Colonization and Ireland in G. P. Scrope’s Political Economy*

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Abstract:

This article elucidates George Poulett Scrope’s argument about colonization and how it relates to his political economy. Scrope approved of colonization in general as a supplementary measure to mitigate gluts in the labor market. He also regarded colonies as demonstrative of the correctness of his political economy, specifically his emphasis on the role of political and social institutions, especially land ownership, and criticism of Malthus’ population theory. However, Scrope was critical of the theory and activities of the so-called colonial reformers. He argued that Wakefield’s “sufficient price” policy was “founded on a fallacy.” More importantly, he opposed the emigration of Irish tenants to the colonies as a remedy for Irish land problem and resulting poverty, instead emphasizing the importance of enabling the existing tenantry to develop the full productiveness of the land they occupied. Behind his criticism of both the “sufficient price” policy in colonies and the consolidation and emigration policy in Ireland lay his appreciation of small-scale farming: unlike colonial reformers, Scrope asserted that small-scale yeoman farming could be as productive as the system of large farms. His disparate views on emigration from Britain and Ireland were closely related to his perspective on natural rights. Scrope advocated for the voluntary emigration of British laborers. However, he was opposed to allowing the Irish poor to emigrate to the colonies. In Ireland, unlike in Britain, cultivators’ right to land was denied or insecure and the people’s right to subsistence was unsettled due to a lack of or deficiencies in poor laws. Unless “the paramount RIGHT of the people to live on the land of their birth” was guaranteed, emigration was not a matter of choice and was therefore never justified.

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to elucidate George Poulett Scrope’s (1797–1876) argument on colonization and how it relates to his political economy. In my previous work, I outlined the main features of Scrope’s political economy: emphasis on the conditions of and limitations to the laissez-faire principle, the right to subsistence of the poor, and the closely related role of government (Isaka 2018). However, little attention was paid to Scrope’s remarks on colonies and colonization, which might provide the key to a better understanding of his political economy and reveal drawbacks of previous work on the subject.

As will be depicted below, Scrope’s argument on colonies was firmly based on and closely related to his economic theory. For example, his basic appreciation of the economic value of colonies, such as those in North America and Australia, reflects his criticism of Malthus’ population theory. He compares British with Spanish colonies to vindicate his argument that appropriate institutions regulating land ownership are crucial to national prosperity. Furthermore, his critique of the so-called colonial reformers can be seen as the crystallization of his political economy, including his prescriptions for the Irish land problem and resulting poverty.

Studying Scrope’s theory of colonization is also highly relevant to the theme of ‘classical political economy and colonies.’ As is well-known, political economists in the early nineteenth century were generally indifferent to colonies. However, there was also a group of people called colonial reformers, including Edward Gibbon Wakefield, who were the most influential on the theory and practice of colonization. Consequently, there were few economists who were interested in colonial issues, but critical of colonial reformers. Scrope was a notable exception, along with, for example, Herman Merivale. However, research on this subject has seen little progress since Winch’s brief allusion to Scrope’s attitude toward colonies and Wakefield’s systematic colonization policy in a single paragraph more than fifty years ago (Winch 1965, 132).

There are some exceptions such as Molony, who treated Scrope as one of the political economists who, along with McCulloch, Malthus, and Wakefield, held a stadial view of history that led to the justification of colonization (Molony 2001). Molony, however, referred to only a limited number of Scrope’s works and described him simply as an adherent of colonization, failing to mention, for example, his opposition to emigration in relation to Irish poverty. By contrast, while Ghosh briefly introduced

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1) Merivale (1841–42, esp. lectures 9 and 13–14). For Merivale’s view on Wakefield’s argument, see also, for example, Winch (1965, 132–35), Ghosh (1967, chap. 10), Semmel (1970, 98–99), Isaka (2010, 50–51). For a more comprehensive survey of Merivale’s view on colonies with close reference to his administrative career at the Colonial Office, see McNab (1978).

2) The same is true of almost all preceding studies. See, for example, Knorr (1944, 274, 278, 286–87), Winch
Scrope as a critic of the utility of colonization in relation to the Irish land problem, he too referred to only a few of Scrope’s writings (Ghosh 1967). Ghosh argued that Scrope’s opposition to Irish emigration stood in stark contrast to his earlier approval of colonies (Ghosh 1967, 301–02). In my view, however, the line should be drawn not chronologically but geographically. As shown in Section IV, Scrope was consistently critical of colonization as a remedy for Irish poverty, despite frequently admitting the economic value of colonies in general, especially in relation to the glut in the labor market in Britain. Regardless, the issue of what political economists thought about colonies can be investigated by reviewing Scrope’s theories and remarks on colonies in more detail.

