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**When is a School not a School?  
The Case of Utility Theory in Early Irish  
Political Economy**

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## **WHEN IS A SCHOOL NOT A SCHOOL? THE CASE OF UTILITY THEORY IN EARLY IRISH POLITICAL ECONOMY.**

### **I**

This paper considers the methodology of historians of economic thought by looking at their treatment of early Irish political economy as a case study. Meek has pointed to what he terms a 'teleological approach' in the history of economic thought (1950, 43). This is the tendency to depict the development of the discipline as a cumulative process. It is as if an agenda for the discipline was laid down fully formed at its inception and then pursued in a systematic way. This teleological approach has led some historians of economic thought to blur the traditional distinction between classical political economy and neoclassical economics (for example, Schumpeter 1954, Hollander 1979, Blaug 1986). It has been suggested by some historians that a school of political economy based upon utility theory existed in the early 19th century in Ireland (for example, Schumpeter 1954, Boylan and Foley 1992). Other historians have linked several of the early Irish political economists to an asserted early English school of political economy based upon utility theory (Hollander 1979, Blaug 1986). If such schools did exist, this adds weight to the teleological approach to the history of political economy.

In 1831, Richard Whately, former holder of the Drummond Lectureship of Political Economy at Oxford, came to Ireland as Archbishop of Dublin. The Archbishopric was an extremely wealthy see with an annual income of £7,786. Whately used part of this income to endow a professorship of political economy at Trinity College, Dublin. Whately, along with the first four holders of the Whately professorship, are associated with the asserted school of utility theory. The first four holders (hereafter called the Whately professors) and their periods of tenure are: Mountifort Longfield (1832 - 1836); Isaac Butt (1836 - 1841); James Lawson (1841 - 1846); William Neilson Hancock (1846 - 1851). This paper addresses two questions: did these early Irish political economists focus on an early version of utility theory, and did they constitute a school of thought? The latter would have been quite unusual in the early nineteenth century. This vivid description of the state of the discipline by Scrope in 1831 suggests a discipline in the very early stages of development.

Professor after professor has brought forward his special doctrine with no small flourish of trumpets as a newly discovered truth; but, each having for

his new erection uniformly destroyed the production of his predecessors and occasionally his own, the sum total of acquisitions during this period, even in the estimation of the most enthusiastic devotees of the science, is but small. They too are divided into sects and schools, perhaps, equalling in number the individual authors; and the consequence of this discordance, even on the most fundamental questions, coupled as it has been with glaring inconsistencies, and the frequent assertion of the most startling paradoxes, is a general feeling of disinclination, we had almost said of disgust, in the public mind, towards a science which, during so considerable a period has confessedly propagated so many dangerous fallacies, and established so few useful truths (1831, 46).

The Whately professorship was a part-time position with a tenure of five years which paid an annual stipend of £100. The incumbent was to give at least nine public lectures a term and was to publish at least one of these lectures. Mountfort Longfield was appointed in 1832, at the comparatively mature age of 30. In the same year, he was also appointed Regius professor of Feudal and English Law at Trinity College. He gave up the Whately Chair in 1836, one year before the end of his tenure, to pursue a legal career and later became one of Ireland's most respected judges. Isaac Butt was appointed to the Whately chair at the age of 23. After his tenure ended, he became a high-profile barrister and politician, eventually becoming leader of the Home Rule Movement. James Lawson was appointed at the age of 24. Like his predecessors, he was trained as a lawyer and returned to that profession after his tenure was completed. In 1865, Lawson became attorney general of Ireland. William Neilson Hancock was appointed at 26. Of the first four Whately professors, he was the only one to make his name primarily as a political economist. He remained an advisor to Government on economic issues after his tenure as Whately professor ended.

Historians of economic thought who argue that the Whately professors constituted a school have tended to base this assertion on the published lectures of the Whately professors. These lectures have been searched for references to utility or something that can be interpreted as such. Typically, such references are not considered in the context of the rest of the material in the lectures, in the context of their other private and published papers, or in the context of events in Ireland at the time.

