tudor Ireland* makes a significant contribution to the study of sixteenth-century Ireland.

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THE CASE OF IRELAND: COMMERCE, EMPIRE AND THE EUROPEAN ORDER, 1750–1848. By James Stafford. Pp 298. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2022. £75 hardback.

James Stafford's book sets out to reorient the study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Irish political thought in two ways. First, it turns away from the questions about nationality and religion which have long dominated the scholarship, to focus instead on problems of commerce and empire. Secondly, it asks what is revealed when Irish debates are treated in relation to British and continental European discussions of Irish politics. These innovations, Stafford suggests, open up an 'entirely new perspective' on Irish political thinking, and on Ireland as a subject in the history of modern political thought (p. 3). *The case of Ireland* argues that Ireland was, in fact, a 'central' problem in a sequence of seminal European debates about mercantile empire and international order in the turbulent century between the Seven Years War and the revolutions of 1848 (p. 258). Some gentle questions might be asked about these assertions of 'centrality'. But the book clearly demonstrates that Ireland was a distinctive and instructive problem in the political thought of the period it covers. This is an immensely suggestive, innovative and imaginative monograph.

The book's centre of gravity lies in the later eighteenth century and the 'age of revolutions', but it reaches further back and forward in time. The analysis proceeds chronologically. Chapter 1 offers a substantive treatment of the tract from which it borrows its title, William Molyneux's 1698 *The case of Ireland*, which responded to an English campaign to restrict Irish woollen exports, before moving on to mid eighteenth-century 'enlightenment' critiques of British rule in Ireland, as outlined by figures including Montesquieu, Adam Smith and Josiah Tucker. The second chapter examines debates about commerce, slavery and Pitt the Younger's abortive 1785 commercial propositions amid the altered constitutional circumstances of 1776–87. The rest of the book is, in different ways, about responses to the French Revolution of 1789, and the wars, conquests and imaginative possibilities to which it gave rise. Chapter 3, on 1789 to 1803, is mainly about how the United Irishmen rethought the future of their country in the shadow of the Bastille and the Directory. Chapter 4, covering the years from 1798 until 1801, is about how the union with Great Britain was conceptualised and sold at that critical juncture, a problem Stafford has

looked at from other angles in earlier publications. Chapter 5 encompasses debates about the Irish population and the country's agricultural arrangements in the war years between 1798 and 1815. The final chapter, which like the others is full of acute analysis but which also acts as an extended coda, is about how new questions around democracy and 'nationality' were argued out in the period from 1815 until 1848.

The case of Ireland belongs to Cambridge University Press's prestigious 'Ideas in context' series. Part of the book's appeal, however, is that it has a wider sense of which contexts ought to matter in the study of political thought than many of its stablemates. It centres on the elaborated arguments of sophisticated thinkers, to be sure, but it also pays informed attention to international geopolitics, flows of trade, shifting structures of agrarian social order, and the dynamics of policymaking and political faction-fighting. These dimensions add appreciably to the richness of the analysis, which is organised for the most part in the approved serial style. Lesser writers and texts are moved through briskly, in a page or two, while better-known and more influential figures get sections to themselves. Stafford never loses sight of his central arguments, however. Every vignette strengthens his wider claims about the interpretive significance of Ireland's imagined position within the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European order, and the post-1789 chapters show with conviction how the country was pulled rhetorically and politically between British and French models of empire.

Most of the book is about Irish and British writers. It is enormously valuable to have their shifting arguments about empire, trade and commercial society in Ireland dissected. But these problems were, for obvious reasons, of immediate practical interest in the branches of the British empire-state. The most novel and intriguing questions raised by the book are about Ireland as a problem in continental European political thought. The book shows that a number of Frenchmen and Germans took the case of Ireland very seriously as a side-light on British and European politics. It offers brief discussions of passing arguments made by titans like Montesquieu and Hegel, but most of the continental figures it considers in depth are second-order players, writers of the order of Gustave de Beaumont and Friedrich Gentz. Taking less exhaustively studied figures more seriously is always a valuable thing to do, and Stafford's discussions are consistently illuminating. The problem is that, looking in turn at continental writers selected precisely because they were unusually interested in Irish issues, we get little sense of the scale and status of Ireland as a problem in European political debate. How widely and intensively was Ireland discussed in France and Germany, in books and tracts and in the periodical press? What about elsewhere in Europe? And to what extent were European debates about Ireland connected directly with each other, and with those taking place over the other side of the Channel, a point touched on here (p. 239) but not discussed systematically? All these questions would need more sustained and structured answers to demonstrate that Ireland was central to continental European debates about empire and political economy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as opposed to being a subject of scattered and situationally significant concern. Stafford may well be right, however, and it would be fascinating to see the question taken up in a more deliberate way.

If we were searching for criticisms, we might note that referring to the namesake father of the prime minister as Sir Robert 'Peele' is unusual, especially when Stafford gives eighteenth-century orthography short shrift elsewhere. More curious is the book's insistence on calling the author of the *Essay on the principle of population* simply 'Robert' Malthus, the name he went by in private life, which goes against his own practice in signing his works (usually as T. R.), and subsequent scholarly convention. These are, at worst, venial faults. *The case of Ireland* asks us to think about Irish history, the history of modern political thought and the relations between the two, in a subtly but authentically new way. It deserves wide discussion.

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