The main focus of this article is Scrope’s criticism of the argument of the colonial reformers. His views on Wakefield’s theory of systematic colonization are addressed in Section III, and those on colonization as a remedy for Irish poverty in Section IV. First, however, his argument on colonies and colonization in relation to his overall political economy will be reviewed.

II. Colonies in Scrope’s Political Economy

1. Economic value of colonies
Scrope generally approved of colonies as a solution for economic problems. Because the British population was excessive relative to the demand for labor, many people were unable to obtain employment and were reduced to pauperism. Conversely, in colonies such as Canada that enjoyed the same climate, language, religion, and laws as the mother country, labor was in such demand that people could obtain an abundance not only of necessities but also comforts and even luxuries. It was thus evident that removal of people to such a comparative paradise was the simplest and most plausible means of improving both their condition and that of those who remained at home. In addition, the colonies would come to grow food for Britain, exchanging it with home manufacturers for the produce of their labor (Scrope 1833a, 334–35; 1832a, iii–iv). Thus, by colonization and free trade, “the double object will be answered of increasing our supplies of food at home (now unquestionably deficient, as compared with commodities of secondary importance) and of opening new avenues for the profitable employment of our surplus labour and capital in agriculture, manufactures, and, let us add, commerce likewise” (Scrope 1833a, 381; italics in original).

In Scrope’s early works, a kind of providential imperialism can be observed in his argument. According to him, emigration is “the natural process” by which the world has hitherto been peopled. It is the extension of “the empire of civilization over the globe,”


3) This aspect is stressed by Molony (2001, esp. 29–30).
realizing “an immense accession to the aggregate of human happiness and virtue.” That mankind should multiply in this way is “most pleasing to the contemplation of the Creator.” It is the only way of fulfilling the divine command, “Increase and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue the uttermost parts of it” (Scrope 1831, 145; 1832a, v).\(^4\)

2. Criticism of Malthus’ theory of population

In Scrope’s political economy, the existence of colonies is emphasized as proof of errors in Malthus’ theory of population. Scrope emphasizes the importance of the government in securing the nation’s general welfare, asserting that it is “the imperative duty of the government” to lend its aid to prevent the poverty of the working class (Scrope 1833a, 300). He even argues that the sole cause of poverty is the mismanagement of resources by government. Naturally, then, Scrope could not accept Malthus’ argument, arguing that the latter’s theory of population attributes “those evils which faulty institutions and legislative mismanagement have alone occasioned” to the growth of the population (Scrope 1848b, 17). Scrope likewise claims that this “absolves wealth and power from all responsibility for the misery which may surround them” (Scrope 1831, 100).\(^5\)

Malthus’ theories were based on the assumption of a limited extent of territory for an increasing number, never overstepping an imagined boundary. Since the dawn of humanity, however, the world has been peopled by emigration. Population numbers have never been limited by the physical impossibility of enlarging the area over which people can obtain supplies of food. “[F]or what conceivable reason are we to circumscribe the population or resources of any given body of mankind within a fixed area? Why may we not allow them in theory, or presume that they will be inclined in practice, either to spread more widely over the earth’s surface, or, at least, draw their food from a wider range…?” (Scrope 1831, 113). For this reason, Scrope prefaced his main work with a world map showing ostensibly underpeopled or un-peopled parts of the Earth and accompanied by a quotation from Josiah Wedgwood (1730–1795): “The World is wide enough for us all” (Scrope 1833a, ii).\(^6\)

In Scrope’s view, Malthus’ theory of population did not hold true in colonies such as those of North America or Australia. There, “the Malthusian philosophy would not obtain credit for an hour” because the only want experienced was that of men to develop by their labor the infinite capacity of the soil, while no artificial checks are in operation (Scrope

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\(^4\) Whenever a maritime and commercial country has really become peopled up to the full extent of the natural resources it possesses for maintaining its population, how easy to transfer the excess of its productive powers to other soils; in other words, merely to enlarge the geographical area of its agricultural operations, continuing the exchange of their surplus produce with its home manufactures” (Scrope 1832b, 27).