Basing the assertion of the existence of a school of thought on such a narrow body of evidence is curious because the concept of “school of thought” is a sociological one. The concept paints a picture of scientists working within an explicit community with the aim of developing a singular approach to the discipline. In order to test whether a school existed among the Whately professors, a detailed definition of the concept of school is required. This paper is based upon the assertion that, if Whately and the Whately professors did create a distinct school of thought, this school should have exhibited traits of a Kuhnian paradigm in an embryonic form regardless of whether it was founded upon utility theory or more classically oriented principles. The section below reviews the Kuhnian paradigm to see how it may be modified to provide a definition of “school of thought”.

## II

Thomas Kuhn was one of the first philosophers of science to consider the development of scientific knowledge from a sociological perspective (Kuhn, 1970). Kuhn’s conceptual device, the paradigm, encompasses the set of theories and laws that scientists use as the foundation of their knowledge, the methodological approaches they take, and the set of standards to which they adhere. The paradigm is, therefore, a full description of a particular scientific tradition. Kuhn’s examples of paradigms include Ptolemaic astronomy, Aristotelian dynamics, and Newtonian mechanics.

Kuhn defined the paradigm as a ‘disciplinary matrix’ composed of four main components (1970, 182). The paradigm contains ‘symbolic generalisations,’ which form a frame of reference for the development of theory within a particular scientific community. These generalisations take the form of laws but they also include definitions of the concepts used within the laws. The second component is a consensus over which problems are the ones which scientists working within the paradigm should focus their attention on (1970, 184). This in turn suggests the third component, which is a system of ‘shared values’ (1970, 185). Finally, the paradigm contains a set of specified exemplars (Kuhn, 1970, 187). These exemplars are examples of how problems should be solved, given the methodology adopted by the paradigm.

A paradigm goes beyond the fact of a group of scientists who just happen to be working on the same theoretical concepts and developing them in the same way.

This is merely a coincidence and would in no way indicate the kind of social scientific community that Kuhn's system suggests.

A paradigm exists within a well-developed scientific community. A school, on the other hand, typically indicates a looser structure. However, the concept of school does suggest an interim structure which has the potential of developing into a more formal community. As such, a school of thought should display embryonic versions of the components that Kuhn portrayed as being the central components of a paradigm. For example, one would not expect a school to have developed theoretical frameworks, but one might reasonably expect writers within a school to be using similar theoretical concepts. If consensus exists over the relative importance of theoretical concepts, then the scope exists for the development of symbolic generalisations. The precursor of consensus is debate. One would therefore expect schools to be characterised by debate among participants as they attempt to identify a focus for their work. Underlying all this activity is collaboration. At the very least, one would expect participants in a school to be engaged with the work of other members. The label of "school" does not suggest work carried out in isolation.

If an Irish school of economic thought existed which was explicitly based on utility theory and structured in a way that even loosely resembled a paradigm, then this adds credence to the histories of economic thought which stress an explicit continuity of ideas in economics from the early nineteenth century. It also suggests that there was no scientific revolution in the movement from classical political economy to neoclassical economics; that the early Irish economists placed the same significance upon neo-classical concepts that twentieth century economists do. The following section explores whether the early Irish political economists were explicitly working on the development of utility theory.

### III

In the first of ten lectures Richard Whately gave as holder of the Drummond Lectureship, he made the following simple statement:

it is not that pearls fetch a high price because men have dived for them; but on the contrary, men dive for them because they fetch a high price (1832, 253).

In 1835, Whately used this concept of utility to refute Ricardo's labour theory of value. This has caused Whately to be placed as a representative of the nineteenth century 'utility school' along with Nassau Senior and William Forster Lloyd by, among others, Roll (1958, 339). It is perhaps reasonable to expect that Whately would have brought this utility perspective to Dublin and influenced the work of the early Whately professors. Certainly, Mountifort Longfield's status as a utility theorist has been asserted by many historians. Roll categorises Longfield as an important member of the utility school, which, he says, 'pre-empted marginal utility analysis by nearly fifty years' (1958, 339; see also O'Brien 1975, 103). Underlying this categorisation is the implication that Longfield was contributing to a school of thought that was already well-developed. Schumpeter was one of the most flattering of Longfield's position among early theorists. He stated that Longfield 'overhauled the whole of economic theory and produced a system that would have served well in 1870' (1954, 465). Moss concluded that 'Longfield must be credited with having developed one of the earliest and most complete supply-and-demand explanations of market price in British economic thought' (1974, 419).

