Colonization and the Recoding of Land in Classical Political Economy

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NOTE:

Apologies for the roughness of this draft! The following is a heavily edited selection from a chapter of an ongoing book project. The aims of the book are, first, to understand how settler colonization schemes in the Anglophone world informed and influenced developments in the history of Western political thought from roughly 1780 to 1880, especially pertaining to concepts of nature, land, property, territory, and population. Second, the book draws on these resources to reflect more generally upon methods in political theory, especially regarding the relationship between historical reconstruction and normative critique in response to colonization and its contemporary legacies.

This chapter is focused on explaining the following puzzle. After the U.S. revolutionary war, British imperial policy (and public opinion more generally) turned against settler colonialism. The emergent field of classical political economy was initially a key resource in this critique. By the mid 1830s, however, this had largely reversed. In the subsequent ‘Colonial Reform Period’ a host of new settlement schemes were authorized, often expressly drawing upon classical political economy for their justification. This contributed to the single largest land grab in human history: the Anglo settler land rush of the late nineteenth century. How did this happen? How did the fortunes of settler colonialism reverse in such a short period and what role did classical political economy play in this change?

My hypothesis is that debates in classical political economy played an important role in this process because they worked to reformulate the conception of ‘land’ that undergirded settler colonial projects. Whereas earlier schemes had emphasized the qualitative uniqueness of land relative to other forms of property, classical political economy demonstrated that land could be treated as legal and commercial abstraction, rendering it desirable again but on new terms. While both early modern and late modern Anglo forms of settler colonialism were oriented towards the acquisition of ‘land’, the period under description here saw a translation across fundamentally distinct meanings behind that key concept. This serves as a caution then against relatively ahistorical treatments of the category from critics and defenders of European colonization alike.
In considering the institution of property as a question in social philosophy, we must leave out of consideration its actual origin in any of the existing nations of Europe. We may suppose a community unhampered by any previous possession; a body of colonists, occupying for the first time an uninhabited country; bringing nothing with them but what belonged to them in common, and having a clear field for the adoption of the institutions and polity which they judged most expedient; required, therefore, to choose whether they would conduct the work of production on the principle of individual property, or on some system of common ownership and collective agency.


In the opening passages of John Stuart Mill’s major work of political economy, he invites readers to imagine themselves as members of a political community that arises *ex nihilo*. Imagination permits us to inhabit a political subjectivity unencumbered by history and ‘unhampered by any previous possession’. Although this involves abstracting away from the actual origins of those European societies where Mill’s readers presumably reside, paradoxically, this process of abstraction brings them closer to the truth of their own traditions and forms of association. It distils, crystallizes, and clarifies the essential nature of that foundational institution of political life—property—precisely by stripping away the actuality of its historical constitution. Arriving at this ahistorical abstraction is what it means to consider property as a question of social philosophy. And, as Mill makes explicit, to envision oneself as a member of a political community without history is to adopt a *colonial* political subjectivity. The colonial *topos* is thus the privileged site of social philosophy. Since it exists in a temporal vacuum, it enables us to view ourselves and our communities objectively, that is, without the distortions and deviations of historical practice.

Perhaps more so than any other figure, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) personifies the recent ‘turn to empire’ in political theory and the history of political thought. Immediately recognizable as a major author of modern liberalism, an active political agent (a Member of Parliament from 1865 to 1868), and a direct beneficiary of European empire (employee of the East India Company from 1823 to 1858), Mill functions as a symbolically important hinge figure in many accounts. Uday Singh Mehta’s breakthrough work, *Liberalism and Empire*, set the tone for this particular reassessment. For Mehta, Mill really represented only one instantiation of a broader phenomenon, namely, the tendency of liberal thinkers to convert
abstract theories of universal rights into exclusionary practices, domination, and the authorization of violence when actualized on the imperial periphery. Subsequent analysis has frequently challenged Mehta’s framework, either by defending figures such as Mill directly, or by providing counter-cases that purport to undermine or nuance the general picture he provided.²

This chapter tacks diagonally across these debates, approaching them from a different angle. This perspectival shift is already suggested by the manner in which Mehta delimited his original study. Early on in *Liberalism and Empire*, Mehta acknowledges that he uses “the terms empire and colony and their philological cognates interchangeably,” despite the fact that, in point of fact,

“The two terms refer to very different conceptual and concrete realities. In European settler ‘colonies’ there was often an ideology and practice of exterminating aboriginal populations. In view of such ideas and practice the distinction between empire and colony is very significant. The liberal endorsement of ‘empire’ is… crucially predicated on notions of tutelage and kinship. It is therefore not consistent with the notion of ‘colony’ where this refers to the idea of exterminating aboriginals. Liberals did not advocate or countenance this practice.”³

Mehta thus gestures here towards an alternative trajectory of thought, running alongside his own concern with imperialism and empire: a genealogy of colonialism in its specificity.⁴ Accordingly, this chapter bypasses the prevailing debate on J.S. Mill and empire—with its emphasis on cultural-racial difference and hierarchy—in favour of an analysis of colonization (as a set of practices) and colonialism (as a body of theoretical reflection on those practices). This permits a distinctive constellation of conceptual issues pertaining to space, territory, property, and density to emerge, which run diagonal to the traditional concerns with empire and imperialism. These uniquely colonial concerns form what I have been terming a political topology and subtend both the political economy and historiography of the era.

A contextualist reading of John Stuart Mill’s *The Principles of Political Economy* (PPE) is the primary vehicle advancing the analysis here. Mill began working on *Principles* in the fall of 1845 and completed it for publication in April of 1848.⁵ The text was written before he became a Member of Parliament but during his employment with the East India Company. It was the first of the major, book-length works for which he is well known today, published before *On Liberty* (1859), *Representative Government* (1861), *Utilitarianism* (1861), and *On the
Subjection of Women (1869). The first edition sold out within a year, leading to second, redrafted version in 1849. Eventually, PPE went through seven editions in Mill’s own lifetime. Although political theorists often overlook this work, many historians of economic thought still consider Mill’s Principles of Political Economy to be a kind of “bible of the economists in the second half of the nineteenth century” and, more generally, claim that classical political economy reached its “peak of contemporary influence” via Mill.⁶

Among its various arguments and themes, The Principles of Political Economy sets out to demonstrate that colonization is “the best affair of business, in which the capital of an old and wealthy country can engage” (PPE, 358). This is, as we shall see, a somewhat surprising claim coming from a text that is so explicitly offered as successor to David Ricardo’s own Principles of Political Economy and Taxation (originally published in 1817 with further editions in 1819 and 1823).⁷ Ricardo, like Adam Smith before him, was a relatively consistent opponent of colonization schemes, viewing them as violations of the ‘free trade’ economic liberalism he espoused. Why then did Mill support colonization and what resources did he draw from classical political economy to do so? More generally and importantly, what does this tell us about the changing face of colonization as it intersects with capitalist development?

In order to address these questions, I propose beginning with an extended detour, one that reconstructs the relevant intellectual context for Mill’s work. In particular, we require an analysis of the recoding of land in the dialectical oscillation between classical political economy and Anglo settler colonization from the 1770s to 1840s. In succinct form, the argument is as follows.

(1) Land acquisition was a major impetus behind both the revival of colonizing projects in the Anglophone world of the early nineteenth century and their increasingly marked differentiation from other imperial formations of the period. Colonial advocacy focused on the need to acquire new, supposedly underpopulated and/or underutilized lands.

(2) Rather than serving as a stable empirical referent, however, ‘land’ actually functioned as a rather protean term in these debates, one that underwent significant reformulation. More generally then, we can observe that colonial dispossession was not merely predicated upon the theft of land, as if it were a simple object with a meaning that could remain stable through the process of exchange. Rather, transfer entailed recoding. The social practices and affective relations that undergird human and
non-human relations to the earth were rewritten through colonization, including the basic comprehension of nature, space, property, use, and improvement.8

(3) This specific historical moment saw the convergence of Anglo settler colonization and an increasingly robust, self-conscious global capitalism. The interactive relationship between colonization and capitalist expansion functions as the underlying horizon of intelligibility for land acquisition practices in this period.

(4) Focusing on only one small slice of this complex process, it is possible to track the traces of recoding in the major works of classical political economy. A targeted reading of work by Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Robert Malthus, as well as a host of their lesser-known interlocutors, reveals several different conceptualizations of land that function to undergird the case for colonial dispossession. In this work as a whole, I discuss Republican, Lockean, Physiocratic, Malthusian, and Commercial-Commodity traditions and argue that, although these ‘lineages of land’ coexist and intertwine, we can observe a general shift in emphasis from the former to the latter.

(5) The increasingly abstract conceptualization of land (as both commodity and as spatial field) that emerges from this period generates a renewed sense that colonization and capitalism are commensurable—indeed mutually reinforcing—and that it is the task of political economy to unite them. This intersection is crystallized and given formal-theoretical expression in Mill’s The Principles of Political Economy.

Precursors to Classical Political Economy

There is a longstanding relationship between colonization and land acquisition. In strands of modern republicanism, for instance, we see thinkers reach back to a certain Greco-Roman tradition (itself always partially imagined and invented), which placed great emphasis on the virtuous of fixed agricultural property, not only for landholders, but also for the political community as a whole.9 Fixed agricultural holdings, especially when held in small units by independent farmers, were considered the fount of republican excellence. Such farmers were relatively autonomous in a material and ethical sense: their unmediated access to land could provide them not only basic subsistence but also a medium for virtuous labour, rendering them less dependent upon others. Recalling this tradition, modern republicans frequently criticized feudalism for perverting this relationship, arguing that the
majority of landholders were no longer independent farmers but proprietors of large estates funded by rent. We can find traces of this in English republicanism of the Diggers and Levellers, but it is also quite evident in later writers such as Rousseau, who was most critical of the kind of large landholdings that formed the foundation of the European nobility. As Alan Ryan summarizes this view:

“Large property leads to corruption as the rich man tries to buy his fellow citizens; moveable property leads to corruption as it allows men to take their wealth wherever they choose, and it allows them to escape the censorship of their fellow citizens; the rise of money and commerce leads to corruption as it exacerbates these tendencies by creating a dependent urban mob who will follow the bidding of their corrupters.”

In this way, modern republicanism could use arguments regarding the qualitatively unique nature of property in land (real estate) as a force for a certain form of (anti-feudal) egalitarianism.

This can only be the basis of a ‘certain form’ of egalitarianism, however, because such arguments have often had trouble overcoming a certain propensity to produce and justify other forms of inequality. Emphasis on land ownership as the fount of autonomy and virtue sits in fundamental tension with a more liberal commitment to formal, individual equality since it is based upon access to a scare and limited resource. This wasn’t a problem for earlier iterations of the tradition in the classical world, since they were not also committed to the formal equality of persons. But even for republicans of, say, seventeenth century England, it was difficult to ignore the fact that universalizing an egalitarian commitment to small-scale, independent agrarian holdings was extremely difficult to achieve in practice: there was simply not enough arable land to permit everyone to have his or her own piece. Thus, it is not difficult to see how this view of land holding could generate colonial ambitions. The acquisition of new lands—particularly those suitable for agrarian cultivation by small farmers—functions to ease the basic contradiction at the heart of ‘egalitarian land-holding republicanism’. As was discussed in Chapter One, Jefferson’s vision of America as a vast nation of yeoman farmers is perhaps the purest expression of this ideal.

It is worth highlighting one salient component of this conceptualization of land that will become important as a point of contrast with later formulations. In this republican lineage, the distinctive, positive feature of land ownership is precisely that it differs from other property forms. What commends ownership in land here is specifically that it is less alienable
and fungible than moveable, chattel property. The immobility of real estate is what anchors the landholder to the earth and to the community. If there is a connection between theories of republican landholding and colonization, then that connection resides in the qualitatively distinct and normatively elevated status of real estate.

In this context, a related but conceptually distinct Lockean lineage of land provided a powerful alternative formulation. Locke provided arguments that helped square a commitment to land ownership with liberal egalitarianism. The price, however, was relinquishing the qualitative distinctiveness of land ownership in favour of an increasingly abstract conception of property and land.

Locke’s framework is partially motivated by his desire to account for how humans might be said to legitimately assert private property claims in an originally common inheritance (from God), even absent “any express Compact of all the Commoners.” His way out of this dilemma was to posit labour as an exclusive property in each person. Labouring upon the natural common removes a portion of it from its original state, bringing it under the ambit of private property. Private acquisition is subject to two provisos: (a) that one not remove more from the common than one can than enjoy before it spoils, and (b) that one leave ‘enough and as good’ for others to enjoy the same. In a state of nature, the provisos of spoilage and sufficiency work together to restrict the amount of private property to a “very moderate proportion”. However, the invention of money enables us to exit this natural condition as it effectively overcomes these limitations. Money permits unlimited accumulation because it does not spoil but, importantly, this also enables Locke to square equality of natural liberty with the fact of inequality in the “disproportionate and unequal Possession of the Earth.” My appropriation of a portion of our common inheritance cannot be justifiably considered a violation of your right to the same—even after all the earth has been apportioned and future generations have no opportunity to directly acquire property in land—if this process is the condition of possibility for the maximum productive use of our inheritance such that the ‘common stock of mankind’ has been infinitely increased and all are better off.