\(^6\) For Scrope, the presence of colonies also impairs the validity of the law of diminishing returns. This law may be true only in a country where the improvement of the arts of production does not take place and the resource of emigration is denied. “[B]ut assuredly that country is not Britain” (Scrope 1832d, 97).
There is an evident tendency in these colonies for subsistence to increase at a much faster rate than population—“[t]he very reverse of the Malthusian axiom” (Scrope 1831, 102).

3. Fertile soil and social institutions

Finally, and most importantly, colonies demonstrated that fertile soil is not a sufficient condition for economic development. In a chapter of the *Principles of Political Economy* titled “Land,” Scrope criticizes Smith for not adequately acknowledging “to what a pre-eminent degree the social and economic condition of a people is influenced by the laws and customs that prevail among them respecting the occupation and ownership of land.” In fact, “by these circumstances almost alone, the position of any nation in the scale of civilization is practically determined” (Scrope 1833a, 98). To Scrope, this was clearly proven by the different degree of economic development of the British and Spanish colonies. The colonies in North America and Australia were in a prosperous state, with settlers procuring a comfortable subsistence for themselves and their family. He argued, however, that the political economists were incorrect to attribute the development of these colonies only to their possession of vast tracts of uncultivated fertile land, since the Spanish and Portuguese colonies remained in a comparatively unimproved condition despite possessing equally rich and virgin soils. Instead, social institutions, especially related to property rights in land, make the difference. Scrope says:

> There is nowhere a more striking proof of the relative advantages of free and despotic institutions, and of the habits, ways of thinking and acting, in a word, the social disposition, respectively generated in nations by such institutions, than is afforded by a comparison of the actual condition and past history of the American states of British origin, with those of Spanish and Portuguese derivation. (Scrope 1833a, 134)

Scrope appreciated the economic value of colonies. Simultaneously, he emphasized the importance of social institutions relating to the occupation and ownership of land for achieving general prosperity. It was quite natural, therefore, that he was also interested in colonization policy, especially in terms of the disposition of waste lands in the colonies. For example, he criticized the practice of granting lands to individuals in almost unlimited quantities without any conditions for their cultivation or improvement, as this locked up large tracts in a useless condition while obstructing access to others. He writes:

> “[T]he terms on which the law, or those whom the law constitutes the legal owners of the land of any country, habitually permit its cultivation or ‘occupancy,’ form an element of first-rate importance in its social arrangements. If they are wise and liberal, labor and capital will be zealously and freely embarked in agriculture, and the improvement of the soil; and its value and productiveness, and with them the wealth of the community, will rapidly increase” (Scrope 1848c, 15).
As government is the legal proprietor of all unoccupied land in the colonies, it is within its power, by judicious or by ill-contrived regulations with respect to its appropriation and settlement, to advance or to retard the utilization of the vast resources afforded by these possessions;—rapidly to draw forth all their productive capabilities, or to place an absolute interdict on their use. (Scrope 1832e, 204–05)

III. Scrope’s Criticism of Wakefield

As shown above, Scrope often regarded colonies and colonization not only as useful elements of economic policy but also as proof of the validity of his economic theory. It is important to recognize, however, that Scrope was highly critical of the colonial reformers, led by Wakefield, who were most influential in theory and most active in practice. In the following two sections, Scrope’s criticism of both Wakefield’s theory of colonization and the suggestion of colonization as a remedy for Irish poverty will be reviewed.

1. Criticism of the “sufficient price”

Although Scrope rarely remarked on colonial policy in his writings, his views can be observed clearly from his questions and answers in the Select Committee on the Disposal of Lands in the British Colonies in 1836 (House of Commons 1836). As a member of the Select Committee, Scrope not only interviewed Wakefield but also made critical comments, as a witness, on Wakefield’s colonization theory.