In the first five of his lectures at Trinity, Longfield wavered between a labour theory of value and a cost of production theory. In lecture II, Longfield adopted the notion that the value of a good is determined by the labour embodied in that good. By lecture III, however, he was arguing that labour is a convenient measure but not 'the only real one' (1834, 42). In lecture VI, Longfield stated that both the cost of production and utility both influence the price of a commodity. It is in this lecture that Longfield introduced the idea of the 'intensity of demand' (1834, 112).

If the existing supply is more than sufficient to satisfy all the demand equal or superior to a certain degree of intensity, prices will fall, to accommodate themselves to a less intense demand (1834, 113).

From this statement it would appear that intensity of demand simply refers to the total amount of demand for a commodity. However, Longfield elaborates:

that portion which any person ceases to consume in consequence of a rise of prices, or that additional portion which he would consume if prices should fall, is that for which the intensity of his demand is less than the high price which

prevents him from purchasing it, and is exactly equal to the low price which would induce him to consume it (1834, 114).

It is the content of this sixth lecture that has led Longfield to be classified as a utility theorist. On this evidence it is difficult to disagree with Schumpeter and Roll's view of Longfield as a precursor of neoclassical economics.

Longfield did use marginal analysis, but in his theory of profit determination rather than in a theory of utility. In lectures IX and X, he attacked the two central tenets of the Ricardian system: the proposition that wages are determined by the cost of subsistence and the proposition that the rate of profit is determined by returns to agricultural production. Longfield, in contrast to Ricardo, argued that the rate of profit is determined by the increased productivity that capital can induce from a fixed quantity of labour. He treated wages as an absolute proportion of the price obtained for the commodity produced. This gave him a long run system in which rents and wages rise and profits fall. This is the same outcome as Ricardo's long run system. However, the foundation for Longfield's long run predictions is very different to those underlying the Ricardian system.

In the Ricardian system, profits fall due to the increase in the share going to wages and wages rise due to the rising cost of subsistence. In Longfield's system, profits fall due to the increased accumulation of capital and wages rise due to the increase in the productivity of labour. In this way, Longfield did away with the concept of surplus value and the political conclusions drawn from it. It was this theory of profit, rather than a utility theory, which forms the core of Longfield's work. In so far as it was based loosely upon marginal analysis, Longfield's work could be said to be an early example of neoclassical economics. However, Longfield's concerns were typically classical; they were focused on production and distribution rather than exchange.

Isaac Butt published his first lecture as Whately professor in 1837. This lecture is written in rather a highblown, rhetorical style, compared to the perfunctory style of Longfield. Butt discussed the prejudices against political economy as an academic subject and the relationship between political economy and moral philosophy in a style that was clearly influenced by Whately rather than Longfield.

While Butt saw a role for utility in determining the value of commodities, he did not expand on Longfield's concept of intensity of demand. He did not go as far as Longfield in developing the concept of utility. Like Longfield, Butt was driven by classical concerns. It is not surprising therefore that Butt focused on Longfield's marginal productivity theory of profit and developed that aspect of Longfield's work. Butt extended Longfield's marginal productivity theory of profit in the analysis of labour, creating 'one of the earliest presentations of the marginal utility theory of imputation' (Moss 1991, 34).

James Lawson, on the other hand, moves the discussion of utility along another step by explicitly stating the law of diminishing marginal utility: 'if A's supply of X be increased, this will generally diminish its utility to him' (1844, 144). He also gave an early statement of the law of reciprocal demand:

If A has a commodity called X and B a commodity called Y, the proportion in which they will exchange for each other will be determined by the utility of X and Y - A will not part with X, or any portion of it, for any portion of Y, unless the portion of Y which he receives possesses more utility to him...than the portion of X which he gives (1844, 144).

Lawson also linked utility to demand and supply: 'demand and supply *generally* influence this utility; for instance, if A's supply of X be increased, this will generally diminish its utility to him' (1844, 144). Despite his clear understanding of marginal utility, Lawson failed to relate it to Longfield's intensity of demand. Had he done so, Lawson might well have come up with an early exposition of the elasticity of demand.

In William Neilson Hancock's lectures at Trinity, the influence of John Stuart Mill is obvious. Hancock argues that while 'the intrinsic variations in prices for short periods depend almost entirely on changes in the desirability of commodities' (1849, 14), in the long run, value is determined by 'the amounts of labour, savingness, and the assistance of natural agents necessary to be used in its production and the prices of such labour, savingness, and assistance, together with the amount of raw produce and its price' (1849, 16).