Famously, one tradition of Lockean interpretation has held up (or assailed) his philosophy of property as a paradigmatic expression of a general culture of ‘possessive individualism’. C.B. Macpherson’s influential interpretation held that Locke (explicitly or implicitly) justified private property as a means of capitalist accumulation. The contextualist
rejoinder held that this approach conflated effect with intent. Locke does not build a defence of private property in order to advance the cause of capital accumulation, but rather, as a mechanism for withstanding the abuse of governmental authority. He does this by couching a theory of entitlement in a natural law comprised of a series of fundamental rights and obligations. Self-preservation is a case in point. My right to self-preservation must be respected by the state (thus providing a bulwark against royal absolutism), but it must just as equally be respected by me in relation to myself. For I do not so much have full ownership over my person (at least not in the modern sense of powers of control, exclusion, and alienation) as use of it, and even then only in accordance with God’s purposes for it.

The same can be said for the earth. God did not merely give the earth to mankind in common: he also imbued us with reason such that we might divine his purposes behind doing so. One of these purposes is self-preservation, but even this should not be taken in a strictly narrow or negative sense. Preservation does not merely entail avoidance of death but, more positively, requires that we “Increase and Multiply.” This gives theological significance to our labouring activity. As Jeremy Waldron puts it: “Laboring is not just something we happen to do to resources, it is the appropriate mode of helping oneself to the resources given what resources are for.”

As Waldron indicates here, the divine element of labour expresses itself in a further obligation: the subjection and improvement of the earth. In its original condition, nature is the common inheritance of all and, as such, exists undifferentiated and without boundary. Moreover, it is essentially without value; it is ‘waste’. Nature only gains value through being subjected to one’s dominion. It is human labour that “puts the greatest part of Value upon Land,” without which “Nature and the Earth” would remain “worthless Materials.” Land so conceived is an originally valueless apparatus or medium of labouring activity. It acquires value only through a process of separation from nature (enclosure) and subsequent transformation to serve human ends.

A whole generation of scholars has unpacked the connections between this view of land and the processes of English colonization in the so-called ‘new world’. In particular, foundational work in the ‘colonial turn’ in Locke scholarship has decisively demonstrated that he was personally invested in English colonization of the Americas, that the colonial horizon informed his intellectual formation more generally, and that his contributions to legal and political thought had a major impact on the actual practices of colonization well
beyond his own time. In so doing, thinkers such as David Armitage, Barbara Arneil and James Tully have provided a compelling explanatory account of Anglo settler colonization in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Driven to subdue the (supposed) vast wastelands of America, mixing labour with nature by bringing new land under the till simultaneously fulfils the Biblical injunction to make productive use of the earth (God’s gift, given to mankind in common), establishes the basis of civil society through protection of private property, and develops the individual through virtuous (agrarian) labour. Gesturing ahead to the discussion of classical political economy to come, it is worth highlighting one important feature of the connection between colonization and land acquisition in the Lockean tradition, namely, that it does not operate through a strictly utilitarian logic. In this lineage, one is driven to enclose and subject the ‘natural waste’ regions of the world not merely because the process of improvement better furnishes mankind with the conveniences of life (although this may also be true), but rather because this is the underlying purpose of nature. This is what nature is for, so not using it in this way (permitting it to remain fallow) is more than a lost opportunity: it is immoral. To speak of fulfilling a natural purpose (connected in Locke to God’s divine will) is, however, to admit non-utilitarian features into the theory of improvement. As we shall see, this component of the argument is largely abandoned by later thinkers such as J.S. Mill, who advance a more strictly utilitarian (or at least instrumental) defence of colonization.21

‘Seeing Like a State’: Land and Productive Capacity

Developments in the eighteenth century did not so much negate Lockean arguments as incorporate and reformulate them, in particular drawing upon them for a more robust and direct defence of capital accumulation by inserting the Lockean natural law theory of property into an account of economic development. This transition involved a pivoting of the basic conceptual stance, away from the perspective of the individual labouring agent toward a state-economic viewpoint. Whereas Lockeanism was generated by an interest in defending the natural right of individuals to private property against state authority, emergent forms of classical economics sought to reconcile these opposing forces by restructuring the state as a vehicle of private interests and capitalist accumulation.
With respect to the role that land appropriation plays in this process, the emergence of the Physiocrat school marks a key transition. The dominant approach to political economy in the eighteenth century, Physiocracy was developed predominantly in France by the économistes François Quesnay (1694-1774), Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot (1727-1781), and Guillaume François Le Trosne (1712-1780). Derived from the Greek, meaning ‘power of nature’, Physiocracy was a form of agrarian economics that emphasized the natural productivity of the earth. Physiocrats thus believed that agriculture was the fount of national power. They considered manufacturing labour to be ultimately unproductive and parasitic, in as much as it merely transformed one set of goods into another. Trade and finance were equally viewed as ultimately unproductive fields of industry, circulating goods and wealth, but contributing no true value to the national economy. Only the agricultural sector could create value since labour invested in the earth produced new goods, rather than merely transforming them.

Rent from land-use was one of the few sources of genuine wealth for the state since it reflected the value-added contributions of agriculture. In this way, the Physiocrat theory of natural productivity translated into state policies that favoured the agricultural sector in general, the landed aristocracy in particular, and resisted both urbanization and industrialization.

Physiocratic and Lockean visions of land are not mutually exclusive. Locke certainly emphasized the wealth-generating function of agricultural labour and engaged in some comparative evaluation of different societies’ productive capacities in relation to their land use practices: for example, famously comparing the cultivated soil of Devonshire to the “wild woods and uncultivated wast of America,” deeming the former more productive by ten-fold. If the Physiocrats seem to express a similar preference for agrarianism, however, their underlying rationale for doing so is novel. Whereas Locke develops a philosophy of property that emphasizes enclosures and agricultural labour in order to construct a bulwark against unlimited, authoritarian government, the intention behind Physiocratic thought is precisely to place into state hands the tools required to govern. And whereas Locke views land as inert and barren without human intervention, the Physiocrats view it as a generative, even mysterious force. Tapping into the romanticization of nature characteristic of the era, the Physiocrats developed creative (if now somewhat perplexing) theories that emphasized the unpredictability of nature’s reproductive capacities. The goal was to study, harness and direct “nature’s capacity to multiply itself.” Armed with the new science of life, the
Physiocrats sought to amplify the natural productive tendencies of the earth for state purposes.

The best-known work of the Physiocrat school was Quesnay’s *Tableau économique*, a complex diagram that purports to represent graphically the system of economic exchanges (themselves reflections of nature’s currents). This work has historically attracted commentary by major thinkers from Tocqueville to Marx to Foucault, who often emphasize its visual inventiveness. Instead of focusing on the *Tableau*, however, the relevant shift tracked here is perhaps more easily expressed via an exemplary passage from one of Quesnay’s famous *Éncyclopédia* entries. In a passage simply titled ‘Farmers’, Quesnay writes:

“Agriculture is the inheritance of the sovereign: all its products are visible; one can properly subject them to taxation; financial wealth can evade its share of subsidies; the government can take them only through means which are onerous to the state.”

As the above makes clear, the Physiocrat case for agrarian labour does not rest exclusively, or even primarily, on a Lockean theory of entitlement, nor on the natural productivity of the land, but also on its *visibility to power*. Agrarianism does not merely generate new wealth: it circulates this wealth in highly legible and conspicuous forms. (In both respects, its opposite is finance capital.) The approach taken by the Physiocrats is thus still dependent on the *qualitative distinctiveness* of wealth in land, but links this much more directly to the problem of governance over a national territory. As Tocqueville observed:

“According to the Economists, the State’s role was not just to govern the nation, but to fashion it in a specific direction… For the Economists this power does not come from God, it is not bound by tradition, it is impersonal, it no longer refers to the King, but the State.”

More recently, David McNally has extended Tocqueville’s observation, noting that in as much as Quesnay’s conceptual outlook adopts the “standpoint of the state,” it “demonstrates that his is an exercise in political economy in the traditional sense”. We are already some distance from Locke’s original concerns then, both with respect to the underlying conceptualization of the earth and the purposes to which it is set. A natural law theory of property in the context of a conflict with governmental authority gives way to an expressly state-centred economy theory based upon the natural vitality of the land itself.

*Smith, Ricardo, Malthus*
Published on the eve of the American Revolution in 1776, *The Wealth of Nations* has been called the “grand central terminus” of classical political economy. As E.P. Thompson opined, if the metaphor holds, then it is not because the book serves as primary point of departure, but because it functions as the nexus through which almost all subsequent debates must eventually run. It is a favourite game of rival theorists and economic historians alike to weigh in on Smith’s indebtedness to the Physiocrats (with whom he briefly studied). This larger debate need not delay us much here, however, except to the extent it pertains to the matter of land. With regard to this specific question, we can note that Smith affirms elements of Physiocracy while simultaneously situating them in a broader and more comprehensive theory.

Among its many contributions, Smith’s *opus* undermines the Physiocratic claim that agriculture is the sole source of true wealth. The accumulation of capital had many faces, including industrial manufacturing, trade, and finance. There is therefore no reason to favour agriculture universally at the expense of other sectors of the economy. However, Smith nevertheless still holds that capital invested in the agricultural sector generates more new wealth than investment in any other domain. Although the Physiocrats erred in “representing the class of artificers, manufacturers, and merchants as altogether barren and unproductive,” it is nevertheless true that the “labour of farmers and country labourers is certainly more productive than that of merchants, artificers, and manufacturers. The superior produce of the one class, however, does not render the other barren or unproductive.” Hence we find in *The Wealth of Nations* a ranking of relative capital return in various sectors, with agriculture still at the pinnacle, but now followed by such fields as manufacturing, domestic distributive trade, and foreign exchange. Only the labour of ‘menial servants’ is considered by Smith to be wholly unproductive.

David Ricardo was even more insistent on the importance of agricultural production. His *Principles of Political Economy* reaffirms the land, labour, capital structure found in *The Wealth of Nations*, but places more emphasis on the tensions between their different corresponding classes. In particular, Ricardo locates in the struggle between workers and the landholding class a key to understanding the organization of society as a whole (not, as Marx would later find, between labour and capital). Hence the pride of place given to an analysis of rent in Ricardo’s work. This theme shall be touched upon in a moment in relation to the
competing theories of Robert Malthus. For the moment at least, we can observe that Ricardo considered efficient exploitation of land to be central to economic growth. A fixed supply in land would ultimately result in lower productivity. The resulting decline in the rate of profit within the agricultural industry would shift the terms of trade against industry and dampen the accumulation process as a whole. Ricardo’s solution was to develop systems of taxation (especially on rent) that might encourage efficient land use and improvement. However, as we shall see, others following in his wake (such as J.S. Mill) denied that the supply of land was indeed fixed at all and instead sought resolution through colonial expansion.

Ricardo worked out his theory of rent and land use in a multiyear public conversation with Thomas Robert Malthus. The well-known core of Malthus’s An Essay on the Principle of Population (POP) is the claim that food production increases arithmetically while population increases geometrically. Malthus is thus commonly associated with introducing a calculative and quantitative dimension to an emergent modern bio-politics, and not without good reason. Malthus’s quantitative formulas mask, however, a more profoundly qualitative innovation. In the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, widespread common understanding had it that a large population corresponded more or less directly to economic well-being and national clout. As Jean Bodin put it: “one should never be afraid of having too many subjects or too many citizens, for the strength of the commonwealth consists in men.” This doctrine found its way into a number of later fields of social life, from penology to marital relations. On the former, Bentham was fond of citing Étienne Dumont’s argument against capital punishment, namely, that death was to be avoided at all costs since, “la force et la richesse d’une nation, [c’est] le nombre des hommes.” On the latter issue, the Encyclopaedia Britannica of the period confidently declared, “As the strength and glory of a kingdom or state consist in the multitude of its subjects, celibacy above all things should be discouraged.” In short, prior to the turn of the nineteenth century, population was power. In the emergent world of industrial capitalism, however, the focus was no longer on large populations, but on their efficient use and mobilization, a shift from quantity to quality. Malthus pushed this one step further in arguing that larger populations were more likely to threaten national well-being as secure it. The qualitative management of population growth thereby entered the science of governance.
Malthus’s work overlaps considerably with the Physiocrats and classical political economists such as Smith and Ricardo. With respect to the question of land, his approach might be considered merely another example of the Physiocratic approach insofar as his primary focus is the agricultural sector, still understood as the primary site of wealth production in the form of food and rent. The emphasis on food production is most notable and, given his context, is understandable. While Malthus was working on revisions to the first edition of *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, the first of Britain’s decennial censuses was released, revealing the extent of the population boom in the late eighteenth century.42 Near continuous war with France between 1803 and 1815 saw Britain emerge as the dominant economic and political power in Europe, but also generated massive national debt and spikes in food prices. The enclosure process (popularly associated with the seventeenth century as a result of Marx’s periodization in *Capital*) actually accelerated and expanded during the period when Malthus was writing, reaching a peak in the Napoleonic war years when roughly nine percent of the total land area of England came under parliamentary enclosure.43 It was in the era of post-war stagnation that Britain became a net importer of food, a shift that influenced Malthus and his concern for national self-sufficiency in agricultural production.

