The Origin and Development of the Concepts of the Population Theory:
R. Wallace, W. Godwin, T. R. Malthus, and D. Ricardo

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1. Introduction
This paper is intended to clarify the concepts of the population theory of Robert Wallace (1697-1771), William Godwin (1756-1836), Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834), and David Ricardo (1772-1823), in order to discuss the relationship between their respective ideas.

Since Wallace argues that population will double in a generation in his book *A Dissertation on the Numbers of Mankind, in Antient and Modern Times*, published in 1753, he is considered as a predecessor of Malthus. Wallace thinks that although the reproductive power of mankind is strong, population is decreasing in modern society. He argues that luxury is one of the main causes, because people buy the luxurious goods, and refrain from marriage.

*Various Prospects of Mankind, Nature and Providence*, published in 1761 was another book in which Wallace discussed population theory. He argues in his *Numbers* that although population doubles logically, it is decreasing owing to the bad forms of government. Therefore in his *Prospects*, he develops the argument what happens to the increase of population under the perfect forms of government of a utopia. Wallace concludes that once utopia is established, an increasing population covers all over the lands, and all the lands are cultivated and utopia is collapsed from the lack of food. Therefore he abandons the utopia.

And his theory of utopia is related to his Theology. The continual increase of mankind by utopia is inconsistent with the limited extent of the earth and the limited fertility of the land created by God. He regards vices as the means to suppress the increase of population. Since he describes a future state after death in which virtues are to be rewarded and vices are to be punished, his arguments in *Prospects* elucidate one aspect of his theodicy. He argued this point of view in his manuscript ‘An essay shewing that Death & Vice are necessary’.

On the other hand, Godwin criticizes Wallace in his book *Political Justice and its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness*, published in 1793. Wallace argues that all the lands could be cultivated in the utopia, but in the light of Godwin, there are still a

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lot of non-cultivated lands in the world. It was best for Godwin to create society based on equality without private property; he was not able to accept the critique of utopia based on overpopulation, which might happen or not. Since Godwin thinks that population could be controlled by reason of mankind, overpopulation is not a big problem.

Malthus criticizes Godwin in his *An Essay on the Principle of Population as it affects the Future Improvement of Society. With Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and other Writers*, published in 1798. Since Malthus was concerned about the increase of population, he argued that social equality, even if established, will be collapsed by rapid population growth. Such a critique of utopia in Malthus is the same as that of Wallace’s in *Prospects*. While Malthus thinks that the overpopulation suggested by Wallace will be the event in the distant future, Wallace does not think it will occur in the distant future, but uses it as a critique of utopia. The similarity between Wallace and Malthus in geometric progression of the increase in population has been focused in previous researches, but the method of critique of utopia is the most important idea in both of them.

Ricardo criticizes the arguments of Malthus. He did not accept the increase in geometric progression of the population despite his high estimation of Malthus’s *Population*. Moreover, the idea of population of Ricardo disagrees with Godwin’s. Godwin argues that if population increases, people should cultivate the uncultivated lands, but for Ricardo, uncultivated lands are infertile. Therefore if people cultivate the uncultivated lands, the rent will increase. In this light, Ricardo criticizes the idea that people cultivate the uncultivated lands. In order to be proportional to the increase of capital, for Ricardo, the increase in population was not so important as Malthus suggested.

The four population theories described above are different from each other. Wallace has been regarded from two points of view: as a predecessor of optimistic Godwin on the one hand, and the predecessor of Malthus who stressed the increase in a geometric progression of the population on the other. But one of the most important ideas of Wallace is a predecessor of Malthus as a critic of utopia.

Ricardo argues that luxury prevents population from increasing; therefore he does not focus on overpopulation. Despite their seemingly similar optimism, the ideas of population theory of Wallace, Godwin, and Ricardo are completely different. Especially, Ricardo’s argument that the capital and the population are related to each other is very different from the ideas of Wallace.
2. Wallace's population theory and his criticism of utopia

2-1 Wallace's population theory

Some scholars argued Wallace's population theory mainly on geometrical ratio of population growth in *Numbers of Mankind*, and considered him a predecessor of Malthus. However, he thought population was not increasing, but tend to diminish. He listed the causes of the diminution as follows: different customs with respect to servants and the maintenance of the poor; different rules of succession to estates, and the right of primogeniture; little encouragement given to marriage in modern times; neglect of agriculture; the loss of ancient simplicity which had long prevailed, and so on.