Hancock eschews the developments in utility made by Longfield and Lawson and presents a typically classical system.



Utility theory did exist to a greater or lesser extent in the lectures of at least the first three of the Whately professors as well as of Whately himself. Whately proposed utility theory as an alternative to the labour theory of value. Longfield contributed to this proposal by identifying the intensity of demand, Butt used an embryonic form of marginal analysis to create a theory of marginal imputation. Lawson contributed the law of diminishing marginal returns. From a Kuhnian perspective, these common threads running through the lectures of the Whately professor can only be indicative of the development of a paradigm if they are accompanied by evidence of a developing consensus about the focus of theoretical development for the school, a developing consensus over appropriate methods, a system of shared values, and the development of exemplars.

The following section considers whether these elements can be said to have existed by considering the private and published papers of Whately and the Whately professors.

### III

Kuhn argued that consensus is intrinsic to the development of a paradigm. He pointed to the importance of shared beliefs in holding a paradigm together (1970, 185). While it is conceded that one would not expect to find the highly developed cohesion among members of a school that one would associate with a paradigm, nevertheless, one would expect some degree of consensus and shared values to exist among members of a school. For evidence, we would consider whether these members ever engaged each other in debate, whether they made references to each other's work, and whether they attempted to tease out and develop each other's theoretical arguments. The previous section suggests that perhaps the references to utility theory in the lectures of Whately and the first three Whately professors could be taken as embryonic symbolic generalisations. But to what extent do the other components - consensus, methods, and shared values - exist in the work of Whately and the Whately professors?

In terms of consensus, the Whately professors did seem to agree on the issues worth discussing. However, these issues did not include utility theory. Not surprisingly, given the state of the Irish economy at the time, the main topics of discussion were poverty and the poor laws, absenteeism, Ireland's dependence on

agriculture, and free trade. These are the topics which appear repeatedly in their lectures and their published articles in the Dublin Statistical Society. There was a modicum of consensus over the theoretical principles underlying their explorations of these topics. For example, all except Butt subscribed to the principle of laissez faire. However, it should be noted that this would not have marked them as constituting a distinct school of thought. Almost all political economists at the time would also have adopted the principle.

If they agreed on the issues that were important, did they then use the same methods to explore these issues? Boylan and Foley argue that the early Whately professors had 'an abiding commitment to induction' (1992, 42). Would this, coupled with the consensus on issues, mark them as constituting a school?

Longfield did suggest that the method adopted by Smith might be preferable to Ricardo's deductive method:

Adam Smith appears not to have possessed much taste or capacity for long or subtle trains of reasoning. The 'Wealth of Nations' is written with very little attention to system, and this circumstance has probably tended to increase its utility. It prevented any error from infecting the entire work (1834, 262).

However, this should be interpreted less as a commitment to Smith's method and more as a criticism of what Longfield saw as the fundamental flaw in Ricardo's system, namely its use of the labour theory of value as its underlying assumption. The cost of production theory of value too, Longfield argued, was a good example of 'deductions of serious consequences drawn from propositions originally founded on verbal subtleties or misapplication of language' (1834, 203). This might be interpreted as a preference for induction but for the following comment at the end of lecture X:

I trust, gentlemen, that you will attend to the difference between a proof founded on an abstraction, and that founded upon a supposition...the former cannot but lead to truth, although its application may be of some difficulty; the latter may lead to truth or falsehood, according as the supposition upon which it is founded on is or is not conformable to the reality of things (1834, 220).

Longfield was aware both of the power of deductive argument and of the pitfalls of inductive method. He went on to give the following examples. The classical theory of rent, he argued, was 'founded on a supposition which I attempted to shew was verified by experience' (1834, 220). His own theory of wages, on the other hand, was an example of 'mere abstract reasoning' and as such 'cannot be false in any time or country' (1834, 220). His theory of profits involved a combination of the two modes of reasoning: 'it is founded partly upon facts lying within the knowledge of all, and partly upon abstract reasoning' (1834, 220). It is interesting to note that he chose a similar defence of his analysis of competition as Friedman was more famously to make in his *Methodology of Positive Economics* (1953):

It is true that no man could make those calculations; but the principle of competition leads to the same result with as much certainty as if such calculations were made and acted upon in every instance (1834, 217).