While briefly influential, it wasn’t long before Malthus’s views on agricultural production were challenged by rival economists. Through their longstanding public debates, Ricardo came to eventually displace Malthus as the key figure on these issues, often by either outright rejecting the claims of the latter or by subordinating them to his own system. Of paramount importance was Ricardo’s contention that food production was, in fact, not fixed and could be boosted relative to demand. Malthus argued that once land had been maximally distributed and productively used it would reach a natural limit and, from this period on, food production could only advance arithmetically (thus producing a situation of diminishing returns). Ricardo rejected this, maintaining that there was no natural fixity of agricultural production and periods of scarcity were a spur to growth.44 Even when he partially agreed with Malthus, Ricardo often derived alternative policy conclusions from the basic theoretical system. The most dramatic case was Ricardo’s rejection of the Corn Laws, which Malthus publically supported for some time.

Operating in a variety of forms between 1689 and 1846, the so-called ‘Corn Laws’ imposed tariffs upon grains imported into England that required milling. In the late eighteen
and early nineteenth centuries, these taxes were generally opposed by Smithian and Ricardian political economists as violations of the principle of free trade, an unacceptable capitulation to agricultural interests (especially the landed aristocracy), and generally an obstacle to modern industrialization. Malthus, by contrast, wrote several pamphlets and shorter pieces defending the laws and, more broadly, contested Smith’s insistence that trade restrictions could not be used to increase productivity. These writings created a rift between Malthus and more mainstream classical economists of the era who accused him of using outdated Physiocrat theories to defend the conservative interests of the landed gentry. It made him an enemy of, amongst others, James Mill and, later, John Stuart Mill as well.

By contrast, Malthus’s views on the Poor Laws were more widely accepted. In 1796, William Pitt the Younger introduced a set of new Poor Laws, which provided a minimum level of state-funded support to all those whose income fell below a certain level. This support imposed work requirements on the poor, including children as young as five, which attracted some condemnation on moral grounds. (They were, for instance, fiercely criticized by Jeremy Bentham). Malthus objected for different reasons, however. He argued that the laws did not achieve their intended effect. Quite the opposite. They only encouraged population growth, which, in turn, lowered wages and drove up food prices. The Poor Laws had a tendency, first, “to increase population without increasing the food for its support,” and, second, to diminish the share of provisions “that would otherwise belong to more industrious and more worth members, and thus in the same manner forces more to become dependent.” (POP, 39) The fact that the Poor Laws were intertwined with Settlement Laws—i.e., relief was managed through residence within parishes—meant that they had the third pernicious effect of stifling the free movement of labour.

Finally, there is the matter of rent. As we have seen, the Physiocratic influence on classical political economy meant that many otherwise opposing thinkers were in agreement that rent from landed estates was a main source of national income, alongside wages and profits. For the Physiocrats, rent was defined as a return to landowners relative to the excess value of food over and above the costs of production. It was thus indexed to their notion of the natural productivity of the soil. By contrast, in *The Wealth of Nations* Smith treated rent primarily as a mode of profit that accrues to the holders of a monopoly over a scarce and naturally limited resource. It was more about access to a means of production than about the natural productivity of the earth. Malthus held the more strictly Physiocratic view, holding
that land yielded more productive value than was necessary to support those living and working on it. The wealth generated by land was not limited then to rent as payment for access to the means of production. Rather, since land also directly contributed to the national economy in the form of a “bountiful gift of Providence,” the theory of rent should rightly reflect this distinctive value-added quality. As a result of this providence, Malthus conjectured, any attempt to reduce food prices as a vehicle for controlling rent would have the opposite effect: it would make agricultural production less profitable, cause more land to be removed from production, and eventually upset the balance between food production and population growth.

Malthus’s definition of rent as the above-cost value of food had the added political benefit of further ingratiating him to the landed aristocracy. His definition shifted focus to the natural productivity of land and correspondingly deflected from the alternative view, namely, that rent was the expression of a class monopoly over a natural resource and thus came at the expense of actual agricultural producers (not to mention consumers, in the form of food prices). In this regard, Malthus’s view was on the outs. Whereas an earlier generation (not only the Physiocrats, but also Smith) held that the interests of large landholders were ultimately commensurate with the nation as a whole, most major thinkers of the early to mid-nineteenth century political economy shared the view, expressed in the new theory of rent, that the large landholders gained profits primarily by driving up food prices. Rent paid to large landholders was a drain on agricultural production, rather than an honest reflection of it. Ricardo’s work is something of a watershed in the transition between the two understandings. Since he did not accept Malthus’s views on either rent or food production, Ricardo also did not share Malthus’s fears of a general shift away from the agricultural sector and toward manufacturing. Instead, he argued that Britain could rely on the profits from its manufacturing industry to acquire cheap raw materials from abroad and, moreover, that problems with acquiring a stable supply were best resolved through an increasingly liberalized trade policy that opened up access to as many markets as possible, driving down prices and making restrictions less likely. His position eventually won out (for instance, the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846).

Land and the Production of Colonial Space
If Malthus may be grouped in with a broadly Physiocratic tradition, there is an additional element to his work that nevertheless justifies setting it apart as a distinct lineage of land. Malthus not only viewed land from the standpoint of its productive capacity relative to the national economy, but also as a factor in the regulation of political density. By this phrase, I intend not merely the quantitative measure of a population’s size, but its politically significant, qualitative attributes, such as health and education, and their relationship to space. In his concern for the normal, healthy development of society viewed as an entire ‘population’, Malthus exhibits elements of what Michel Foucault would later theorize as biopolitics. However, Malthus was also concerned with class stratification and, vitally for our purposes here, geospatial concentration. The concern then was not merely with the biopolitical health of the population considered as a mass, but also its vertical organization (stratification and class composition) and its horizontal distribution. A relatively small, but highly stratified and densely packed population is a breeding ground (for Malthus, quite literally) for all manner of individual and social pathology. A densely populated underclass constitutes what Malthus terms an “overcharged population” (POP, 62), ripe for political upheaval and/or culling by a variety of natural checks, such as plague and famine.

In his concern with density, concentration, and biopolitical management, Malthus contributed to the recoding of land as abstract space. Malthus viewed the amount of land held by a country not only in terms of its productive capacity, but also as a determining factor in population density. To anticipate our discussion to come, this has important implications for the distinctiveness of colonization. Once one adopts a Malthusian concern with the spatial distribution of populations, it becomes possible to imagine colonial expansion and land acquisition as a political technology in the management of growth and the dispersal of various ‘redundant populations’ (the kinds of ‘surplus labourers’ or ‘industrial reserve army’ that Marx later theorizes, drawing explicitly upon Malthus). Colonization of those supposedly empty and underutilized territorial expanses of the earth thus becomes a viable extension of the new political economy.

Instrumental ‘Anti-Colonialism’

If it is correct to say that debates in classical political economy of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries display at least three different conceptions of land—Lockean,
Physiocratic, and Malthusian—it is not yet demonstrated that these played any significant role in colonial policies of the era. In fact, there is evidence to the contrary. Both Smith and Ricardo, for instance, were relatively consistent opponents of schemes to found new colonies abroad. At the turn of the nineteenth century at least, both schools of political economy tended to view colonization as unnecessary at best, disastrous at worst. The economic benefits to Britain were either non-existent or insignificant compared to what might be reaped through similar capital investment at home, especially when combined with liberal trade policies between free, independent states. Adding more land to the nation was not necessary for a modern, capitalist, ‘free trade’ society, but an outdated throwback to earlier visions of empire. In this way, these schools of political economy also reflected a general scepticism about the benefits of colonization in the wake of the U.S. revolutionary war. The general atmosphere in Britain from roughly 1780 to 1820 was thus one of reticence and uncertainty with regard to the colonial question.

It must be noted that any expression of ‘anti-colonial’ sentiment in this period was almost never a result of concern for Indigenous peoples in newly acquired lands. No major work in political economy attempts to reconstruct the perspective of Indigenous peoples in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, or the United States and/or analyze colonization from their standpoint. Rather, the debate pivots upon the economic and political benefits of dependency relations between settlers and the metropole. The prevalence of anti-colonial sentiment during these decades derives from the growing sense that colonization is costly and inefficient, and that Great Britain can achieve global supremacy more effectively by other means (e.g., ‘free trade imperialism’). For instance, Smith’s extended analysis of colonialism in Book IV of *The Wealth of Nations* focuses largely on the deleterious effects of artificially enforced trade monopolies, which he views as “necessarily hurtful” to all parties. Liberal trade between the metropole and a “natural and free” colony is, by contrast, viewed as “always and necessarily beneficial.” Although Ricardo’s took a somewhat different route in his reasoning, he reached many of the same conclusions. Ricardo also reduces the polarity of the ‘colonial relation’ to the settler-metropole dyad (ignoring altogether any distinct Indigenous interests), and focuses almost exclusively on the matter of free trade between them. While he concurs with Smith that colonial trade restrictions are a hindrance to economic liberty and long-term growth, unlike Smith, he at least concedes that politically (and militarily) enforced trade monopolies are beneficial to dominant parties in the
immediate term. In general then, classical political economy at the turn of the nineteenth century was primarily anti-colonial, although only in a very narrow sense. As Donald Winch summarizes this: "Colonial trade restrictions stood condemned on free-trade grounds; colonial markets were held to have no effect, beneficial or otherwise, on profits; nor were they necessary for the employment of the surplus capital of the mother country." However, to the extent that major thinkers of classical political economy in this period can be said to have adopted an 'anti-colonial' position, this tended to translate into a plea for 'responsible government' and independent home rule for already existing white settler societies. In this way, this brand of 'anti-colonialism' was likely just as unsatisfactory to the Indigenous peoples trying to defend their lands from Anglo settler predation (a fact that is similarly glossed in the secondary literature in this field).

Finally, recalling the contrast with the Lockean tradition to precede it, it is important to highlight the extent to which these debates pivoted upon an essentially utilitarian—or, perhaps more generally, instrumental—calculation. The focus of this early dispute is on the relative benefits of colonization, not on Britons’ underlying moral entitlement to engage in the practice. In fact, in an increasingly utilitarian form of argumentation, the two questions came to converge. The idea that colonization fulfilled a moral imperative whose foundation could be arrived at independently of a utilitarian calculation of benefit—for instance, that it realizes the ultimate purpose of the natural world—is largely foreign to this debate. In this way, we can see that the argument has moved beyond the framework advanced by Locke.

Since the ‘anti-colonialism’ of turn of the century classical political economy was largely based upon an instrumental calculation of benefit, it could be relatively easily turned about by its own reasoning. Beginning in the 1820s, enthusiasm for colonization began to rise once more as the works of the classical economists came to directly inform and buttress new colonization schemes. A series of new societies and corporations were founded whose purpose was to coordinate land appropriation efforts abroad with lobbying over allocation schemes at home. These included the National Colonization Society (1830), the South Australian Association (1834), the New Zealand Association (1839), the New Zealand Land Company (1841), and the Colonial Reform Society (1850). The Colonial Reform movement, as it came to be generally known, grew in size and influence and built a new consensus on the viability of colonization, often drawing resources from the classical political economists particularly with respect to land. Three central figures in this were Robert Torrens Sr.
(1780-1864), Edward Gibbon Wakefield (1796-1862), and Robert Wilmot-Horton (1784-1841). As Torrens and Wakefield are discussed in other chapters, the focus here is with the last of this trio.

Colonial Resurgence

Perhaps more so than any other single figure, Robert Wilmot-Horton serves to demonstrate how Physiocrat and Malthusian conceptions of land came to be rearticulated through colonial practice. In addition to being a prolific writer on the topic, Horton was able to directly implement his vision of colonization, serving as Under-Secretary of State for War and the Colonies (1821-28) and then as Governor of Ceylon (1831-37). In this way, he articulates the relation between the classical political economists and Anglo settler colonization in the field.

Horton is best known as an enthusiastic agent of colonial-emigration schemes, which sought to move thousands of poor and under-employed workers to ‘empty’ lands in the ‘true colonies’, focusing particularly on the transplanting of Irish families—themselves recently displaced from various rounds of enclosures—to Canada. Horton developed his case for colonial-emigration on a theory of wages adapted from the classical political economists. He argued that if the working population grew too fast, then wages would fall and poverty would increase. This matter was made all the more pressing by the simultaneous consolidation of agricultural land-holdings into larger estates, which was meant to increase productivity in the long-run, but in the short term exacerbated problems associated with rapid urbanization and pauperism and led to a dip in food production. To enable landowners and parishes to take advantage of the benefits of emigration, Horton argued that the government should make loans to parishes on the security of a mortgage on the poor rates. He was opposed to what he called ‘desultory emigration’ and proposed a more coordinated effort, for instance, suggesting that emigrants to be given land (especially in Canada) together with agricultural implements and provisions for a year.

In the early 1820s there were a series of organized political disturbances in southern Ireland. As Chairman of the Select Committee of Emigration at the time, Horton was quick to attribute these to the existence of a large body of unemployed and dissatisfied persons and connect the matter to his own plans for colonial-emigration. He believed that a plan to
dispose of this surplus population through mass emigration would restore political
“tranquillity”. Horton argued that the current state of the United Kingdom (especially vis-à-vis Ireland) meant that any plan for increasing the rate of capital accumulation or for increasing the flow of capital could be taken up successfully only “after the absorption of part of the redundant population, by the means of a well regulated emigration.” Horton referred to this process as the “abstraction” of labour, holding that the excess supply of labour could be resolved in punctuated acts of colonial displacement without influencing the mortality or fertility rates of the population. Arguing this required some conceptual innovation, however. As Horton insisted, classical economists would need to view the local labour market as part of a global whole, taking means to shift populations across huge expanses, even continents, when necessary.

