

Care of  
St. Clare's Comprehensive  
Manorhamilton  
Co. Leitrim

20 – 03 – 2012

Dear An Taoiseach,

My name is Oisín Parkinson-Coombs. I am 16 years old and am in the first year of my Leaving Cert cycle. I am writing you this letter in order to give my opinion of what a fair and just Ireland should be, and to offer some suggestions on how to achieve this.

Firstly I would like to address the main issue. What is a fair and just society? Is it based on Confucian values, like in China, where social harmony comes at all costs and far outweighs individual satisfaction? Or, is it, as in America, where the end justifies the means and the individual comes above the welfare of the community. In my opinion both of these systems have their advantages for both the society and the economy. However, I find both of these systems to be far too extreme. I believe that in each culture there is a happy harmonisation of the two that suits the morals and ethics of the people. I believe that us Irish are quite a moderate people and are not too extreme in any view. It is my belief that our social equilibrium lies somewhere in the middle of these two views. Ireland has always been a community centred country, though recently individualism has crept in (not that this is necessarily a bad thing). It seems that our society needs to be accepting of family values while also making space for newer and more current social ideals. However there is a problem with this. How do we ensure that all of our decisions in government reflect the harmonisation required in order to meet the desires of the public and are in their best interest. In general we refer to An Bunreacht na hÉireann. We see if the laws we bring in are in line with the ideas set out in it, and if not these laws must be altered. I believe we need something new, a new benchmark against which we make our decisions. I hope to outline what kind of document this should be, and what I believe the ideals expressed in this should be.

I believe that this document should be aspirational. It should not be taken literally and end up at the point where the tiniest discrepancy will prevent necessary legislation and decisions from being put forward. This document should be idealistic. In a certain sense it should almost be Platonic, its values should be a constant in our society even as our lifestyles and beliefs may change. It should not be curtailed by the economic climate under which it was penned or implemented. A passing public mood over certain aspects should not be appeased to gain voters trust. It should be a rational exploration of the type of Ireland we would be proud to be a part of. In recent years the heralded Irish welcome has dissipated. Many people are no longer proud of their Irish heritage. As they leave the country they do not want to be associated with the Ireland that presently exists. They have become disenchanted with the age old stereotypes that no longer seem

to hold true. We need this document to outlay a moral, ethical and idealistic plan of an Ireland that all of our citizens can be proud of, so that all of our diaspora can be proud to say their Irish. This document must represent the international reputation that we want, not some fable that no longer holds true. This is the challenge we are faced with, and I believe that if we solve this then we will no longer be wandering aimlessly through our economic development (no disrespect intended). If we can assemble such a document we will no longer be saying we need to find €80 billion or that we need an export driven economy. We will be looking for ways to save and make money that are in line with our ideals. If we can do this then there will be no room for complaint. I would much prefer to live in an economy that is developing at a moderate rate and respecting values that I agree with, than a Gordon Gekko scenario where we lose all sight of ourselves and focus merely on profit. I will now outlay what I would hope this document to contain, and hopefully my prejudices won't impede on its purpose to be supportive of all walks of life.

There are two main issues that I would like to be addressed in such a document, and I believe that these issues are some of the most important for our societal and individual growth and morality. I will be focusing on equality and education. I must first point out that I am not going to be making suggestions of where cuts should and shouldn't be made. I am going to be explaining my stand point on some of the controversial issues within these topics and on why these topics need to be addressed in a Platonic sense and what I believe their resolutions should be.

Firstly I would like to deal with the issue of equality. I have accepted that life is unfair, and around every corner the world is, and always will be rife with inequality, and this regrettable fact is one that we must deal with. However I believe that there are certain inequalities that we can deal with very effectively. When we think of inequality we often think of how the rich don't pay enough taxes and how the poor are being taxed out of house and home, and though I don't entirely agree with that I can understand this view. However, I find that economic inequality is necessary, not only for a functioning economy but for a free, democratic society. The inequality that I would like to address here is that on a moral and ethical scale. For many years our laws relating to morality and ethics have been closely tied in with what the Church thinks is right, it's written into our Constitution and almost into our language. I realise that as we have progressed we have grown away from some of their ideals, and I believe that that independence is a good thing; however I do not think that this social change has been reflected in our legislation. A lot of our laws exclude many minorities, be it those from other religions, atheists, or even those practicing Christianity who don't entirely agree with the Word of God. There is one topic I will discuss in this letter that I believe to be pivotal to the Ireland I want to live in. Gay Rights. I acknowledge all the work that has been done over the past number of years in order to include gay people in our communities and give them the same rights as us. But it simply has not been enough. The work that Sen. David Norris has done impresses me, and for that he deserves our gratitude in helping to establish a fairer and more just Ireland; but a lot of his work has been undone by the scandal about his partner and his actions in relation to it. It is not right that all of his work has been thrown into disrepute with those who were not fully supportive in the first place. I understand that it is hard, especially for the