Butt was more vague than Longfield in his methodological argument. In his early introductory lectures, Butt remarked that 'in the mixed sciences (of which...Political Economy is one) we are called on to admit facts as the basis of our reasoning' (1837, 17). However, in *Rents, Profits and Labour* (1838), he stressed the importance of the 'elementary abstract propositions' of political economy as a foundation for applied analysis (1838, 9). He saw a distinction between abstract and applied political economy which J.S. Mill was later to develop (J.S. Mill 1874 [1844], 331). By the time Lawson published his *Five Lectures on Political Economy* in 1844, the debate in England on the scientific status of political economy had reached its height. Lawson argued that the problem with the Ricardian system was not its deductive framework per se, but rather the difficulty in applying its abstract principles to a real economy (1844, 4). Lawson went on to propose a methodology for political economy that was very similar to J.S. Mill's:

it is a mixed science, consisting of two parts, the first, abstract, composed of a few simple, and almost self-evident propositions; and the second, far the most important, being the application of the principles deduced in the first part to facts (1844, 6).

This was by no means a radical proposal. It was broadly in line with the approach favoured by most English political economists at the time. Lawson clearly

understood the power of subjecting abstract principles to testing. He pointed out that it was Senior's examination of the actual path of profits and wages which led to the denial of Ricardo's supposition that profits and wages are inversely related (1844, 6). However, with some prefiguring of twentieth century debates on measurement and theory, he also outlined the dangers of induction: 'the mere huddling together of facts without regard to the deduction of any vital truth from them, burdens the memory without enlightening the understanding' (1844, 6). In the lectures of Hancock, the influence of J.S. Mill with respect to both the content and method of political economy is very evident.

While there are similarities in the methodological arguments of the Whately professors, to say that they had reached a consensus would be an exaggeration. As with their developments of theoretical issues, their methodological arguments were formed in isolation from one another.

To say that they had 'an abiding commitment to an inductivist methodology,' as Boylan and Foley do, suggests a clarification of thought on methodological issues which Longfield and Butt certainly did not possess. Lawson and Hancock, both clearly influenced by J.S. Mill, were on surer ground, but there is no evidence to suggest that their adoption of Mill's methodology was born out of debate between them on this issue. Since the Millian methodology was favoured by the large majority of English political economists at the time, it cannot be held up as a feature which distinguishes an Irish school of political economy.

The third necessary component in Kuhn's paradigm is the existence of shared values. It would be reasonable to suppose that a school would be composed of like-minded individuals. It is on this criterion that the assertion of a distant Irish school really falls apart, despite Boylan and Foley's assertion that there existed 'a large degree of unanimity and intellectual unity among the first holders of the Whately Chair' (1992, 37).

Richard Whately was in a good position to be a founder of a school of thought in political economy in Ireland. He was one of the few people in Ireland in the 1830s with a good knowledge of the popular debates in political economy. He had good contacts; Nassau Senior was one of his closest friends and they corresponded with

each other from the early 1820s until Whately's death in 1863.<sup>1</sup> He is described by Boylan and Foley as 'the most influential propagator of political economy in nineteenth century Ireland' (1992, 4).

Boylan and Foley cite Sir John Lentaigne as saying that it was 'mainly through his [Whately's] influence and exertions' that the Dublin Statistical Society was formed (1992, 4). However, it is difficult to square this leading role for Whately in the development of a distinctly Irish school of political economy with the evidence on his personality. Whately's biographer, W.N. Fitzpatrick, wrote that 'at Oxford, he was considered a bore, and regarded as a nuisance which ought at any sacrifice to be put down' (1864, 73). Fitzpatrick went on to quote from an 'Irish Conservative Journal' that Whately 'soon became disliked as a rough-mannered man seemingly possessed with an idea of his own mental capacity' (1864, 91-92). McDowell argued that Whately 'carried little weight in official circles' and was largely disliked at Trinity (1952, 192). This is supported by Murphy's vivid descriptions of the competitions for the first and second Whately professors (Murphy 1983). It is instructive to note that of the first four Whately professors, only Longfield is reported to have attended Whately's state funeral on 15 October, 1863.