Ensuing summary reports on Horton’s Committee give us a clear picture of the conceptualization of ‘redundant’ (or, in Malthus’s phrasing, ‘overcharged’) populations and demonstrate the circuit that connected these displaced European workers to settler colonization schemes abroad. In his summary of the Committee’s findings, then Anglican Bishop of Toronto John Strachan made these linkages explicit and usefully clarifies the terminology of the period. He relates that, by “redundancy of population,” the Committee does not mean to suggest that there is “absolutely an excess of population in the United Kingdom.” Rather, “the redundancy here meant is, that the demand is not equal to the supply of labour.” The greatest part of this redundancy, Strachan reports, is the result of the British “plan of consolidating farms” in Ireland. The resulting “disturbances” risk engulfing the whole of the United Kingdom in a “scene of anarchy, rapine, and misery.” The only solution is to export these populations to the colonies, which, with their ample, fertile lands, are “well adapted to their reception, offering good neighbourhood, health, independence, and even opulence.”

Through such argumentation, Horton’s efforts during the 1820s and 30s to promote colonial emigration slowly paid off. In 1823 and 1825 the government supported emigration from Ireland to Canada along the lines suggested by his plan, enabling some 2,500 emigrants to leave Ireland at a cost to the taxpayer of over £56,000. Although doubts were expressed as to the success of these ventures, especially as they proved to be so expensive, Horton succeeded in obtaining parliamentary consent for the appointment of two Select Committees,
in 1826 and 1827, to examine the whole question of emigration in the light of these experiments.⁶⁸

Several key British intellectuals were recruited to lend credence to this colonial emigration scheme. Robert Malthus proved especially pivotal to its eventual success. Despite privately confessing his doubts as to the long-term viability of the plan, Malthus publicly supported Horton on numerous occasions, including serving as a “star witness” at the 1826 Parliamentary Committee on Emigration. There, Malthus testified that the empirical evidence and “general reasoning and scientific principles” alike supported the case for colonial emigration.⁶⁹

Part of Malthus’s interest in colonial emigration policies of this sort must have derived from the widespread sense that they were a natural extension of his own version of political economy. James Mill— a disciple of Ricardo and otherwise frequent critic of Malthus—directly connected Horton’s vision to the Malthusian framework, calling it a natural working out of the “practical consequences of the Principle of Population.”⁷⁰ Mill, along with Ricardo himself, publically supported the emigration schemes, even while qualifying their enthusiasm.⁷¹ As he wrote:

“It is only, in certain circumstances… that a body of people can be advantageously removed from one country, for the purposes of colonizing another. In the first place, it is necessary that the land which they are about to occupy, should be capable of yielding a greater return to their labour than the land which they leave; otherwise, though relief is given to the population they leave behind, their won circumstances are not better than they would have been had they remained… the expense of removal from the mother country to the colonizing country, should not be too great; and that expense is usually created by distance.

If the expense is too great, the population which remains behind in the mother country, may suffer more by the loss of capital, than it gains by the diminution of numbers. It has been often enough, and clearly enough, explained that it is only capital which gives employment to labour; we may, therefore, take it as a postulate. A certain quantity of capital, then, is necessary to give employment to the population, which any removal for the sale of colonization may leave behind. But if, to afford the expense of that removal, so much is taken from the capital of the country, that the remainder is not sufficient for
the employment of the remaining population, there is in that case, a redundancy of population, and all the evils which it brings.”

This seems to have been Malthus’s own position, though he tended not to express his reservations too loudly when in public. In the late 1820s and early 1830s, Horton and Malthus exchanged numerous letters on the issue, in which Malthus confessed his ambivalence. While acknowledging its temporary need, Malthus had difficulty accepting Horton’s reassurance that large-scale assistance to emigration would not constitute a stimulus to population growth. In *The Principle of Population*, Malthus had already acknowledged that the settler colonies appeared not to suffer from the same “want of room and food” (*POP*, 49) plaguing Great Britain. The colonization of new lands appeared then as an ideal scenario for the resolution of European woes since in these spaces, “the knowledge and industry of an old state operate on the fertile unappropriated land of a new one.” (*POP*, 60) This claim appeared to sit in some tension with Malthus’s generally pessimistic view, however, since it seemed to show that barriers to growth were in fact temporary and artificial, and had been largely overcome in America. To ward off this potential criticism, Malthus countered with a different narrative of colonial expansion. Although it was true that the American colonies had achieved enormous population growth—having been “found to double itself in twenty-five years” (*POP*, 16)— this miraculous combination of growth and well-being was only temporary because it was ultimately founded upon a limited and exceptional basis: access to enormous amounts of land. As Malthus argued, “the happiness of the Americans depended much less upon their peculiar degree of civilization than upon the peculiarity of their situation as new colonies, upon their having a great plenty of fertile uncultivated land.” (*POP*, 138) What his more optimistic critics failed to see was that even a society founded under such ideal conditions would eventually go awry. The natural good fortune of the American colonies could only delay the inevitable because limits to perfectability are intrinsic to human sociality itself, not merely a function of technical incapacity or lack of resources. Human institutions can guide and correct the natural passions, but only in relatively superficially manner— like “mere feathers that float on the surface” (*POP*, 75). More specifically, “[w]hen these two fundamental laws of society, the security of property and the institution of marriage, were once established, inequality of
conditions must necessarily follow… It has appeared that, from the inevitable laws of our nature, some human beings must suffer from want.” (POP, 85)

Reference here to marriage points to a further Malthusian concern. From Malthus’s standpoint, one weakness of Horton’s scheme was that, in order for it to address overpopulation and pauperism at home, it would need to promote emigration amongst the least ‘civilized’ classes. The uneducated, dislocated, impoverished and displaced Irish were the paradigmatic face of colonial emigration in the minds of both Horton and Malthus. However, as Malthus continually pointed out to his colleague, these were precisely the sort of people to ignore his other recommendations for population control. They showed little concern for delaying marriage, birth control, and small families. Thus, displacing them might provide England some temporary relief but, in the long run, this was unlikely to satisfy Malthusian anxieties with overpopulation on a larger scale.

Partially in response to these concerns, Horton began to couple his arguments for colonial-emigration with forms of ‘home colonization’. In the latter case, surplus labourers would be confined to work camps in England and given state-facilitated labour to keep them occupied and productive. These ‘domestic colonies’ still had a distinctly agrarian bent, often emphasizing the moral benefits of farm labour (recalling the Lockean framework), as well as being oriented towards the reclamation of waste lands (Horton thought the paradigmatic case for such home colonization were camps focused on the reclamation of bog lands in Ireland). Thus, he conceded that colonial-emigration was no panacea and ought to be viewed as one weapon in a larger arsenal aimed at diminishing and dispersing the ‘redundant populations’. As he put it:

“Colonization abroad, as a remedy for the evils of a relatively redundant population is, and has been, with me, only a subordinate object of enquiry. I consider it only as the best and cheapest mode of disposing of that superfluous labouring population from the general labour market, which I contend to be the main remedy for the distressed condition of the labouring classes in the United Kingdom, inasmuch as it is that superfluous labour which is not wanted by any party as a means of production, which deteriorates the condition of the whole labouring classes collectively.

Horton goes on to suggest that if it could be shown that “the superfluous population so abstracted can be disposed of more economically and more advantageously at home than abroad,” he would “never be found to press for a moment the remedy of Colonial
Emigration.” However, since such an alternative method of abstraction had not been found, the latter was the only true and viable solution.⁷⁹

By the 1830s, Malthus’s rather tepid support for colonial emigration began to drive a wedge between him and its more enthusiastic supporters. An example of this can be found in the writings of Nassau Senior, whose *Two Lectures on Population* and *Outline of the Science of Political Economy* both distance themselves from Malthusian population theory precisely because it does not provide sufficient justification for colonization.⁸⁰ The Scottish economist and Ricardo disciple, J.R. McCulloch, provides another example. Rejecting strict Malthusiansim as too pessimistic, McCulloch took the lead amongst economists in supporting Horton more directly.⁸¹ Those more aligned with Malthus (such as James Mill) thought that stricter birth control measures and public education could better control population than emigration (although most Malthusians still saw colonial emigration as an important tool, even if only a palliative one). Those who took a more critical view of Malthus were even more favourably disposed towards colonial emigration schemes. Unfortunately for Horton, many of them eventually became convinced that even his emigration schemes did not go far enough. As a result, men such as Nassau Senior and Robert Torrens eventually went over to Wakefield’s position, believing a more robust and systematic project of colonization was required.⁸²

In short, by the 1830s, the general view was that colonization and classical political economy were complementary, not competing projects. This was a surprising turn, given that the two ‘founding fathers’ of the latter field (Smith and Ricardo) had themselves never shown much enthusiasm for the former. The renewed case for colonial dispossession was at least in part a function of the recoding of land itself in this period. Colonial advocates drew less and less upon expressly republican or Lockean idioms—with their emphasis on the virtuousness of agrarian landholding and/or improvement. Instead, they emphasized the unique, wealth-generating properties of arable land and the need for spatial redistribution of redundant populations. Land had simultaneously become a site of productive industry and a field of abstract space. It remained only to formally square these frames alongside its more strictly commodity form. For this, we can look to the contributions of John Stuart Mill.
Having reconstructed some of the relevant steps in the recoding of land relations in Physiocracy and classical political economy, it is now possible to analyze Mill’s contributions to these debates in a new light. It is not difficult to track his debt to the context discussed above since Mill makes the linkages clear enough. In particular, Mill offers his writings on political economy as an elaboration of Ricardo’s economic theories.

For Mill, as for Ricardo, the exchange value of a commodity is determined by the relationship between supply and demand within a given market. However, exchange values are constrained by the ‘natural value’ of the commodity, which is determined by the conditions of production. These conditions are ‘objectively’ given in the sense that they are not determined by the market, but rather by the minimum inputs required for the production of the item in question. (For instance, the basic subsistence requirements of workers.) Natural values are set by long-run marginal costs, which is the minimum compensation threshold the exchange value must meet. Innovation in the organization of labour or in the technology of production can lower the necessary inputs, thus dropping natural values over time. They cannot, however, completely remove them. The only circumstance in which such values could be removed altogether would be one in which all our material needs were supplied directly by nature in a form that required no modification by human intervention.  

Like most other works of classical political economy, Mill’s *The Principles of Political Economy* is organized into a tripartite analysis of land, labour, and capital, the “three requisites of production” (*PPE*, 46). Land is separated out as a category of analysis in both empirical-descriptive and normative-prescriptive registers. It is foundational to both the structure of economic development, and as a special case in the normative defence of private property. Across these registers, land comes to take on a variety of different meanings and symbolic valences as, for instance, a site of production, a commodity to be traded, and a spatial field upon which human societies are situated.

Mixing an economic analysis with normative theory generates certain tensions, however. For instance, when viewed from the standpoint of a normative theory of property relations, Mill will insist that land constitutes a qualitatively different form of property, irreducible to the menagerie of commodities produced by the mixture of capital and labour. This argument depends upon maintaining a distinction between real and chattel property, which sits in some tension with a commodity logic of abstraction that levels such distinctions. The unique
status of land persists and explains why it is not collapsed into the categories of labour or capital. Mill goes so far as to identify three social classes based on their relation to the three requisites of production—capitalists, labourers, and landowners—each representing a distinct cluster of roles, functions and interests (PPE, 46).

One of the main objectives of The Principles of Political Economy is to give private property the “fair trial” (PPE, 15) it has never had because of a tendency to conflate its ideal form with its institutional realization in actually-existing capitalist societies of the time. In order to imagine an ideal case, Mill invites us to consider private property as it might function under the perfected conditions of universal, modern education, combined with a regime of population control (PPE, 16). In a trope we have see reoccur time and again—and harkening back to the quote that opened this chapter—Mill suggests that this thought experiment would be assisted by assuming a kind of temporal zero point, a kind of ‘original contract’, so as to prevent the ideal operation of private property from distortion due to historical inheritance. This is clearest in the epigraph with which this chapter begin, where Mill expressly invites his readers to imagine themselves as “a body of colonists, occupying for the first time an uninhabited country” (PPE, 7-8). Mill contends that under such circumstances it would be reasonable to adopt a normative theory of private property that is essentially desert-based. At the very least, this would mean that one would acquire a property right in the products of one’s direct labour. As he puts it,

“The institutions of property, when limited to its essential elements, consists in the recognition, in each person, of a right to the exclusive disposal of what he or she have produced by their own exertions, or received either by it or by fair agreement, without force or fraud, from those who produced it. The foundation of the whole is, the right of producers to what they themselves have produced.” (PPE, 25; emphasis added)

Mill anticipates an objection to this relatively simple formulation: current property rights do not merely extent over the products of labour, but also their means, for which the owners were not directly responsible. Labour power is, in fact, “only one of the conditions which must combine for the production of the community” (PPE, 25; emphasis added). Labour must also be combined with what Mill calls the “stock of necessaries provided in advance.” This stock is a combination of “the fruits of previous labour,” (PPE, 25), to which the current owners cannot lay claim, and the fruits of nature, to which no one can lay claim.
(Adam Smith referred to this initial assemblage as primary accumulation, from which Marx later built his theory of primitive accumulation.) Mill writes:

“The essential principle of property being to assure to all persons what they have produced by their labour and accumulated by their abstinence, this principle cannot apply to what is not the produce of labour, the raw material of the earth. If the land derived its productive power wholly from nature, and not at all from industry, or if there were any means of discriminating what is derived from each source, it not only would not be necessary, but it would be the height of injustice, to let the gift of nature be engrossed by individuals.” (PPE, 37-38)

This issue was, of course, already raised by Locke, who attempted to resolve it by denying the productive power of land and linking entitlement to self-preservation (and God’s directives). In an important sense, this is a different problem for Mill’s theory of private property. It is a problem even in the highly abstract, counter-factual scenario Mill envisions because Mill retains a Physiocrat ascription of productive agency to nature. If land contributes directly to the production of wealth, then private property rights do not seem to directly correspond to a desert argument because the distribution of property and wealth seems also dependent upon such contingent and arbitrary factors as the productive capacity of one’s land at any given time.