The key to the colonization policy advocated by Wakefield lay in the “sufficient price” of land. Wakefield argued that, in all British colonies, land was so inexpensive that “the poorest class” could obtain land of their own. Accordingly, labor for hire would become scarce everywhere in the colony, preventing capitalists from engaging in any work that required the constant employment of many pairs of hands (Wakefield 1849, 340). In addition, the affordability of land encouraged each settler to obtain tracts too large to use, interposing “great deserts amongst the settlers.” This “extreme degree of dispersion” minimized the power of capital and labor, eliminating the possibility of both high profits and high wages (Wakefield 1833, 2:156). The solution proposed by Wakefield was to set a “sufficient price” on land, which would compel laborers to work for some considerable period of time for wages before they could become landowners. The revenue that accrues from the sale of land is, as an emigration fund, expended in conveying poor people of the laboring class from the mother country to the colonies (Wakefield 1849,

8) In Winch’s view, given in a single paragraph, Scrope almost fully supported Wakefield’s plan of colonization (Winch 1965, 132). Winch, however, refers to only a part of the interaction in the 1836 Select Committee. By contrast, Semmel, who describes their discussions with similar brevity, stresses Scrope’s negative evaluation of Wakefield, showing an appreciation of the originality of Scrope’s colonization theory while also referring to his correspondence with Howick (Semmel 1970, 117–18).
In Scrope’s contrasting view, the “sufficient price” was “founded on a fallacy, and dangerous, if carried practically into operation, to the very objects we all have in view” (House of Commons 1836, 177), and he therefore preferred a low land price to the “sufficient price.” Wakefield argued that the ease with which settlers could acquire land led to sparse settlement, leaving each settler an isolated landowner with few laborers. Such a colony could not prosper due to the lack of combined labor, the very basis of the production of wealth. Scrope, however, argued that the desire of immigrants to acquire their own land was not so strong that they would ignore opportunities to obtain high wages. By adopting an inexpensive land policy, a colony could attract many immigrants. As settlers could obtain land easily, they would relatively quickly become independent farmers, thus encouraging higher wages, and in turn, attracting more immigrants. Colonies would thus develop without the risk of a lack of combined labor.

It appears to me it is simply the high rate of wages existing in those western provinces of the United States, that alone is the plain and obvious cause why so many of the labourers and artisans prefer remaining as labourers, to settling in the wilderness as farmers.... it is quite clear to me, that the cause of wages being high in the United States, is that land being extremely cheap, unless a labourer can obtain as large a command of the necessaries and comforts of life by labouring for wages, he will prefer taking to a farm of his own. (House of Commons 1836, 178)

For Scrope, preventing laborers from rapidly acquiring land was only one factor to be considered in determining the price of land. If the “sufficient price” is set much higher than that in other countries or colonies, it will necessarily have a negative effect on the stream of colonization. A high land price might also induce those who desire their own land to illegally occupy it as squatters, a common situation in the Australian colonies.

My view of a moderate price I have stated to be one limited by the regulations of the selling price of waste land in other countries and colonies, by the difficulty of preventing squatting if a high price be demanded, and, by the prospect of the discontent which would be produced in the labouring population, if you demand a high price for fertile lands within their view almost, on which they think they might maintain themselves in comfort, particularly if you adduce as a reason for that high price your desire to detain them in a state of servitude against their will. Mr. Wakefield’s principle of price is exclusively directed to the prohibiting the settlement of labourers on land until they have worked a certain term of years. He excludes all other considerations. If his theory be true, the price it points out is an absurdly high

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9) For contemporary political economists’ views on Wakefield’s systematic colonization, including those of Scrope, see Black (1960, chap.7, esp. 215–26).
Most importantly, Wakefieldian restrictive land policy was also criticized in terms of the principle of freedom of choice. Scrope warned that preventing laborers from settling on land could create great discontent among their class, as people object to being prevented from doing what they wish and forced to do what they dislike. They suppose themselves to be the best judges of their own interest. Any restriction on a choice that they think is most conducive to their own interests would thus have to be recognized as unwise and impolitic. At least, such measures as raising the existing price to compel people to work for hire are unacceptable to “the democracy of the United States of America.” He says:

In a free country such a principle cannot be avowed and maintained; or at all events, in a country where the labouring classes stand in the position of the labouring classes in the United States. They would be apt to look upon the imposition of a high price as a device of the capitalist for lowering the rate of wages of labour, and for obtaining their services at an inadequate price; in short, as a specious and ingenious attempt at establishing a sort of modified white slavery.11) (House of Commons 1836, 180)

2. Criticism of the transplant of large-scale farming to colonies
Scrope’s criticism goes to the very heart of the theory of systematic colonization. Specifically, he cast doubt on the advantage of a system of agriculture reliant on large-scale farming and a combined labor system. One of the most important purposes of the “sufficient price” policy was to create combined labor in colonies. Combined labor and