Whately had a caustic turn of phrase evident from his letters to Senior. For example, he mocked his Catholic counterpart, Archbishop Sands, for his stammer, and referred to the Provost of Trinity College, Provost Sadlier, as 'un mouton qui reve'.<sup>2</sup> He read only Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen and, indeed, there are more than a few attempts to capture the tone of Mr. Bennet in his letters to Senior. For example, on 29 May 1846, he wrote to Senior to congratulate him on the engagement of his son, Nassau Senior Jr., to one Miss Jane Hughes: 'it is to N's credit, and yours, to be satisfied without great wealth, high connexions, or extraordinary beauty'.

Whately seemed to approve of the appointment of Longfield as the first Whately professor (Murphy 1983). In a letter to Senior in November 1832, he writes 'He [Longfield] is well spoken of in all respects...he is the one on whose answers I had pronounced the most favourably'. He tells Senior that he has passed Senior's lectures on to Longfield. On 11th January 1834, he mentions Longfield again in a

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<sup>1</sup> Over 400 letters between Whately and Senior survive in the collections of Senior's papers in the National Library of Wales.

<sup>2</sup> letter to Senior, dated 4 January 1841, Whately/Senior letters, Nassau Senior Files, National Library of Wales.

letter to Senior: 'our PE professor is about to publish his whole course of 12 lectures. I did not hear them'. Senior only made one comment on Longfield in return: 'will you lend your copy of my article to Longfield - I cannot give him one as I am [indecipherable] by my engagement with the proprietors from giving away many unless in the Continent or America. He [Longfield] is a valuable writer - but quite wrong on absenteeism - which seems [indecipherable] by nature as a stumbling block to Political Economists'.<sup>3</sup> This offhandedness by Senior would suggest that Longfield was certainly not considered at the time to be an important member of a utility school of thought.

By 1836, it is clear that it was in fact Senior, and not Whately, who was setting and marking the examination for the Whately professorship. In a letter dated 20th February 1836, Whately thanks Senior for the questions. In a letter dated May 1836, Whately writes: 'I have promised the Provost of Trin Coll to give in my decision this week, not to keep the candidates long in suspense. Unless therefore I receive the papers from you by return I shall decide as well as I can without.' On 29 May 1846, Whately wrote to Senior: 'I have selected some of the PE questions and have rec<sup>d</sup> the answers. Will you supply me with your judgement on the candidates? There are not many.' On 10th June 1856, Whately wrote to Senior: 'I fully expect to have yr answer about the PE questions tomorrow, on w<sup>h</sup> day the examiners will call to ask me for them. But if not sent, pray do so without delay.' On 12th June 1856, Whately wrote to Senior: 'I have handed in the PE questions. The answers I will transmit to you after having looked them over. This will probably be in about a fortnight.'

It was Senior rather than Whately who was setting and correcting the examinations in respect of the Whately professorship. Whately, by his own admission, did not have enough knowledge of the subject to carry out these tasks. This does not suggest the confidence of a man who saw himself as the leader of a school of political economy. Another curiosity about these letters is how infrequently the Whately professors are mentioned. The quotes above with regard to Longfield are the only references to him. Whately did seem to like Longfield despite their political differences. Whately was a Whig; in later life, Longfield went on to become an active liberal but given his contributions to the Tory *Dublin University Magazine*, one could assume that he was initially a conservative.

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<sup>3</sup> letter to Whately from Senior, dated 19 January 1836, Whately/Senior letters, Nassau Senior Files, National Library of Wales.

Longfield's career as a political economist suffered a setback in 1836. In 1835, Longfield had published his *Three Lectures on Commerce and One on Absenteeism*. These lectures were reviewed by T.P. Thompson in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1836. This review was scathing. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Longfield gave up the Whately professorship a year before he was due to and focused on a career in the law. No private papers of Longfield's remain in existence so this conclusion is speculation. Longfield did continue to write on economic issues for the *Dublin University Magazine* and the Dublin Statistical Society but never ventured to reach a wider audience again.<sup>4</sup>

In direct contrast to Mountfort Longfield, Isaac Butt was a very vocal Tory. Prior to taking up the Whately professorship, he was editor of the *Dublin University Magazine*, a staunchly Protestant and conservative journal established by Butt and five other graduates and students of Trinity in 1833. The tone of the magazine is described by McDowell as combining 'narrow and aggressive Toryism with the literary enthusiasms of the romantic movement' (1952, 114).