Mill combines this concern with another of a different order. He groups together this ‘ideal theory’ problem (really stemming from his understanding of land) with a non-ideal problem, that is, a problem related to any actually-existing regime of private property. This is Mill’s account of the problem of dispossession. This second order concern is that the means of production may have been acquired in some unjust way, which produces an uneven bargaining field and makes the subsequent agreements between labourers and the owners of the means of production unfair in some relevant sense. So it may be both about an ‘original injustice’ (an original theft, for instance) and about the injustice of the relationships that flows from the structuring effects of the original event. Mill recognizes that ‘free agreements’ entered into under uneven and unfair conditions are themselves tainted by the original injustice. He realizes that in almost all real cases, capital was not created solely by the labourer of the “present possessor,” but was rather

“created by the labour and abstinence of some former person, who may indeed have been wrongfully dispossessed of it, but who, in the present age of the world, much more
probably transferred his claims to the present capitalist by gift or voluntary contract: and
the abstinence at least must have been continued by each successive owner, down to the
present.”

If this is true, then “those who have inherited the savings of others have an advantage which
they may have in no way deserved, over the industrious whose predecessors have not left
them anything” (PPE, 25-26). In other words, Mill recognizes that the normative
justification of a system of private property is threatened by the fact that the initial
distribution of resources is justifiably unequal.

Those familiar with Mill’s general philosophical framework can anticipate that he
attempts to resolve this issue on broadly utilitarian grounds. He admits the reality of
unearned advantage in the distribution of wealth and property under capitalism, but
contends that this is consistent with justice when it facilitates the general improvement of
the well-being of the whole. Under conditions of dispossession and/or unearned inheritance,

“while it is true that the labourers are at a disadvantage compared with those whose
predecessors have saved, it is also true that the labourers are far better off than if those
predecessors had not saved. They share in the advantage, though not to an equal extent
with the inheritors.” (PPE, 25-26)

This is essentially then an instrumental-utilitarian argument for both (a) accepting the
original unjust distribution of land and property, and (b) for the inequalities subsequently
produced by the asymmetrical relations of exchange it engenders, what Marx will later term
dispossession and exploitation respectively. These circumstances are acceptable to Mill under
the condition that they improve the welfare of all.

This does not mean that inherited relationships of ownership cannot be questioned or
modified. In fact, with respect to the question of land, Mill shows fair concern for the
problems that arise when a landed aristocracy is permitted to take root. In the context of his
discussion of landed aristocracy (PPE, 265-273), Mill considers the matter of a right of
appropriation: whether such a right exists and, if it does, what limits might be justly placed
upon it. Since the general framework here is that of a utilitarian defence of civilizational
progress (discussed in greater detail below), this provides the criteria for determining both
the soundness of original appropriation and the limitations to it. In other words,
appropriating from the commons is justified for Mill when it can be shown to improve the
common lot of all. When it cannot, then we are justified in either restricting further unequal
appropriation or, in more extreme cases, even (re)appropriating from the established landed property classes. Since *improvement* is a key element in the general theory, mere possession or occupation of land is not a sufficient condition for continued recognition of property rights. In an argument that blends Lockean and Physiocratic element, Mill places a special emphasis on the relationship between improvement and cultivation:

“When land is not intended to be cultivated, no good reason can in general be given for its being private property at all; and if any one is permitted to call it his, he ought to know that he holds it by sufferance of the community, and on an implied condition that his ownership, since it cannot possible do them any good, at least shall not deprive them of any, which could have derived from the land if it had been unappropriated… The species at large still retains, of its original claim to the soil of the planet which it inhabits, as much as is compatible with the purposes for which it has parted with the remainder.” (PPE, 43)

This emphasis on cultivation differs from a strictly Lockean one, however, since it is less related to a theory of agrarian virtue (at the level of the individual) and more connected to Physiocratic and Malthusian concerns with food production and societal growth (at the level of the population).

This utilitarian framework is highly flexible, and can be mobilized both to defend and critique inequality in real property (i.e., access to land). In an argument that will eventually have important implications for the Anglo settler world, Mill places restrictions upon our ability to overturn property arrangements that arise through unjust dispossession. There are some instances in which accepting current circumstances is necessary, even if we must concede that these conditions have their historical origins in injustice:

“Possession which has not been legally questioned within a moderate number of years, ought to be, as by the laws of all nations it is, a complete title. Even when the acquisition was wrongful, the dispossession, after a generation has elapsed, of the probably bona fide possessors, by the revival of a claim which had been long dormant, would generally be a greater injustice, and almost always a greater private and public mischief, than leaving the original wrong without atonement. It may seem hard that a claim, originally just, should be defeated by mere lapse of time; but there is a time after which (even looking at the individual case, and without regard to the general effect on the security of possessors), the balance of hardship turns the other way.” (PPE, 27)
We shall see how these concerns, generated from a normative theoretical standpoint, play out differently in a colonial context later in this chapter. For now, however, we can at least observe how Mill saw them cashing out in the British context.

As a matter of empirical fact, Mill estimates that landed property in England is “very far” from satisfying the conditions of justice and that, as a result, the claims of the landowner classes should be “altogether subordinate to the general policy of the state.” (PPE, 40-41) In a curious inversion of terminology then (common now to most private property regimes), expropriation comes to designate the practice of apprehending private property for public, state purposes (i.e., eminent domain). With respect to land, Mill therefore adopts the classical political economy approach: because agriculture is important to the national economy, inefficient and wasteful use of the land invalidates feudal rights of ownership in landed estates.

We have seen some of the ways in which Mill viewed real estate or “landed property” as “a different thing from other property,” (PPE, 40-41) in part because it is not mobile in the way that other commodities are, and in part because it possesses a certain agency in the actual production process. It is necessary to admit that non-human agency plays a role in the productive capacity of land (in order, for instance, to account for the different yields resulting from the same labour input), and this has an impact on the general normative theory of property because it impinges upon pure desert-based arguments that would attempt to derive entitlement directly from labour input. Given the differential productivity of the soil, equal labour input generates unequal results. This undermines any purely desert-based moral defence of private property, which Mill seeks to overcome by appealing to the general utilitarian goal of welfare maximization. Although he admits something of a common inheritance of the earth to humanity as a whole, he considers its unequal partitioning just when consistent with the broader goals of progress (defined in utilitarian terms): “No man made the land. It is the original inheritance of the whole species. Its appropriation is wholly a question of general expediency.” (PPE, 40-41) It is, of course, essentially an empirical question as to whether the earth has been ‘improved’ in such a manner that the general welfare of all has been lifted along with it and (even if one were to accept this point), secondarily, whether the system of private appropriation is really necessary to this process. The point here is simply that Mill certainly accepted both of these
claims; together, they play a central role in stitching together the economic and normative-theoretical components of his work. Mill took it as nearly self-evident that there was a vast different between “the earth as it is, with its clearings and improvements, its roads and canals, its towns and manufactories, and the earth as it was when the first human being set foot on it,” and that the befits of this transformation extend far beyond “those who are called the owners of the soil.” (PPE, 251) Of course, this has an added benefit of making the theory more practicable because, at any rate, distinguishing the ‘non-human’ from the ‘human improvement’ aspects of any particular, actual piece of land would be impossible. 

Such a framework can generate highly variable public outcomes, including both the defence and expropriation of landed estates. These different courses of action are ultimately justified by an underlying appeal to general welfare. The defence of appropriation and re-appropriation ultimately rests upon generally utilitarian grounds and is connected to conceptions of progress and improvement. Contained implicitly within these issues are two related questions which we can now address more directly: (a) What is the ultimate end or purpose of the civilizational development of which private property and capitalist accumulation is an integral part? and; (b) To what extent does the correct (non-pathological) form of civilizational development happen ‘naturally’, that is, without state guidance or interference, purely by the uncoordinated activity of individuals?

With regard to the first question, Mill echoes a common refrain of classical political economy (particularly derived from Ricardo), that economic growth ought ultimately lead to a balanced, dynamic equilibrium, which he terms a ‘stationary state’ (PPE, 124-6). This stationary state consists in a highly normatively charged, utopian civilizational telos. The goal of social and economic development is not, for Mill, endless growth for its own sake, but rather the achievement of a stationary state in which welfare can be maximized, and wherein ‘welfare’ is understood in a relatively expansive sense, what Mill terms “the Art of Living (PPE, 129).

To understand the relationship between the ‘art of living’, the stationary state, and the model of civilizational development Mill is advancing here, it is perhaps helpful to look beyond The Principles of Political Economy. In an earlier essay simply titled ‘Civilization’ (1836), Mill distinguishes between two common uses of that charged term: a purely empirical or descriptive sense, meant to capture various features of what now travels under the terms ‘modernization’ or ‘development’ (which can have both positive and negative elements)
versus a strictly normative sense of the term (designating only the positive elements of the previously identified processes). Mill makes clear that he understands the term in the first sense:

“We shall in the present article invariably use the word civilization in the narrow sense: not that in which it is synonymous with improvement, but that in which it is the direct converse or contrary of rudeness or barbarism. Whatever be the characteristics of what we call savage life, the contrary of these, or rather the qualities which society puts on as it throws off these, constitute civilization.”

As we can see from this quote, Mill employs ‘savagery’ as foil against which he can define his understanding of civilization, a common and convenient device of argumentation in his time. Here, as in PPE, Mill lists a variety of features that combine to produce civilizational development or modernization in this sense. They include population growth, commerce, agriculture, co-operation, law and private property, and, importantly, these all hang together as a modular package and are not separable: “they begin together, always coexist, and accompany each other in their growth.” The problem for Mill is that, while this civilizational development lifts modern humanity up out of the condition of ‘savagery’, it produces its own novel pathologies and distortions. If not guided and controlled in some way, progress can lead to stagnation, decay and, echoing Tocqueville, new forms of mass rule, soft despotism or, as he phrases it later in On Liberty, “social tyranny”. If there is one concern that Mill held consistently throughout his career, it was the fear that, with “the natural growth of civilization, power passes from individuals to masses, and the weight and importance of an individual, as compared with the mass, sink into greater and greater insignificance.” So civilizational development can produce distinct forms of social and political domination and, related, torpor and moral decay in individuals and populations alike.

We can see that, for Mill, endless growth (whether economic or demographic) cannot be an end in itself. Rather, true progress (in the limited, normative sense) can be achieved only in the realization of a stationary state that maximizes the welfare of all through the enabling of true ‘arts of living’. This means then that Mill has criteria for distinguishing proper from improper government intervention quite independent from mere economic development. Book V of PPE is devoted to elaborating these criteria and providing concrete examples of their utility. Here, Mill distinguishes between what he terms ‘necessary’ versus ‘optional’ functions of government. He uses this distinction to criticize both the socialists (who
mistakenly view optional interventions as necessary) and the total laissez-faire capitalists (who believe there to be almost necessary interventions). The necessary functions of government for Mill are more numerous than one might expect. They comprise basic functions such as protection from violence, the administration of property regimes and rights, enforcement of contract, and dispute resolution, but they also include what he calls the ‘evidentiary function’ (the keeping of documents, statistics, etc.) and the ‘fiduciary function’ (directly caring for those who cannot care for themselves). Mill considers at length various forms of taxation as a manner of government intervention in the service of one or more of these objectives (including income, inheritance, and commodity taxes; ground and building rents; import duties, etc.), and generally supports what we would term today a ‘progressive’ taxation scheme. He also considers scientific development, exploration, and support of the ‘learned classes’ (e.g. university chairs) worthy causes for government support (PPE, 363-364), as well as some forms of public welfare for the alleviation of poverty (PPE, 354-356). These concerns have lead some commentators to conclude that Mill is better aligned with a democratic-socialist tradition than a strictly liberal one. However, Mill opposed government intervention in the form of trade protectionism, based on ‘Mercantile Theory’ (PPE, 298), in favour of ‘free trade’ policies. This last discussion is clearly closely related to the question of colonies because, as we shall see, Mill aims to square a critique of government intervention in the form of trade protection (e.g. Corn Laws) with an even more ambitious program of colonial expansion, all the while holding that both are extensions of the new political economy.