2-2 Wallace's intention of utopia

Although Wallace treated the problems of utopia in *Prospects*, his argument of utopia covers only first four chapters of the total twelve. Therefore, it is important to understand how he would situate his ideas of utopia in *Prospects*. He stated his own situation in the advertisement as follows:

Though the Writer of the following Pieces [i.e. Wallace] has made several observations upon civil government, and the constitution of society; yet his principal intention in these Prospects, is to illustrate the principles of morality and natural religion: in particular, to discover whether the present life of man has a relation to any other, and thus to trace the designs of providence with respect to a state after death. At the same time, he hopes that his observations will not only answer his principal purpose, but serve likewise to throw some additional light upon human nature, and human society, considered only with relation to the present life. (Wallace 1761, p.iii)

Thus, his main intention in *Prospects* was to illustrate the principles of the morality and natural religion, and the designs of providence with respect to a state after death. Therefore, in order to consider his treatment of utopia, the argument of providence is indispensable. As to that argument he mentions as follows:

We may fancy universal peace, friendship, virtue, and wisdom. But these delightful scenes have never existed, never shall, nor can they exist but in the poets brain to furnish materials for writers of romance.

If this is really the case, one cannot help being sorry for it; but this is not the

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proper place to examine how far such agreeable scenes are possible. It is sufficient to observe at present, that we can form consistent ideas of much higher improvements in human society than have appeared hitherto. However the question concerning the possibility of such a happy state, is of too great importance to be slightly passed over. It deserves an accurate discussion, which will sufficiently reward our pains: for though perhaps, after all our inquiries, we must rest contented without finding out what we would wish; yet by our searches we shall at least gain a more intimate acquaintance with the human affections and passions. We shall see farther into the nature of society, and penetrate deeper into the methods of the divine providence. (Wallace 1761, pp.24-25)

The reason for him to examine the utopia was not to establish a utopian society in reality, but to have an acquaintance with the human actions and passions, and to penetrate deeper into the methods of the divine providence.

2.3 Wallace’s conclusion of utopia

Wallace considered his utopian government referring to that of Thomas More. Under such a government, those four of human passions which are related to vices, emulation, the love of ease or sensual pleasure, the love of liberty, and quarrels which arise from men’s affection, are not fatal anymore in such a society. The whole earth could become a paradise, and mankind could be universally wise and happy.

However, he concluded that utopia could be collapsed. Under such a perfect government, it could bring about population growth, and collapsed by overpopulation.

Under a perfect government, the inconveniencies of having a family would be so entirely removed, children would be so well taken care of, and every thing become so favourable to populousness, that though some sickly seasons or dreadful plagues in particular climates might cut off multitude, yet in general, mankind would increase so prodigiously, that the earth would at last be overstocked, and become unable to support its numerous inhabitants. (Wallace 1761, p.114)

Once a utopian society is established under such a government, people will increase inevitably. Since there is not sufficient room for containing the whole mankind, there could be food shortage on this earth. The earth could be overstocked at last: mankind would battle each other to seek foods.

Therefore since it could be impossible to support the great numbers of mankind
under a perfect government, he abandoned the utopia in conclusion. Since God created the earth, Wallace considered that utopia was inconsistent with providence. Since he thought that vices could prevent population growth, he conceded real society even though there were vices in that society.