Butt was editor of the magazine from August 1834 to November 1838.<sup>5</sup> Butt, like Longfield, came from an upper middle class Anglo-Irish family. Longfield contributed to the magazine several times during Butt's time as editor. Although no correspondence between them exists, this would suggest that they knew and respected each other. The relationship between Butt and Whately was on quite a different footing. Whately was incensed at the appointment of Butt as Whately professor. The machinations of the Board in the election of Butt are vividly described by Murphy (1983). It is interesting to note that Isaac Butt is not mentioned at all in the letters between Whately and Senior; the other three Professors are mentioned at least in passing. From May 1836 until 23rd April 1846, there is no mention at all of the Whately professorship between Whately and Senior.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Longfield's death notice in the *Freeman's Journal* of 22 November 1884 failed to mention that he held the Whately professorship.

<sup>5</sup> He had a break from the role in 1836, when Rev. James Wills took over temporarily.

<sup>6</sup> Given the Archbishop's taste for caustic descriptions of those he considered to be his adversaries, it is likely that references to Butt did in fact exist. Whately's daughter, Elizabeth Jane destroyed several of her father's letters which she considered sensitive on his death in 1863. She may well have destroyed letters that might have mentioned Butt in an unfavourable light given the extent of Butt's popularity at the time of her father's death.

The origins of the animosity between Whately and Butt appear to be associated with Butt's editorship of the *Dublin University Magazine*. On 8th March 1835, Whately wrote to Senior accusing the *Dublin University Magazine* of 'abusing me a long time'; however, he goes into no detail on the form or scale of this abuse.<sup>7</sup>

For his part, Butt did not rate Whately too highly. Some of the evidence for this comes from letters of J.N. Edge, the nephew of Henry Maunsell who, together with Butt, John Swanzy and John Dallas Edge, established the *Protestant Gazette* in 1838. In a letter dated Whitsunday 1913 to Frank McDonagh, who was preparing a biography of Butt before he was killed in World War One, Edge wrote that 'he [Butt] called himself "sometime professor of Political Economy in the University of Dublin".'

Edge continued, 'he [Butt] had not a high opinion of Whately. He did not consider Whately a deep thinker. said you could see the shallows in his mind.'<sup>8</sup> This suggests that Butt did not take Whately or his own position as Whately professor very seriously.

Whatever about Longfield, it seems highly unlikely that Whately encouraged Butt in his thinking on political economy whether on utility theory or not. Butt railed against the principles of political economy and in particular, laissez-faire, when he saw the hardship generated by the policies derived from them.

This gained Butt enormous popularity. While Butt began his career as a conservative, by 1852 he had moved towards liberalism, offering himself as a liberal-conservative for Youghal, a seat he won. Butt became a fervent nationalist and founder of the Home Rule Party. While he continued to write on economic issues, his interest in the development of economic theory did not persist beyond his tenure as Whately professor.

Butt's predecessor, James Lawson, was the exact opposite of Butt in both his economics and politics. Whereas Butt questioned the application of the principles of political economy to Ireland, Lawson fervently believed in the universal application of

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<sup>7</sup> Rashid attributed an article reviewing Longfield's lectures published in the June 1834 volume of the magazine to Whately. This seems highly unlikely given Whately's comment to Senior. It also seems unlikely in the light of the substantial political differences between Whately and those of the main contributors of the magazine. It is much more likely that the author of the review was Butt or Samuel O'Sullivan, who were responsible for the majority of the articles on political economy in the magazine into the 1850s.



these principles. After his tenure as Whately professor ended, Lawson turned to politics. When his career failed to take off, he then turned to the law. He was appointed as attorney-general in 1865. One of his first acts was to suppress the publication of the *Irish People* newspaper. This did nothing to endear him to nationalists, both Catholic and Protestant. A terse death notice in *The Nation* on 13 August 1887 wrote 'The dead judge was a persistent enemy of Ireland since his elevation to the Bench.' Lawson's political views would certainly not have endeared him to Butt but they were in line with those of Hancock.