Colonization

In his discussion of the need for government guidance towards the normatively preferred form of civilizational development, Mill leaves a rather wide exception to what is normally thought of as a relatively restrictive set of conditions. He argues that government intervention is justified, even required, in the case that individual acts “involve consequences extending indefinitely beyond them,” and include the “interests of the nation or of posterity, for which society in its collective capacity is alone able, and alone bound, to provide.” (PPE, 357) Mill’s primary example of this is colonization, and the general rationale for including colonization in this category links us directly back up with this theory of progress:
“The question of government intervention in the work of Colonization involves the future and permanent interests of civilization itself, and far outstretches the comparatively narrow limits of purely economical considerations… To appreciate the benefits of colonization, it should be considered in its relation, not to a single country, but to the collective economic interests of the human race.” (PPE, 357-358)

In order to properly understand Mill’s discussion of colonization in the context of his broader political economy, we must take note of the specific sense with which he employs the term. Mill is quite clear that when he uses the words ‘colonialism’ or ‘colonization’ he intends a distinct form of pacific emigration and resettlement. It is “the removal of population from the overcrowded to the unoccupied parts of the earth’s surface.” (PPE, 357) Thus, Mill certainly does not intend to use the term as exchangeable with imperialism, empire, or their cognates, nor does he consider colonialism to be directly related to war, violence, or indigenous subjugation to any significant degree. In fact, the entire analysis of colonial operations can proceed, for him, virtually without mentioning Indigenous peoples at all. Having reconstructed elements of it, we now know that the debate he is intervening into here is based upon separating out the colonial question from that of broader matters of British empire and, equally, the status of Indigenous peoples. Rather, Mill is debating with those thinkers who either took settler colonial expansion to be undesirable or who thought it could or should occur without government intervention at all (the main Smithian and Ricardian positions before him). In a clear reference to the debates between Torrens, Horton, and Wakefield, Mill also opposes himself to “emigration on the voluntary basis,” which he admits, “rarely has any material influence in lightening the pressure of population in the old country, though as far as it goes it is doubtless a benefit to the colony.” (PPE, 358)

In this debate, the single most important figure that Mill enlists to his side is Edward Gibbon Wakefield. Wakefield’s model of ‘systematic colonization’ stands as the paradigm of effective colonial expansion, leading to the kind of moral, social, and economic progress Mill commends. This is not because Mill is unfamiliar with other thinkers on the topic. He does, for instance, briefly consider Adam Smith’s writings on the matter, only to reject them as insufficiently theorized and systematized. He also mentions the influential Scottish theologian and prominent Malthusian political economist, Thomas Chalmers, whose work is said to be not without merit, but nevertheless “much more confused” than even that of
Mill intentionally turns instead to Wakefield as the key thinker on the topic because the colonial adventurer “takes a much clearer view of the subject, and arrives, through a substantially correct series of deductions, at practical conclusions which appear to me just and important.” (PPE, 102) Of Wakefield’s work, Mill states that he has “nothing to object,” apart from the fact that the colonialist exaggerates the novelty of his intervention. In other words, Mill reads Wakefield as largely consistent with the prevailing treads in political economy at the time.

Mill’s use and appropriation of Wakefield is surprisingly consonant with the one we find two decades later in Das Capital. Like Marx, Mill attributes to Wakefield the central insight that so-called ‘artificial’, state intervention is required in order to set up the initial conditions for capitalist production and reproduction. The so-called ‘Wakefield system of colonization’ basically consists in setting a state-imposed value on the price of land, rather than permitting the value of land to be set by normal competition between supply and demand. Land, as we have already seen, while subject to forces of commodification, is a form of ‘real’ or ‘immovable’ property and not subject to normal mechanisms of circulation. This is because land here functions both as a commodity and as the basis upon which a commodity market can be established in the first place. It is both a good to be traded and the material conditions of possibility for trade (i.e., the foundation of a new market-society). Therefore, land must pass through an initial period in which it is treated qualitatively different from other objects of purchase, ownership, trade and barter. The process by which the earth is transformed into commodified parcels of land both requires state intervention and, at the same time, is productive of the conditions for state and market formation. Hence it is the key to the reproduction of ‘new world’ societies abroad.

The crucial hinge here is the role that territoriality plays in the formation of a labour pool, what we have been calling a dialectic of land and labour. As Mill recognizes, Wakefield’s contribution lay in his observation that “the degree of productiveness of land and labour depends on their being in a due proportion to one another.” (PPE, 352) In a terrain of nearly unlimited territorial expanse, labourers have the opportunity to return to a condition of ‘immediate producer’ (in Marx’s words), thus the coercive requirement to remain a member of the wage-labour pool dissolves. As Mill interprets Wakefield:

“[I]f a few persons in a newly-settled country attempt to occupy and appropriate a large district, or if each labourer becomes too soon an occupier and cultivator of land, there is
a loss of productive power, and a great retardation of the progress of the colony in wealth and civilization: that nevertheless the instinct (as it may almost be called) of appropriation, and the feelings associated in old countries with landed proprietorship, induce almost every emigrant to take possession of as much land as he has the means of acquiring, and every labourer to become at once a proprietor, cultivating his own land with no other aid than that of his family. If this propensity to the immediate possession of land could be in some degree restrained, and each labourer induced to work a certain number of years on hire before he become a landed proprietor, a perpetual sock of hired labourers could be maintained, available for roads, canals, works of irrigation, etc., and for the establishment and carrying on of the different branches of town industry; whereby the labourer, when he did at last become a landed proprietor, would find his land much more valuable, through access to markets, and facility of obtaining hired labour. Mr Wakefield therefore proposed to check the premature occupation of land, and dispersion of the people, by putting upon all unappropriated lands a rather high price, the proceeds of which were to be expended in conveying emigrant labourers from the mother country.” (PPE, 352)

In commending the Wakefield system here, Mill is well aware that he is running aground of his general support for a low-intensity intervention and the ‘free market’ capitalist state. If, for instance, colonization is truly profitable—if it is indeed “the best affair of business, in which the capital of an old and wealthy country can engage” (PPE, 358)—and there is an already-existing class of capitalists who will disproportionately profit from this venture, then it surely follows from Mill’s own logic that this class ought to be the one to fund its initial costs. Why should state intervention be required at all? Why ought public risk be incurred? Isn’t this exactly the kind of “paternal government” that Mills warns of elsewhere, the kind based in the “self-conceited notion of the legislator” who presumes to know what is in the interest of all, “better than they do themselves,” (PPE, 352)? As Marx will later emphasize, classical political economists must betray the logic of a self-generating market society precisely because they recognize that there is nothing natural or inevitable about the formation of a labour pool—it must be imposed by forces external to ‘free market capitalism’ as such. Mill is no exception. He openly concedes that an unregulated system would “prevent the formation of a class of labourers” (PPE, 353).
Artificially controlling the market in land, thereby regulating the outward expansion of capitalism itself, must therefore be a “national undertaking,” the initial costs of which ought to be “borne by the colonial government.” (PPE, 359-360) This has numerous side-benefits: besides forming a labour pool, the system of highly regulated colonial expansion is central to the bio-political dimensions of colonial and capitalist expansion. Namely, it permits for the regulation of population growth and density, which has important effects on such matters as the balance between urban and rural forces, moral education, and international trade.

Directly echoing Horton and Malthus, Mill recognizes that tight regulation of outward settler expansion functions as “a beneficial check upon the tendency of a population of colonists to adopt the tastes and inclinations of savage life, and to disperse so widely as to lose all the advantages of commerce, of markets, of separation of employments, and combination of labour.” (PPE, 360) One needs, after all, a certain population density “for purposes of cooperation.” (PPE, 361) With regard to international trade, securing relatively dense settlements enables the formation of new markets for goods, which generates a positive feedback system between the mother country and the “unoccupied continents under its command” (PPE, 362). The Wakefield system is thus also superior to the Mercantile-protectionist theory which was already well on its way out by the 1840s. Mill rejects the argument that protectionism functions to concentrate populations by forcing peoples into privileged trade zones. He posits that the Wakefield system is a better solution to the challenge of how to “check the excessive dispersion of the population” (PPE, 305).

Wakefield has demonstrated a “better way” than trade protectionism. Namely, he has shown that one can “modify the existing method of disposing of the unoccupied lands, by raising the price, instead of lowering it, or giving away the land gratuitously, as is largely done since the passing of the Homestead Act.” (PPE, 306)

Finally, Wakefield is credited also solving some of the problems associated with the falling rate of profit. This issue pertains of course less to the initial conditions for the formation of a capitalist system than to its ongoing operation. The key concept here, which Mill takes from Wakefield is that of a field of employment. Wakefield is said to have best understood the tendency towards a falling rate of profit, even in the so-called ‘new world’, because he recognizes that “production is limited not solely by the quantity of capital and of labour” (PPE, 102-3). It also requires a ‘field of employment’, which consists in “the land of the country, and the capacity of foreign markets to take its manufactured commodities. On a
limited extent of land, only a limited quantity of capital can find employment at a profit.” (PPE, 103) As empirical evidence of the superiority of the Wakefield system, Mill cites both the successes of South Australia, Victoria, and New Zealand (all ‘Wakefield colonies’) and the failure of Swan River (a non-Wakefield colony also discussed by Marx) (PPE, 361).

We can perhaps now better see how, within Mill’s work, land plays a distinct and central role in both the economic development and growth of capitalist societies and, secondly, in the normative theory of private property rights that undergirds and justifies this economic system. Land functions here as both an independent source of value and a spatial field upon which human societies are situated, playing an important role in both the analysis of wealth production and regulation of population density. But it also functions as a unique form of property, access to which structures much of the society as a whole. We have also seen that Mill adopts E.G. Wakefield’s understanding of systematic colonization as key to understanding the interrelation between land, labour, and capital and, in particular, the need for state intervention to establish the bases for a ‘free market’ society. But even if one were to accept that Wakefield’s method of colonization was the most effective of the options, it would not explain why we should accept colonization at all? Why is colonial expansion necessary in any case? Why can’t Britain, or the other western European powers, achieve the ideal stationary state within their own geographical bounds?

Having surveyed the broadly Malthusian conception of land qua space, it is possible to understand Mill’s colonial advocacy. Land plays the crucial role in limiting or enabling population growth for two reasons. First, it is the most important element in food production. The productivity of the soil sets out agricultural yields, which has a direct bearing upon population growth. This is what I’ve been terming the Physiocratic lineage. Second, as we have already seen, land is also used here as a metaphor for space, so access to it determines the effect that growth has on population density. Population density is, of course, related to a host of other important socio-economic factors, everything from transportation to sanitation. In this regard, Mill’s political economy adopts and reflects the general Malthusianism of the field in his time.

As we have already seen, for Mill positive socio-economic development is the result of a precarious balancing act between the three principal forces of capital, labour, and land. The particular combination of forces that prevails in a given space determines the biopolitical
capital of that region. The bulk of Principles of Political Economy is committed to working through various variables on the three axes to see how the rate of profit is affected by, for instance, rise in population, or increased food production, etc.\textsuperscript{107} In this balancing act, population density plays a key role. For instance, Mill argues that the relationship between labour and capital—as expressed by the law of wages—is ultimately dependent upon “the ratio between population and capital… [thus] wages depend on the checks to population” \textit{(PPE, 57-58)}. Since population is primary determined by the productivity of the land, “money wages depend on the productiveness of the least fertile land, or least productive agricultural capital” \textit{(PPE, 59)}. From a broadly Malthusian influence on classical economics, Mill adopts the view that increases in population (which naturally accompany civilizational development) produce new contradictions and tensions that need to be managed. Specifically, they can create what Horton termed the “redundant population,” disturbing the balance between the three classes of labour, capitalist, and landowner. Citing Malthus directly, Mill concludes that, “even in a progressive state of capital, in old countries, a conscientious or prudential restraint on population is indispensible, to prevent the increase of numbers from outstripping the increase of capital, and the condition of the classes who are at the bottom of society from being deteriorated.” \textit{(PPE, 125)}\textsuperscript{108}

In an ideal ‘stationary state’, of course, the balance between labour, land, and capital could be maintained through market calibrations. In such a utopia, the system would be relatively self-sustained and would not tend towards the kinds of extremes envisioned here. However, Mill recognizes that the western European countries of his era have not reached such a point. Although closer to achieving this \textit{telos}, Europeans have not yet grasped the idea of a dynamic equilibrium let alone found a way to implement it in practice. While the “\textit{density of population} necessary to enable mankind to obtain… all the advantages both of co-operation and of social intercourse” had been attained in these ‘advanced’ societies, Europeans have not yet learned to “be content to be stationary” \textit{(PPE, 129; emphasis added)}. As such, they continue to pursue an “ultimate increase of wealth and population” for its own sake, which threatens achievement of the truer object: the pleasant ‘art of living’.\textsuperscript{109} All actually-existing capitalist societies have a tendency then to \textit{over-reach}. They are growing faster than their societies can reasonably manage, and thus cannot completely control the contradictions that arise from rapid development.\textsuperscript{110} Again, this is very bio-political: it is most clearly expressed
for Mill by population growth. Only now do we arrive then at the convergence of concerns that form the fundamental basis of the colonial imperative.