10) Scrope’s criticism of the sufficient price is related to the revenue from land sales. Although he agreed with the appropriation of land sale proceeds to an immigration fund, he differs from Wakefield in thinking that a much lower land price, as in the United States, would procure sufficient funds. When he was asked by the committee if maintaining such a low price in the British colonies would realize as much revenue as in the United States, he answered: “I do not see why we should not... I do therefore trust that the Committee will eschew Mr. Wakefield’s leading principle of colonization, and adhere in the question of price to the safe and successful example of the United States” (House of Commons 1836, 182). Scrope enumerated other possible sources of the immigration fund, such as general taxation, poor rates, a tax on the wages of labor in the colonies, and the repayment by installment of loans made to individual emigrant laborers in the colonies (House of Commons 1836, 176–77). Although Scrope proposed the use of the poor rate to aid in the emigration of paupers in his plan for a poor law in Ireland, it should be noted that emigration was only “subsidiary to the domestic employment of the Irish poor” (Scrope 1833b, 82). In fact, in later years, the higher cost of emigration was emphasized as a rationale for “home colonization” in Ireland. (Scrope 1847, 34–35; 1848a, 25, 28; 1848b, 34, 88–89). As for the abovementioned tax on wages, see also Scrope (1830, 11).

11) This does not imply that Scrope entirely advocated a laissez-faire approach to the disposition of land in colonies. He criticized the transfer of control over land from the British government to the colonial legislatures as an “enormous concession” that was “uncalled for and unwise” (Scrope 1873, 279–80). See also the citation from Scrope 1832e in Section II above.
capital were indispensable for productive agriculture, which in turn was necessary for a colony to become an exporter of food or raw materials. The combined capital and labor type of agriculture was only possible, however, with large farms. In short, Wakefield sought to re-create in the colonies the large-scale farming then prevalent in England. He says:

The most scientific of English farmers, if he were to apply his knowledge to the cultivation of a single field, would not raise a much greater produce than the most ignorant of Irish cottiers. The great extent of his farm allows full scope for the exercise of his superior knowledge. That of which he has a superior knowledge, is the art of cultivation on a large scale; and for the practice of this art, capital and labour in proportion to land are indispensable. (Wakefield 1833, 1:29)

By contrast, Scrope thought it unnecessary to transplant the large-scale farming system to the colonies. He denied, in general terms, that large-scale farming was the only way to use land profitably, although he admitted with regard to long-cultivated lands that “the system of cultivation by large farms and hired labour” was the most productive. In the case of waste land, however, cultivation was best accomplished by “the patient exertions and persevering industry of the cottier peasant, working on his own account on his own little patch of soil.” Such a farmer would put into his labor twice the exertion of even the free hired laborer of the capitalist-farmer and four times that of the constrained serf or slave because, as a landowner, he has complete conviction in the undisputed enjoyment of the fruits of his labor and improvement (Scrope 1833a, 349–51). In line with these arguments, and because he doubted the superiority of large-scale farming over small-scale, Scrope concurred that fifty-acre lots should be offered to laborers to create a valuable class of peasantry in a colony.

I also question whether it is of immense importance to such an agricultural territory as the western provinces of North America, to be cultivated upon the system of large farms by hired labour. I think it is possible that each settler occupying with a sufficient capital his own tract of land, may produce as large an amount of agricultural produce as under the system of large farms. (House of Commons 1836, 190)

IV. Scrope’s argument over the Irish land question and colonies

Scrope and the colonial reformers acted vigorously in both the academic and political

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12) His appreciation of small-scale farming also played an important role in his argument on the Irish land problem and resulting poverty. See Section IV.
spheres, particularly in the 1830s and 1840s. This was also the period during which an enormous number of Irish tenants were ejected from their lands, forcing many to emigrate to the colonies. Importantly, Scrope’s remarks on the Irish land problem and resulting poverty were often connected to his views on colonization, which contrasted distinctly with those of colonial reformers. In this section, Scrope’s argument on emigration is examined in relation to Irish poverty.