Only Hancock retained a keen professional interest in the discipline after his tenure as Whately professor had ended. Hancock published on a wide range of issues including land tenantry, banking and finance, the poor laws, absenteeism, the principle of laissez-faire, and the development of Irish industry. Like Lawson and in contrast to Butt, Hancock took the view that the principles of political economy were universally applicable. Writing at the height of the great famine, he stated that 'the deaths in the west of Ireland, instead of proving the danger of too strict an adherence to sound principles, prove the danger of any departure, however slight, from such principles' (1847, 22).

A final example serves to show that the Whately professors did not share the same political or ideological views. Whately died in 1863. When the funding for the Whately professorship ran out in 1866, the Board of Trinity met to discuss the future of the professorship. It was decided that the college itself would fund the professorship on the existing conditions. However, the Board decided not to allow graduates of the Queens' Universities to compete for the Chair. This effectively excluded Catholics from the competition. Whately was a supporter of united education and had made it a condition of his endowment that Catholics be allowed to compete. John Cairnes, Whately professor from 1856 to 1861 and by this time Professor of Political Economy at University College London, was furious. On 23rd April 1866, he wrote to his long-time correspondent, Professor Nesbit of Queen's University Galway, that he intended to encourage the previous incumbents of the Chair to renounce it in protest.<sup>9</sup> He seemed to be confident of Butt's support and had asked an intermediary, James McDonnell, to write to Longfield on the matter. However, Hancock and Lawson refused to 'withdraw the position of the Chair.'

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<sup>8</sup> Butt Papers, National Library of Ireland.

<sup>9</sup> Cairnes papers, National Library of Ireland.

United education was a fundamental and incendiary topic in Ireland in the nineteenth century. This example serves to show how far apart the values of the Whately professors were.

#### IV

Kuhnian paradigms have four elements: symbolic generalisations, consensus, shared values and exemplars. While it is acknowledged above that schools are a looser structure than paradigms, it is argued that schools should display an embryonic version of the components of a paradigm. These components are applied to the work of the early Irish political economists. This group have been described as a school based upon the utility theory of value by several historians of economic thought. The Kuhnian framework is used to see whether such a claim is justified.

There are three candidates for symbolic generalisation in the work of the Whately professors: utility theory of value, productivity theory of profit and trade theory. None of these three are emphasised in the work of all the Whately professors. Longfield and Lawson focused on utility conceptualisations; Longfield and Butt developed an alternative theory of profit; Butt emphasised an alternative theory of trade. There is little evidence of a continuity of thought across their work. There is no sense in which one could conclude that any of the Whately professors saw themselves as developing a system handed down by their immediate predecessor. Common elements in their analysis can only be interpreted as coincidences.

There is little evidence of a common approach to political economy among the Whately professors. In Longfield and Butt, methodological issues are too vaguely dealt with to be taken as evidence for a developing consensus on methodology. They both move between deduction and induction without clearly linking the two modes of reasoning. Neither show any preference for one method over the other. By the time Lawson and Hancock write about methodological issues, the influence of J.S. Mill is evident. Certainly, Lawson and Hancock adopt Millian induction as the appropriate method for political economy but this cannot be said to form the basis of a distinctly Irish school of political economy.

Kuhn points to the importance of shared values and commitments to particular problems in holding a paradigm together (1970, 185). To a certain extent, the Whately professors did share a commitment to dealing with issues relevant to the

Irish economy but they did not have shared values. For example, Butt, Lawson and Hancock all agreed that the correct focus was on economic growth not distribution. This characterises them as classical economists in the tradition of Smith rather than Ricardo. But their proposed policies were often conflicting. These conflicts largely reflected their different political backgrounds. For example, Hancock was a staunch liberal and as such was a firm supporter of the principle of laissez-faire. Butt, on the other hand, was a Tory and as such was less concerned about the maintenance of free trade between Ireland and England.

This paper suggests that the work of the early Irish political economists can only be interpreted as a school of thought only if one takes a very narrow definition of "school". It is argued here that the identification of a school constitutes more than just the identification of some similar conceptualisations in the work of individuals writing at around the same time. There must be evidence that these individuals see themselves as part of a community. They must be engaged with the work of their contemporaries. If this leads to consensus, then a school might be said to exist. A teleological approach to the history of economic thought is based on the supposition that classical political economy and neoclassical economics constitute a single mode of thought. Only if sociological elements in the development of economic thought are identified, can this supposition be justified. It is not enough to identify fragmentary hints of neo-classical analysis in the work of classical political economists in order to assert a continuity of thought between the two eras.

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