But there are certain primary determinations in nature, to which all other things of a subordinate kind must be adjusted. A limited earth, a limited degree of fertility, and the continual increase of mankind are three of these original constitutions. To these determinations, human affairs, and the circumstances of all other animals, must be adapted. In which view, it is unsuitable to our ideas of order, that while the earth is only capable of maintaining a determined number, the human race should encrease without end. This would be the necessary consequence of a perfect government and education. On which account it is more contrary to just proportion, to suppose that such a perfect government should be established in such circumstances, than that by permitting vice, or the abuse of liberty in the wisdom of providence, mankind should never be able to multiply so greatly as to overstock the earth. (Wallace 1761, p.122)

He criticized utopia also in his manuscript of ‘An essay shewing that Death & Vice are necessary’, which is dated Saturday September 17 1764. He regarded this manuscript as ‘a very fine and just speculation to vindicate the wisdom & order of nature and providence’, and begins his argument as follows:

We are ready to complain of the order of nature & the morall Government of the world & to quarrell with providence, because of Death, Diseases, bad government, war & all the effects of vice & the irregular passions of mankind. But all these things are necessary in the present state & the human nature is capable of much greater happiness & perfection, if men be considered either in their single capacity or as members of Society: Yet such happiness and perfection are not consistent with the fundamentall constitution of the earth in its present state.

There are 2 very fundamentall constitutions att present, one is that the earth is of a limited extent, Another that a new succession of men & other animalls daily arises by propagation & if the scheme is consistent with itself, all things with relation to men & other animalls must be consistent with these 2 fundamentall constitutions. (Wallace n.d. p.2)

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3 This manuscript is introduced briefly in the paper of Luehrs (1987).
There are death and vices in the world. Although mankind complains to God about them, they are necessary in this world. He attributed in his manuscript the causes of these misery to the a limited extent of earth, a new succession of men & other animals daily arising by propagation, whereas in his *Prospects* he pointed out three fundamentals of a limited earth, a limited degree of fertility, and the continual increase of mankind.

He criticized utopia in conclusion in his manuscript.

Nor is there only a necessity for death & Diseases, but we see likeways how vice & debauchery[,] how injustice violence & war contribute to living about the great design of nature[,] [S]uppose men perfectly temperate and regular in their Diet & amours[,] Diseases would be much prevented[,] [S]uppose a perfect government according to sir Thomas More’s or Harrington’s plan & a proper education for children by which meaning vice and injustice & and all the miseries of war would be prevented[,] mankind indeed would be extremely happy[,] arts & Sciences would flourish, navigation & commerce be established among the most Distant nations on a just footing, the earth would produce in vast abundance & every part of it be like a paradise. But then it would likeways be overstocked & there would be no room for the vast numbers of men who would be propagated under this equal & just government & thus such a perfect & happy state of human nature is absolutely inconsistent with propagation & the limited extent of this earth.

(Wallace n.d. pp.5-6)

His main intention was not to establish utopia in this world, but to criticize it, because it was inconsistent with this limited earth created by God. There is not enough room in this earth for mankind who increase geometrical ration under the utopia. He looked on vices as the means to prevent overpopulation. However it does not mean he estimated vices *per se* as highly as Bernard de Mandeville (1670-1733) did. He criticized them as a minister after the argument of utopia as follows:

But if these evils are supposed further to have a relation to a future state, much greater room is given for displaying the divine wisdom, in bringing good out of evil. How natural must it be, on this supposition, to conceive that the calamities in the lives of virtuous men, may naturally, as well as by a positive appointment, turn out to their advantage, and that punishments may also be proper and
necessary in a future state? (Wallace 1761, pp.367-368)

He concluded that vices or abuse of liberty could prevent overpopulation, but the mankind who did such vicious actions was punished in a future state. In Prospects, vices are the central idea of him. After he insisted the necessity of vices in the argument of utopia, he criticized them as a minister. Therefore what he desired to emphasis was to answer the question: for what purpose vices exist and how far they are approved by God. His Prospects therefore was written for his theodicy.

3. Godwin’s population theory and his utopian society

3.1 Godwin’s equitable society

Godwin insisted on equitable society in Political Justice. By disparity between the rich and the poor apparent in commercial society in particular, the poor are suffering severely from poverty. His purpose was to rectify this disparity.

I have an hundred loaves in my possession and in the next street there is a poor man expiring with hunger, to whom one of these loaves would be the means of preserving his life. If I withhold this loaf from him, am I not unjust? If I impart it, am I not complying with what justice demands? To whom does the loaf justly belong?