Colonialization is crucial to human civilizational development because it is the means by which the most advanced (European) societies can manage the rapid population growth that accompanies material prosperity, especially during the intermediate period before those leading societies transition to ‘stationary states’. Otherwise, the contradictions of capitalist development would continue to plague these leading societies, their material success would begin to reverse as the rate of profit falls, and capitalism would prematurely reach its boundary. In such societies,

“the rate of profit is habitually within, as it were, a hand’s breadth of the minimum, and the country therefore on the very verge of the stationary state. By this I do not mean that this state is likely, in any of the great countries of Europe, to be soon actually reached, or that capital does not still yield a profit considerably greater than what is barely sufficient to induce the people of those countries to save and accumulate. My meaning is, that it would require but a short time to reduce profits to the minimum, if capital continued to increase at its present rate, and no circumstances having a tendency to raise the rate of profit occurred in the meantime. The expansion of capital would soon reach its ultimate boundary, if the boundary itself did not continually open and leave more space.” (106-107; emphasis added)

We can see more clearly now why Mill commends colonization in particular. Territorial acquisition is the key element to surviving this transitional phase of capitalist development. For it is only in the so-called ‘uninhabited regions’ of the world, where agricultural development can keep pace with global population growth, and where there is sufficient space to manage the distribution of populations (but especially the ‘redundant’ underclass) that capitalist development requires. Once again then, land plays multiple roles, functioning both as active, productive agent, a commodity, and a spatial horizon or ‘field of employment’. Hence, the future management of the most industrialized and developed societies hinges to a considerable extent upon their ability to return to a previous period, a “natural state of a country,” when “the land is highly productive, and food obtained in great abundance by little labour,” and by Mill’s own time, this was “only true of unoccupied countries colonized by a civilized people,” (PPE, 96) The unique status of these ‘unoccupied lands’—paradoxically gesturing simultaneously towards Europe’s past and its future— means that Mill dismisses
altogether the criticisms of settler colonization that had taken arisen in the mid-nineteenth century. He continually opposes himself to these pessimists and critics, arguing that,

“Much will also depend on the increasing migration of labour and capital to unoccupied parts of the earth, of which the soil, climate, and situation are found, by the ample means of exploration now possessed, to promise not only a large return to industry, but great facilities of producing commodities suited to the markets of old counties.” (PPE, 72)

Mill concludes, therefore, that

“improvements in production, and emigration of capital to the more fertile soils and unworked mines of the uninhabited or thinly peopled parts of the globe, do not, as appears to a superficial view, diminish the gross produce and the demand for labour at home; but, on the contrary, are what we have chiefly to depend on for increasing both, and are even the necessary conditions of any great or prolonged augmentation of either. Nor is it any exaggeration to say, that within certain, and not very narrow, limits, the more capital a country like England expends in these two ways, the more she will have left.” (PPE, 122-123)

In short, colonialism has been reformulation such that enormous expenditure of capital and state power can be viewed not as a violation of the principles of free trade and classical political economy, but as their natural extension. Colonization benefits capital and labour at home but, more than this, it is in the “collective economic interests of the human race.” (PPE, 358). In advancing this normative defence of colonial expansion, Mill’s work on political economy functions as part of the political theory of colonial dispossession.

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3 Metha, pp. 2-3, ft. 1.
4 The concluding claim of this passage is, I submit, empirically false. Moreover, as previous chapters have argued, the conceptual distinctiveness of ‘empire’ from ‘colony’ is not due to something like *natural kinds*, but rather was the result of a political practice that sought to differentiate the two. Only in retrospect could they be seen as clearly discrete, a movement that was precisely the product of countenancing indigenous extermination.


7 J.S. Mill offers his writing on political economy as an elaboration of David Ricardo’s work and was widely read as a ‘Ricardian’ (although Mill did tend to introduce a series of side issues from moral and social philosophy and thus, at least stylistically, echoes Smith). David Ricardo was a close friend of James Mill and major intellectual influence on both father and son. James Mill published his own *Elements of Political Economy* in 1821, which was expressly meant to be a distillation of Ricardo’s larger and more complicated text, and the younger Mill consistently referred to Ricardo as Britain’s “greatest political economist”. [CITATION NEEDED. NOTE THAT THIS REFERENCE REMAINED IN ALL EDITIONS OF PPE.] This isn’t to say that Mill did not modify Ricardo’s work to his own ends. For instance, it is clear that Mill choose to distance himself somewhat from the stricter and narrower Benthamite philosophical underpinnings of Ricardo’s economic theory. Mill did not wish to rest his economic model too heavily upon a philosophical-anthropology that envisions humans as exclusively self-interested, competitive, utility maximizing agents and instead adopted an expanded view of utilitarianism, one that could admit of a more complex psychology than the one often ascribed to Bentham (Mill suggests that his own position is closer to Adam Smith’s in this regard). [CITATION RE: MILL’S BREAK WITH UTILITARIANISM]


11 See Chapter One.


13 Locke, §§ 27, 35.

14 Locke, §36.

15 Locke, §50.


17 Locke, §41.


19 This framework was not original to Locke, but it was adopted and extended by him.

20 Locke, §43.

21 In what follows, I use the term ‘utilitarian’ in the broad sense, that is, as more or less interchangeable with an instrumentalist or consequentialist mode of reasoning. I do not intend it in the narrower and more technical sense associated with the school of moral philosophy linked to Bentham and J.S. Mill, in part because this imports a theory of moral psychology and human motivations that don’t necessarily apply to the more general question of how to reason about the use and improvement of the earth.

22 On the Physiocrats generally see Linda Vardi, *The Physiocrats and the World of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014). Other works on classical political economy and the history of political thought that have informed my discussion here include Emma Rothschild, *Economic


24 Vardi, pp. 6, 63.

25 Vardi, p. 3.


27 François Quesnay, “Fermiers,” François Quesnay et la physiocratie, 2: 455.


29 McNally, pp. 102-103.

30 Another indication of the difference between Locke and the later political economists is hinted at in the former’s use of the term ‘industry’ as nearly synonymous with agricultural cultivation, where as the latter group would use them in opposition. In a clear demonstration of the Lockean frame at work as a tool of colonial legitimation, William Cronon has documented the manner in which 17th century English colonial commentaries drew precisely the conclusion that Indigenous Americans lacked ‘industry’ because they lacked settled agriculture. See William Cronon, Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England (NY: Hill and Wang, 1983).


34 Smith, pp. 346-55.

35 Criticizing the Physiocrats directly, he states that it is “altogether improper to consider artificers, manufacturers, and merchants in the same light as menial servants. The labour of menial servants does not continue the existence of the fund which maintains and employs them… It is upon this account that… I have classed artificers, manufacturers, and merchants among the productive labourers, and menial servants among the barren or unproductive.” Smith, p. 261.

36 Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834), renowned author of An Essay on the Principle of Population, originally published anonymously in 1798, followed by several expanded and revised editions between 1803 and 1826.

37 “[T]he power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man. Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio.” (POP, 13)

38 Malthus was a founding fellow of the Statistical Society of London, founded in 1834. Reflecting the centrality of agriculture, the logo of the society was a wheatsheaf.

1. La peine capitale n’est pas convertible profit; elle ne donne point de à la partie lésée: elle en détruit même la source le délinquant, par son travail, pourrait réparer partie du mal qu’il a fait: sa mort ne répare rien. 2. Loin d’être convertible en profit, cette est une perte, une dépense dans ce qui fait la et la richesse d’une nation, le nombre des hommes.” Étienne Dumont, ‘Examine de la peine de mort,’ in J. Bentham, ed., Théorie des Peines et des Récompense, (Bruxelles: Société Belge de Libraire, 1840), p. 235.


Thompson, Customs in Common, p. 288.


See especially Observations on the Effects of the Corn Laws, and of a Rise or Fall in the Price of Corn on the Agriculture and General Wealth of the Country (1814); along with Inquiry into the Nature and Progress of Rent and Grounds of an Opinion on the Policy of Restricting the Importation of Foreign Corn [YEAR]. [FULL CITATIONS NEEDED]

Interestingly, the rather conservative Malthus defended the priority of agriculture on grounds that he might have shared with later radicals. For Malthus did not disagree with Smith’s contention that the manufacturing industry was a source of independent wealth (departing then from the strictly Physiocrat line), but he did question whether this was necessarily good for the nation as a whole. Industry produced wealth, but almost exclusively for the factory owners. The benefits of agricultural production, by contrast, were shared widely across the nation.

Bentham, “Observations on the Poor Law Bill February 1797.” [CITATION]

Here we can see a precursor to contemporary arguments that social welfare increases dependency and removes a check against idleness. Hence too Malthus’s support for workhouses for the idle poor.

He advocates the repeal of the Poor Laws and “total abolition of all the present parish laws,” which would “give liberty and freedom of action to the peasantry of England, which they can hardly be said to possess at present.” (POP, 43) Many of Malthus’s objections to the Poor Laws lead to the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. One of the main authors of the Report of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws leading to these amendments was Nassau Senior, the lawyer and economist who also happened to be a friend of Alexis de Tocqueville.

Mathus, “The Nature of Rent” (1815) [FULL CITATION NEEDED]

See Michel Foucault, Security, Territory, Population (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). “Now with the physiocrats and, more generally, with the eighteenth century economists, I think the population no longer appears as a collection of subjects of right, as a collection of subject wills who must obey the sovereign’s will through the intermediary of regulations, laws, edicts, and so on. It will be considered as a set of processes to be managed at the level and on the basis of what is natural in these processes… [T]he population will henceforth be seen, not from the standpoint of the juridico-political notion of subject, but as a sort of technical-political object of management and government” (STP, 70); “But then, the well-known opposition between Malthus and Marx would be proof that in the nineteenth century the problem of population is still really central in all political economic thought. After all, on a Ricardian basis that is absolutely common to them both, what is the source of their disagreement? For Malthus, the problem of population basically has to be thought as a bio-economic problem, whereas Marx tried to circumvent the problem and to get rid of the very notion of population, but only to rediscover it in the no longer bio-economic form, but in the specifically historical-political form of class, of class confrontation and class struggle. This is the source of their
disagreement: either population or classes, that is where the split occurs, on the basis of an economic thought, a political economic thought, that was only possible as such with the introduction of the subject-population.” (STP, 77) For Foucault’s other writings specifically on Malthus, see Les Mots et les choses, p. 269; The Order of Things, 256-257; and on the role of population in the physiocrats and economists, see Foucault, Histoire de la folie, pp. 429-430; Madness and Civilization, pp. 231-232.

52 There are some suggestions by Adam Smith that even mass famine must be considered a proper remedy for economic woes: “the order of nature [which] if it occasionally produces dire sufferings, does also provide generally the most effective means for their mitigation.”52 (See also Burke, Thoughts on Scarcity). As Marx would later put this, “equilibrium is re-established by depopulation” (C, 861) [cites Thomas Sadler’s critique of Malthus in The Law of Population (2 vols.), published in 1830]

53 Malthus had little direct influence on colonial policy in his time. It is possible he had a more indirect one, however: his main employment was as Professor of History and Political Economy at the East India Company’s College in Hertfordshire, where he taught young boys intending to enter the imperial company’s civil service.

54 Karl Marx, Capital, Vol. 1, pp. 782-798. Marx also cites Herman Merivale in the context of this discussion, whose contributions are explored in the next chapter.


56 Smith, Wealth of Nations, p. 190. Smith called the discovery of America “one of the most important events recorded in the history of mankind.” Smith, p. 590.

57 David Ricardo, Principles of Political Economy and Taxation, Chapter XXV, pp. 227-233.


59 One figure who stands somewhat outside the mainstream here is Jeremy Bentham. A prominent voice of anti-imperial and anti-colonial sentiment at the turn of the nineteenth century, Bentham was approached by Wakefield in 1831 and was evidently able to change the utilitarian philosopher’s mind on colonization. Bentham gave Wakefield his support in a scheme for the colonization of South Australia and, in so doing, drew arguments from the classical political economists.

[NOTE RE: The Physiocratic influence on Bentham is perhaps most evident in his ‘Colonies and Navy’ essay from 1790[??] :

“It is impossible therefore that you can ever have too much agriculture. It is impossible that, while there is ground untilled, or ground that might be better tilled than it is, any detriment should ensue to the community from the with-holding or withdrawing of capital from any other branch of industry and employing it in agriculture. It is impossible… that the loss of any branch of trade can be productive of any detriment to the community, excepting always the temporary distress experienced by the individuals concerned in it for the time being, where the decline is a sudden one.” (‘Colonies and Navy,’ I, pp. 217-218.)

More Malthusian concerns with population density are visible elsewhere:

“taking futurity into the scale, the well-being of mankind appears to have been promoted upon the whole by the establishment of colonies. Taking Britain for example, at the rate at which population has been increasing for this last century, long before the conclusion of the present century, the population would have extended beyond the utmost number for which the soil would be capable of affording sustenance…” (Citing Economic Writings, III, p. 355.)

For an example of Bentham’s anti-colonial writings, see Emancipate Your Colonies! (written and privately circulated in 1792, publically published in 1830); Rid Yourselves of Ultramaria. For a strong defence of Wakefield’s schemes, see (Panopticon versus New South Wales, see Works, IV, pp. 173-284.)