1. Colonial Reformers’ prescription for the Irish land problem

Wakefield thought that Irish poverty was caused by the lack of combined labor and capital and that colonization could help to address the surplus population in Ireland. In his view, the key problem was the “minute division of labour which takes place among the cottiers of Ireland...: a state of things, under which each labourer works by himself, and for himself only, with no larger capital than his own hands can employ, without exchange, or nearly so, and producing... not much more than enough for his own subsistence” (Wakefield 1833, 1:19–20). Charles Buller, another of the leading colonial reformers, was also critical of small-scale, self-sufficient farming: “the allotment of small pieces of land among the labouring class... may be made of great utility to a large portion of the labouring class, if had recourse to only as a means of supplying additional comforts and occasional independence to labourers, whose main reliance is on wages; but that it would entail the greatest curse on our labouring population, if they were ever brought to regard the cultivation of small allotments as their principal means of subsistence” (Wakefield 1849, 471–72).

The connection between the Irish land question and colonization can be observed most clearly in the argument of Robert Torrens, who may also be regarded as a colonial reformer. Like Wakefield, Torrens attributed the poverty of the Irish people to defective agriculture, which was in turn caused by “the want of combined labor upon the soil” (Torrens 1835, 40). In England, a farmer could cultivate 500 acres of land with approximately fifteen hired laborers working in combination. By contrast, in Ireland, 500 acres of land was divided into sixty separate farms occupied by sixty peasants, each working without the aid of hired labor. Then, Torrens claimed that fifteen men working in combination could raise greater produce than sixty men working separately and without co-operation. However, if small holdings were consolidated into larger holdings and the productivity of agriculture raised with combined labor and capital, many ex-peasants would be displaced from their holdings and find no demand for their labor. What should be done for them? Torrens’ answer was colonization.

13) Although there may be some differences in opinion, several scholars have argued for Torrens’ inclusion among the colonial reformers. For example, Magnusson (2004, 44) explicitly says, “Torrens belonged to a group of colonial reformers including Wakefield.” In any case, no one denies that he belonged to the “Wakefield school” (Knorr 1944, 300) or was a “disciple” of Wakefield (Semmel 1970, 10) and “remained allied” (Winch 1965, 130). On Torrens’ theory of colonization, see, for example, Robbins (1958, esp. chap.6).
There can be no relief, no safety for Ireland, except in an extensive and well regulated system of colonization; planting on the unoccupied lands of our foreign possessions, that portion of her rural population which may be ejected from their small holdings, by such a consolidation of farms as may be sufficient to secure the advantages of combined labour upon the land.\(^{14}\) (Torrens 1835, 44–45)

2. Denial of colonization as a solution

As shown in Section II, Scrope generally approved of emigration as a remedy for surplus population. However, on the Irish land question and resulting poverty, he never advocated emigration as the best means to address the issue.\(^{15}\) For Scrope, colonization was “essentially an abstraction of the elements of wealth and strength from the parent country” and “a wasteful diversion of the national means,” unless resources at home were fully utilized (Scrope 1848a, 25; 1848b, 9). At most, its “proper place” was as a secondary and prospective resource” (Scrope 1848b, 9; my italics). He was “for HOME COLONIZATION... in preference to foreign” (Scrope 1848a, 26; capitalization in original). Specifically, he proposed to transform waste lands in Ireland, including even those privately owned, into small farms, thus increasing the number of small-scale yeomen who cultivated their own land. He argued, as in the criticism of Wakefield’s colonization policy, that the land is “made as productive, if not more so, on the small as on the large farm system” (Scrope 1848b, 44).\(^{16}\)

Why did Scrope agree with emigration of laborers from Britain to the United States or British colonies and disagree with the emigration of the Irish poor? It is not difficult to understand the reason underlying his criticism of Irish immigration to Britain. They had colonized London, Manchester, Glasgow, Birmingham, Bristol, and other chief manufacturing districts. As a result, the natural vents for the surplus population of rural parishes were constantly choked by the hordes of starving Irish immigrants. Every one of them occupied a place which would otherwise have been taken by an English laborer, and drove the latter back upon his parish to be maintained there in idleness (Scrope 1833b, 60–61). However, the negative effects on the British labor market, or other purely

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\(^{14}\) Wakefield also thought that emigration to colonies would resolve the Irish land question. “[A] very useful end of colonization” is “to turn the tide of Irish emigration from England to her colonies... [T]he owners of land in Ireland... might thus be taken out of the dilemma... of a choice between legally giving up a great part of their rental to the hungry people, and yielding to the people’s violence the land which was taken by violence from their fathers” (Wakefield 1833, 2:106).