……. It is unjust, if one man labour to the destruction of his health or his life, that another man may abound in luxuries. It is unjust, if one man be deprived of leisure to cultivate his rational powers, while another man contributes not a single effort to add to the common stock. The faculties of one man are like the faculties of another man. Justice directs that each man, unless perhaps he be employed more beneficially to the public, should contribute to the cultivation of the common harvest, of which man consumes a share. This reciprocity, indeed, as was observed when that subject was the matter of separate consideration, is of the very essence of justice. (Godwin 1793, pp.422-423)

He vindicated the society based on equality from the point of view of justice. He did not intend to equalize it by relying on private charity. Though he acknowledged the role of Christian religion, he did not consider private charity as justice.

If religion has spoken out, and told us that it was just that all men should receive the supply of their wants, we should presently have been led to suspect that a
gratuitous distribution to be made by the rich, was a very indirect and ineffectual way of arriving at this object. The experience of all ages has taught us, that this system is productive only of a very precarious supply. The principle object which it seems to propose, is to place this supply in the disposal of a few, enabling them to make a show of generosity with what is not truly their own, and to purchase the gratitude of the poor by payment of a debt. It is a system of clemency and charity, instead of a system of justice. It fills the rich with unreasonable pride by the spurious denominations with which it decorates their acts, and the poor with servility, by leading them to regard the slender comforts they obtain, not as their incontrovertible due, but as the good pleasure and the grace of their opulent neighbours. (Godwin 1793, p.426)

Thus, he intended to establish the equitable society by the system without relying on private charity or religion. If his utopian society was once established, there could be less wars and vices. He thought that as crimes occurred due to disparity between the rich and the poor, if once equitable society was established, there could be less misery, and the society could be a paradise.

3.2 Godwin’s population theory

Unlike Wallace, Godwin’s intention was to establish a utopian society in reality. As Wallace criticized utopia by reason of overpopulation, Godwin could not ignore his idea.

An author who has speculated widely upon subjects of government, has recommended equal, or, which was rather his idea, common property, as a complete remedy, to the usurpation and distress which are at present the most powerful enemies of human kind, to the vices which infect education in some instances, and the neglect it encounters in more, to all the turbulence of passion, and all the injustice of selfishness. But, after having exhibited this picture, not less true than delightful, he finds an argument that demolishes the whole, and restores him to indifference and despair, in the excessive population that would ensue. (Godwin 1793, p.459)

As for Godwin, Wallace should have finished his theory of utopia before the

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4 Godwin noted here and cited Wallace’s Various Prospects of Mankind, nature and Providence.
collapse of it. But, the main intention of Wallace was to insist that it was impossible to establish utopia in this world. Therefore Godwin had to refute Wallace’s ideas.

One of the most obvious answers to this objection is, that to reason thus is to foresee difficulties at a great distance. Three fourths of the habitable globe is now uncultivated. The parts already cultivated are capable of immeasurable improvement. Myriads of centuries of still increasing population may probably pass away, and the earth still be found sufficient for the subsistence of its inhabitants. Who can say how long the earth itself will survive the casualties of the planetary system? Who can say what remedies shall suggest themselves for so distant an inconvenience, time enough for practical application, and of which we may yet at this time have not the smallest idea? It would be truly absurd for us to shrink from a scheme of essential benefit to mankind, less they should be too happy, and by necessary consequence at some distant period too populous. (Godwin 1793, pp.459-460)

Wallace concluded that even if the utopian society was established, it will be collapsed in the end. Godwin criticized him even though acknowledging Wallace’s theory of overpopulation in utopian society, regarded the problem of overpopulation to be in the distant future. It was absurd for him to abandon utopia by reason of overpopulation which might happen in the distant future. It was more important for him to create equitable society in this world than to have undue anxiety for which might happen in the distant future. It is not probably important for Wallace when utopia could be collapsed. His main intention was to argue theology in Prospects, not to determine when utopia could be collapsed. Godwin, who wished to establish a utopian society in reality unlike Wallace, resolved this problem by regarding the collapse of utopia as the event in a far distant future.