older generations, to be comfortable with the idea of two men or two women being in love, and it can upset them to see them display their affection in public. But I can't help but think is that because of the way they were and we are brought up to think of a man and man or a woman and a woman to be something alien and unnatural. To a certain degree they are still excluded from the community, never being fully accepted. I believe that this needs to be changed. It is not fair to exclude people because of their sexual orientation; they did not consciously choose to be attracted to their own sex in order to put everyone else ill at ease. They are merely following their hearts in the face of social prejudice and judgement, while this triumph of love in the face of adversity is applauded in a heterosexual couple it is frowned upon if those in question are homosexual. I believe that we need some gesture that homosexuality is ok. And that is why I believe it should be included in this document. I don't believe that it needs to be called marriage, as I can understand how that would unnecessarily upset the practicing laity and the religious sector. However I do believe that a gay couple should have all the same rights as a married heterosexual couple regardless of what we call it. It needs to be put into this document that being true to yourself is something to be applauded and not something to be excluded for. In this way we can all be proud of our country, a country that does not try to change us but accepts and respects us for who we are.

Secondly I would like to speak about education. I, like countless others, believe that education is key to everything in life. I don't believe that we should ever stop learning, for there is always something that we don't know. However unlike many others I do not believe that education and research should be done for commercial game, or to set oneself up for a high paying job. And I can feel one of my prejudices creeping in now. In this economic climate we are constantly bombarded by the order to study science or computing in college. That is where the jobs are. It is as though every news caster obeys this doctrine sent out by some higher power. I am lucky that Maths is what I want to study, and that there are plenty of jobs that need mathematicians. But that is not the reason I am studying it. Education should be based on the discovery of knowledge and wisdom for its own sake, granted this may not be everyone's cup of tea, but I believe that emphasis should be placed on this in order for Ireland to again become the land of, well maybe not saints, but scholars at least. Education should not be pursued for accreditation or a monetary reward, for I can name but one famous living lecturer or researcher. It should be done purely for self actualisation and understanding the mysteries of the world. If by chance these discoveries become useful in the future, or turn out to be lucrative ventures then that is a bonus, but that should not be our motivation. In my opinion the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom can be justified merely by the discovery of knowledge and wisdom, regardless of its commercial use. This is the beauty of education. It need not be practical, as long as it is another discovery in the enigma of the universe then it is a success that should be nurtured and grown, and eventually we might be able to turn around in this Cave of Plato's and not merely see the shadows of reality, but reality itself. I believe that in this document there needs to be emphasis placed on the pursuit of knowledge and wisdom. Through doing this I believe that we will live in an Ireland that will be famed for its philosophical outlook on life, and will be a country that we will be proud to be a part of.

I know that this has been a long read so I will make this summary short. Ireland needs an aspirational document which will outlay the kind of Ireland that we can all be proud of. It should be Platonic in that its ideals should hold even as society develops. I realise that there will be circumstances that will require it to change, and sometimes for it to be ignored. However, having a map that will guide us to the Ireland we want to be can never be a bad idea, even if we do take a few detours and perhaps get lost along the way. My two passions which I would hope to be included are equality for people of all sexual orientations, and that there is an emphasis placed on education as a means to achieve self actualisation rather than a way to train oneself for where the jobs are at a certain time.

I thank you for taking the time to read this letter, and hope that you take some of my points under consideration. I hope that my ideas did not come across as those of idealistic, naïve teenager who does not understand the world, though perhaps that might be exactly what is needed to design such a document. Someone who is untainted by life's corruptions and who still sees the world as a pure place where good wins out over evil and morality triumphs over profit.

Yours sincerely

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Oisín Parkinson Coombs