60 As the historian John Waever puts it, “by the late 1820s and early 1830s, the writings of classical economists about land’s intrinsic value to its owners informed land allocation discussions in London and settlement colonies, stimulating new land allocation regulations for Australia and leading to the East India Company’s reforms of land tenure and taxation.” John Weaver, ‘Economic Improvement and the Social Construction of Property Rights,’ in Despotic Dominion: Property Rights in British Settler Societies (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005): 79-102, p. 82.
61 R.C. Mill, *Colonization of Australia*, 1829-42, Chapter II.
66 Strachan, pp. 6-7.
67 Strachan, pp. 12, 19.
68 Winch, *Classical Political Economy*, p. 54.
71 James Mill showed his support for Horton in his article on ‘colonies’ for the *Supplement to the Encyclopaedia Britannica* [CITATION].
73 Winch, *Classical Political Economy*, p. 58. Despite this, Malthus continued to maintain in revised editions of *The Principle of Population* that:
   “It is precisely under these circumstances [high unemployment] that emigration is most useful as a temporary relief; and it is in these circumstances that Great Britain finds herself placed at present. Though no emigration should take place, the population will in degrees conform itself to the state of demand for labour; but the interval will be marked by the most severe distress… The only real relief in such a case is emigration, and the subject at the present moment is well worthy the attention of the government, both as a matter of humanity and policy.”
74 Malthus and his critics shared a common adherence to a ‘stages of civilization’ view of historical development in which humanity was progressing from lower/savage forms to higher/civilized, a view indebted to (inter alia) Adam Ferguson (1723-1816) and his influential 1767 text *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767). See Malthus, *Principle of Population*, Chapters III-IV. [Also influenced later evolutionary theory in both Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace.]
75 As he puts it: “[I]t appears that a society constituted according to the most beautiful form that imagination can conceive, with benevolence for its moving principle instead of self-love, and with every disposition in all its members corrected by reason and not force, would, from the inevitable laws of nature, and not from any original depravity of man, in a very short period degenerate into a society constructed upon a plan not essentially different from that which prevails in every known state at present; I mean, a society divided into a class of proprietors and a class of labourers, and with self-love for the main-spring of the great machine.” (POP, 86) It is interesting and perhaps surprising to find in Malthus such a clear statement regarding the centrality of class division to modernization. As Marx would later point out, this is nevertheless still a rather conservative analysis, since Malthus views this division as natural, inevitable, and insurmountable. Still, from a Physiocratic vantage, he does provide some limited tools for a critique of the emergent bourgeois industrial capitalists. For instance, Malthus agrees with Smith and Ricardo (contra the traditional Physiocrats) that manufacturing may be productive. However, he argues that, unlike agriculture, it is only productive for a certain segment of the population—the proprietors of the manufacturing industry—while non-productive for the society as a whole. In effect, he is recognizing that the value created in manufacturing is really just a transfer of wealth from the labourers to the capitalists. (POP, Chapter XVIII, esp. 134-136)
Famously, Malthus generally viewed the idea of human perfectability with great suspicion. The *Principle of Population* is offered as a “conclusive” argument “against the perfectibility of the mass of mankind” (*POP*, 14), directly opposed to the Enlightenment vision of unlimited progress through the use of reason. (Malthus’s main example of this faulty reasoning is the work of Nicolas de Condorcet, especially his *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progres de l’esprit humain* (1795).) He combined arguments regarding the constancy and insurmountability of natural laws with a Christian idiom of original sin and ineradicable evil. This rather dark vision gained a great deal of notoriety and widespread popularity in Great Britain after it was praised by leading theologians and preachers by such as John Bird Summer (author of *Treatise on the Records of Creation* (1816) and eventual Archbishop of Canterbury) and Thomas Chalmers. In particular, Malthus’s melancholic outlook on perfectibility meshed rather well with Anglican orthodoxy, which viewed life as a state of trial in which pain played an equally important role as pleasure in motivating action and, in particular, avoiding evil. As he puts it: “Evil exists in the world not to create despair, but activity.” (*POP*, 158)

There is a subplot to this narrative that would reveal an important gender dimension to these debates, a complete treatment of which would unfortunately take us too far from the central topic here. Briefly put, however, Malthus’s entire argument rests very heavily upon the postulate that heterosexual, procreative coupling was both necessary and, with some small variation, historically invariable. While reason’s proper function is to serve as a “proper corrective and guide” to the otherwise unruly passions, and that with decent education, many of the dominant forms of passion could be tamed and challenged into constructive ventures, Malthus bemoaned the near total lack of progress with regard to sexual appetite. The drive for heterosexual pairing was so foundational to natural human dispositions it could scarcely be tamed at all, not by culture, not even by old age. In this one field, “no observable progress whatever has hitherto been made.” (*POP*, 90) So the heterosexual (procreative) drive is viewed as almost entirely historically and culturally invariable, impervious to the education of reason. In cashing out the implications of this view, however, Malthus evinces rather weak logic. For in the next breath, Malthus states that this is especially so for the “lower classes”, and declares it highly improbable that this particular section of humanity should ever “be sufficiently free from want and labour to attain any high degree of intellectual improvement.” (*POP*, 91). In other words, a lack of education amongst the lower classes renders them more vulnerable to sexual demands which, in turn, limits their receptivity to instruction and edification. As Michel Foucault put it, with Malthusianism, the family “will change from being a model to being an instrument.” (STP, 105)

Even in his own time, this set of claims was vigorously challenged. Many thinkers could see that an alternative to Malthus’s rather fatalistic prognosis was to emphasize the emancipation and education of women. From Mary Wollstonecraft to the later writings of J.S. Mill, through to Amartya Sen, Vandana Shiva, and a complex host of feminist thinkers and movements today, the transformation of the social power of women has been the decisive refutation of (neo)Malthusian theories that view population growth and subsequent immiseration of the ‘lower classes’ as natural phenomena.

There is even a surprisingly personal dimension to this debate. One of Malthus’s principal targets in *EPP* was William Godwin, proponent of a form of radical utopian anarchism and author of the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*. Today, however, Godwin is probably best known as the husband of Mary Wollstonecraft and father of Mary Shelley.

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80 “Senior’s co-operation with Horton took a practical form. In 1831 he wrote a pamphlet on assisted emigration which embodied a draft of the bill which Lord Howick introduced in Parliament (with some modifications) in the same year. In this he advocated legislation to enable parishes to sponsor emigration as a solution to agricultural distress in England and Wales, pointing out the dangers of civil war under existing conditions.” Winch, *Classical Political Economy*, p. 66. (Citing Remarks on
Emigration with a Draft of a Bill. Written in collaboration with Horton and James Stephen, legal advisor to the Colonial Office.

81 See McCulloch’s review of the work of Thomas Chalmers, a disciple of Malthus, in the *Edinburgh Review*, Oct. 1832, No. CXI [CITATION]


83 This is close to how Locke speaks of Indigenous food-gathering practices for instance.

84 It is not altogether clear what Mill intends in referring to these groups as classes. In many cases, these categories seem to function more as ideal types for a set of interests, never fully or completely embodied in any particular empirical group of people. In other cases, Mill seems to imply that they do, in fact, correspond to relatively discrete sociological groups. For instance, he notes that there are cases in which the same person owns all three requisites. This occurs, for instance, “when the labourer himself is the proprietor” (*PPE*, 47). This is the “commonest case in the Northern States of the American Union”, and can be found in parts of Europe where peasant self-sufficient farming still exists. The other case of this convergence is when “the labourers themselves are owned by the landowners” (*PPE*, 47). This can be found in plantation colonies and slave states. In these cases, “the land, the factories (if they may be so called), the machinery, and the degraded labourers, are all the property of a capitalist.” (*PPE*, 47) Later, however, Mill states that, “in manufacturing industry there never are more than two classes, the labourers and the capitalists.” (*PPE*, 48-49)

85 “In no sound theory of private property was it ever contemplated that the proprietor of land should merely a sinecurist quartered on it.” (*PPE*, 39)

86 Mill discusses this practice in some detail, including assessment of just compensation (*PPE*, 42).

87 Discusses ‘real’ or ‘immovable’ property (mostly land) (*PPE*, 261-261) [link to Polanyi on land as ‘fictitious commodity’]

88 Improvement: “But though land is not the produce of industry, most of its valuable qualities are so. Labour is not only requisite for using, but almost equally so for fashioning, the instrument. Considerable labour is often required at the commencement, to clear the land for cultivation. In many cases, even when cleared, its productiveness is wholly the effect of labour and art.” (*PPE*, 38)

89 See *System of Logic*, bk. Vi. Ch. XII.


91 Mill, ‘Civilization,’ p. 46.

92 In *PPE*, Mill lists Technological mastery over nature, Security of Person and Property, and Development of the capacity for ‘co-operation’ as three criteria for assessing civilizational progress (*PPE*, 66-69).


94 “Society can and does execute its own mandates; and if it issues wrong mandates instead of right, or any mandates at all in things with which it ought not to meddle, it practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression.” John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), p. 7.

95 Mill, ‘Civilization,’ pp. 52-53.

96 Mill later also distinguishes between two different *modes* of government intervention: authoritative (actual physical intervention and coercion) vs. informative (providing information and education). (*PPE*, 325)

97 Mill’s examples here are “an infant, or a lunatic, or fallen into imbecility” (*PPE*, 164). Later, he also considers disability issues, child labour, non-human animals, and the status of women under this broad heading, concluding that they all warrant some paternalistic-fiduciary care, with the exception of adult, non-disabled women (*PPE*, 342-44).

98 Poor Laws of 1834 (*PPE*, 354-355)

Reference to Wakefield (PPE, 112)

Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847); preacher, Professor of Moral Philosophy at St. Andrews (1823-8), then Professor of Divinity at Edinburgh until his death. Published An Enquiry into the Nature and Stability of Natural Resources (Edinburgh, 1808); and On Political Economy in Connection with the Moral State and Moral Prospects of Society (Glasgow, 1832). Chalmers was on many questions, a self-described Malthusian.

"The error which seems to me imputable to Mr. Wakefield is that of supposing his doctrines to be in contradiction to the principles of the best school of preceding political economists, instead of being, as they really are, corollaries from those principles; though corollaries which, perhaps, would not always have been admitted by those political economists themselves." (PPE, 103)

Discusses ‘real’ or ‘immovable’ property (mostly land) (PPE, 261-261) link to Polanyi on land as ‘fictitious commodity’

Elsewhere: “if all the capitalists of the colony were to combine, and bear the expense by subscription, they would still have no security that the labourers, when there, would continue to work for them. After working for a short time and earning a few pounds, they always, unless prevented by the government, squat on unoccupied land, and work only for themselves.” (PPE, 359)

[Especially that of Mr. Carey-- ?? CHECK]

[CITATION REQUIRED RE: HOMESEAT ACT]

Summary: “If during any period agricultural improvement advances faster than population, rent and money wages during that period will tend downward, and profits upward. If population advances more rapidly than agricultural improvement, either the labourers will submit to a reduction in the quantity or quality of their food, or if not, rent and money wages will progressively rise, and profits will fall.” (PPE, 96)

“The publication of Mr. Malthus’ Essay is the era from which better views of this subject must be dated; and not withstanding the acknowledged errors of his first edition, few writers have done more than himself, in the subsequent editions, to promote these juster and more hopeful anticipations.” (PPE, 125)

“The density of population necessary to enable mankind to obtain, in the greatest degree, all the advantages both of co-operation and of social intercourse, has, in all the most populous countries, been attained. A population may be too crowded, though all be amply supplied with food and raiment. It is not good for man to be kept perforce at all times in the presence of his species. A world from which solitude is extirpated, is a very poor ideal… Nor is there much satisfaction in contemplating the world with nothing left to the spontaneous activity of nature… If the earth must lose that great portion of its pleasantness which it owes to things that the unlimited increase of wealth and population would extirpate from it, for the mere purpose of enabling it to support a larger, but not a better or happier population, I sincerely hope, for the sake of posterity, that they will be content to be stationary, long before necessity compels them to it.” (PPE, 128-9)

E.g., over-capitalization: “This brings us to the last of the counter-forces which check the downward tendency of profits, in a country whose capital increases faster than that of its neighbours, and whose profits are therefore nearer to the minimum. This is, the perpetual overflow of capital into colonies or foreign countries, to seek higher profits than can be obtained at home.” (PPE, 115)

On population as key variable, see (PPE, 73)

Mill’s immediate example here is the United States. Elsewhere, he refers to these spaces as “the backward countries of the world,” arguing that only there is “increased production is still an important object: in those most advanced, what is economically needed is a better distribution, of which one indispensable means is a stricter restraint on population. Levelling institutions, either of a just or of an unjust kind, cannot alone accomplish it; they may lower the heights of society, but they cannot, of themselves, permanently raise the depths.” (PPE, 127)

“Thus, the exportation of capital is an agent of great efficacy in extending the field of employment for that which remains: and it may be said truly that, up to a certain point, the more capital we send away, the more we shall possess and be able to retain at home.” (PPE, 116)
Colonialism: “The same considerations enable us to throw aside as unworthy of regard, one of the common arguments against emigration as a means of relief for the labouring class. Emigration, it is said, can do no good to the labourers, if, in order to defray the cost, as much must be taken away from the capital of the country as from its population. That anything like this proportion could require to be abstracted from capital for the purpose even of the most extensive colonization, few, I should think, would now assert: but even on that untenable supposition, it is an error to suppose that no benefit would be conferred on the labouring class.” (PPE, 119) Goes on to detail the ways in which the English labouring class will only benefit in the longrun from emigration/colonialism; “To appreciate the benefits of colonization, it should be considered in its relation, not to a single country, but to the collective economic interests of the human race.” (PPE, 358) Read William Ellis, ‘Employment of Machinery,’ Westminster Review, 5 (1826): 101-30. Cited by Mill as an important source.