\(^{15}\) According to Black, “Only Poulett Scrope” was against emigration as a relief measure during the Great Famine (Black 1960, 232).

\(^{16}\) As Black shows, the economic defense of small farming in Ireland was originally developed by Irish figures such as William Blacker (1777–1855) and William Sharman Crawford (1781–1861). The most influential English political economist who followed them was J. S. Mill, whose ideas were “strikingly at variance with orthodox classical ideas on the subject” (Black 1960, 29–31). For the similarity between Scrope’s and J. S. Mill’s view on this point, see also Isaka (2018, 53). For Scrope’s argument with J. S. Mill over the Irish poor relief measures, see Morishita (2019, 107–12).
economic viewpoints, cannot explain why Scrope criticized Irish emigration to British colonies or other foreign countries. If the destination of Irish immigrants was somewhere other than Britain, it would not adversely affect British laborers’ wages or its poor law administration. Likewise, in terms of the labor market, it is difficult to deny the positive effect of emigration from Ireland to British colonies, such as those in Australia, because it would simultaneously mitigate the problems of labor surplus in the former and shortage in the latter.

It is Scrope’s theory of natural rights, specifically, the right to land and the right to subsistence, that is the key to understand his different attitudes on emigration. The land is more equitably and liberally leased in Britain than in most other countries. A cultivator, secured by a lease in the possession of all that he can raise off his farm over and above the rent he has stipulated to pay its owner, stands for the term of his occupation in the position of its owner. In addition, the land laws extended the protection to the tenants from the rapacity of their landlords, and the courts of Britain have at all times liberally afforded the countenance to the efforts of the industrious classes of society to emancipate themselves from the thralldom in which they had been bound by the feudal system (Scrope 1848c, 16; 1833a, 124). In Ireland, by contrast, the soil is locked up in the legal possession of a small number of “careless, bankrupt, or absentee proprietors, who have no power or energy to develop its resources; but absolute power to prevent their development by the refusal of just terms of tenure to others” (Scrope 1848a, 32). A large portion of cultivators are expected to improve the land on a six months’ tenure, and in very many cases, with a notice to quit served upon him yearly. He must himself build his house, his stables, his barn, and other farm offices, with the knowledge that he may, by the sudden caprice of his landlord or the agent, be turned out of his occupation, and deprived of property he may have thus created, without a penny of compensation. In addition, any improvement of the kind he may make will be absolutely the cause of his expulsion, unless he consents to pay an increased rent—that is, to pay over again for the improvements he has himself made (Scrope 1848a, 35).

As for the right to subsistence, Scrope argued that the poor laws in Britain had long since repudiated the extravagant extension of the right to property in land. For over two centuries, land on this island had been held in ownership on the express condition that no man, woman, or child born or even momentarily resident on it, should incur the risk of starvation for want of employment if able, or of charitable relief, if unable to work (Scrope 1846, 57). By contrast, the Irish poor law was introduced only in 1838, and even after several amendments, it was woefully insufficient to save the poor. Scrope stressed that Irish landowners had virtually no responsibility whatsoever for the maintenance of the population that lived on their estates. It was a matter of indifference whether the people lived or died; rather, their interest lay in the latter alternative. “A CLEARANCE effected by fever and famine may save the trouble and odium that would be incurred, in bringing about the same desirable result by direct means!” (Scrope 1846, 53; capitalization and italics in original).
Scrope’s differing views regarding emigration for Britain and Ireland can be explained by these different situations about the two natural rights. In Britain, at least for Scrope, farmers enjoyed security of tenure over the land and the poor laws ensured people’s right to subsistence. Therefore, emigration was a matter of freedom of choice. However, this was not the case in Ireland, where cultivators’ right to land was denied or highly insecure, and the right of the poor to subsistence was unsettled due to a lack of or deficiencies in poor laws. In Ireland, emigration was not a matter of freedom of choice, but a violation of natural rights. It is in this context that Scrope proposed to enact or reform the poor laws, as well as reform land laws and promote small yeoman farming, rather than allow people go to the colonies. Scrope’s following criticism of Malthus can be read as that of all those who advocated emigration of the Irish poor:

I know, indeed, but one argument that can be raised against the paramount RIGHT of the people to live on the land of their birth. It is that of Mr. Malthus, that “There is no room for them at nature’s table;” that “the places are all full;” that the land will not, cannot be made to maintain them. Happily this plea is as false in fact, as it is inhuman in appearance. It is false everywhere. But of all countries on the globe is it most notoriously, glaringly false, if predicated of Ireland. Ireland which exports at present many millions’ worth of food! ... Ireland is the last country in which this pitiful excuse for denying the just claims of the poor can be put forward by any honest reasoner! (Scrope 1846, 67–68; capitalization and italics in original)

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17) In response to hand-loom weavers in England who had petitioned for legislative restraint on machinery and the regulation of wages, Scrope proposed emigration to colonies (“LET THE ATLANTIC BE BRIDGED OVER”), criticizing their request as “opposed to every principle of science and common sense.” When, in their reply letter, his proposal was refused (“WE WILL NOT GO—we’ll die here, where we were born”), he replied: “the Bridge’ is proposed only as a convenience to those who choose to go.... My proposition is not (as you unfairly represent it) to TRANSPORT the honest labourers of this country, but to FREE THEM FROM IMPRISONMENT within its narrow limits...” (Scrope 1835, 5–7, 17, 24; capitalization and italics in original)

18) This does not mean that these propositions are explained only in terms of his natural rights theory. The enactment of the poor laws in Ireland was proposed, for example, as a means to prevent the influx of the Irish into the British labor market or to protect British farmers from competition from Irish producers, who did not have to pay a poor rate. For these purely economic viewpoints, see, for example, Scrope (1833b, 59–69).

19) As a matter of history, however, Scrope’s propositions were not carried out—at least never well enough—and millions of Irish people left “the land of their birth” during and after the Great Famine. Although he admitted that emigration had positive effects on the Irish labor market, he lamented the following facts about emigration: “Thousands upon thousands fled from a country so afflicted by Providence and neglected by its rulers. And the depletion occasioned by the famine itself, and the constant outflow of the peasantry to seek a living in the United States of America, which set in then and has continued ever since, have together, in a rude but effective manner, solved the problem of the redundancy of population in Ireland. But who can wonder at the bitter feelings those terrible famine years left behind in the bosoms both of those who quitted their native land under the circumstances I have briefly glanced at, and those who remained?” (Scrope 1873, 270).
V. Conclusion

Scrope not only approved of colonization as a supplementary measure for mitigating a glut in the labor market in general but also regarded colonies as evidence of the correctness of his political economy, specifically his criticism of Malthus’ population theory and emphasis on the role of political or social institutions, especially those of land ownership.

However, Scrope was highly critical of the colonial reformers, led by Wakefield, who were most influential in theory and most active in practice. For Scrope, Wakefield’s “sufficient price” policy was “founded on a fallacy, and dangerous, if carried practically into operation, to the very objects we all have in view”. The reformers’ prescription for the Irish land problem was likewise unacceptable. Scrope opposed the consolidation of small farms and the emigration of expelled tenants, emphasizing the importance of enabling the existing tenantry to develop the full productiveness of the land they occupied. Underlying Scrope’s criticism of both the “sufficient price” policy in colonies and the consolidation and emigration policy in Ireland was his appreciation of small-scale farming: unlike colonial reformers, Scrope asserted that small-scale yeoman farming could be as productive as the system of large farms.

It is misleading to say, as the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography does, that he “advocated emigration to the colonies as the best solution to the problems of poverty and over-population” (Rudwick 2004, 553). It is true that he urged colonization in response to the arguments of antipopulationists, and proposed emigration as a practical means to improve conditions for people in Britain. However, he rejected colonization as the best means for addressing Irish poverty. It was “essentially an abstraction of the elements of wealth and strength from the parent country” unless resources at home were fully utilized. In Ireland, at most, its “proper place” was as “a secondary and prospective resource.” He was “for HOME COLONIZATION... in preference to foreign.”

It should be noted that Scrope’s differing views between emigration from Britain and Ireland were closely related to his views on natural rights. Scrope advocated for voluntary emigration of British laborers as a solution for a glut in the labor market. However, he was opposed to allowing the Irish poor to migrate to the colonies. In Ireland, unlike in Britain, cultivators’ right to land was denied or quite insecure and the people’s right to subsistence was unsettled due to the lack of or deficiencies in the poor laws. Unless “the paramount RIGHT of the people to live on the land of their birth” was guaranteed, emigration was not a matter of choice and was therefore never justified.

(Tomonori Isaka: Toyama College)
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