In previous researches⁵, the ideas of Wallace and Godwin are both of them considered optimistic. It is true that they do not worry about overpopulation in reality. On the one hand, over population is just an imaginary theory in utopia for Wallace, but on the other hand, overpopulation might occur in the distant future for Godwin. Wallace who insisted population was decreasing in modern times compared to ancient in Numbers did not have to worry about overpopulation seriously, but Godwin who wished to establish an equitable society, had to resolve the problem of overpopulation.

Therefore even if they are optimistic, their ideas of optimism are not quite the same. In the point of view of utopia, Wallace criticized it, and Godwin approved it. Their ideas were quite opposite.

4. Malthus’s population theory and his criticism of utopia

4.1 Malthus’s population theory

Although Wallace insisted that population could increase under good government and lastly utopia could be collapsed by reason of overpopulation, he thought there were still a lot of uncultivated lands and mankind was decreasing in reality. However unlike Wallace, Malthus thinks overpopulation is an urgent problem, since population increases in a geometrical ratio, but subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio.

I said that population, when unchecked, increased in a geometrical ratio; and subsistence for man in an arithmetical ratio. (Malthus 1798, p.11)

However Wallace did not describe arithmetical ratio of subsistence. He only predicted substance could be insufficient under the perfect government. Since Malthus regarded overpopulation as important, he had to describe checks on overpopulation.

The preventive check appears to operate in some degree through all the ranks of society in England. There are some men, even in the highest rank, who are prevented from marrying by the idea of the expenses that they must retrench, and the fancied pleasures that they must deprive themselves of, on the supposition of having a family. (Malthus 1798, p.26)

The positive check to population, by which I mean, the check that represses an increase which is already begun, is confined chiefly, though not perhaps solely, to the lowest orders of society. This check is not so obvious to common view as the other I have mentioned: and, to prove distinctly the force and extent of its operation, would require, perhaps, more data than we are in possession of. But I believe it has been very generally remarked by those who have attended to bills of morality, that of the number of children who die annually, much too great a proportion belongs to those, who may be supposed unable to give their offspring proper food and attention; exposed as they are occasionally to severe distress, and confined, perhaps, to unwholesome habitations and hard labour. (Malthus 1798, p.29)
He added another factors to these two checks.

To these two great checks to population, in all long occupied countries, which I have called the preventive and the positive checks, may be added, vicious customs with respect to women, great cities, unwholesome manufactures, luxury, pestilence, and war.

All these checks may be fairly resolved into misery and vice. (Malthus 1798, p.38)

Since he was apprehensive for overpopulation, he considered the checks of population. His main ideas are preventive and positive checks. Although he acknowledged these roles, they were not sufficient for him to check overpopulation. Wallace did not regard overpopulation as reality; Godwin thought overpopulation was suppressed sufficiently by human reason and might happen in the distant future, but was not a serious problem in his age.

4.2 Malthus’s criticism of utopia

Before arguing the utopia theory of Malthus, it is necessary to introduce Malthus’s interpretation of Wallace. Since Wallace’s main intention was to criticize utopia, Godwin opposed his idea arguing overpopulation was not an urgent problem, even though it might happen in the distant future. Godwin regarded Wallace as a critic of Utopia. But Malthus misunderstood the idea of Wallace.

To a person who draws the preceding obvious inferences, from a view of the past and present state of mankind, it cannot but be a matter of astonishment, that all the writers on the perfectibility of man and of society, who have noticed the argument of an overcharged population, treat it always very slightly, and invariably represent the difficulties arising from it, as at a great and almost immeasurable distance. Even Mr. Wallace, who thought the argument itself of so much weight, as to destroy his whole system of equality, did not seem to be aware that any difficulty would occur from this cause, till the whole earth had been cultivated like a garden, and was incapable of any further increase of produce. Were this really the case, and were a beautiful system of equality in other respects practicable, I cannot think that our ardour in the pursuit of such a scheme ought to be damped by the contemplation of so remote a difficulty. An event at such a distance might fairly be left to providence: but the truth is, that if
the view of the argument given in this essay be just, the difficulty so far from being remote, would be imminent, and immediate. (Malthus 1798, p.53)

Malthus described the title of the chapter VIII of his Population as ‘Mr. Wallace—Error of supposing that the difficulty arising from population is at a great distance—’. Malthus criticized him for not assuming overpopulation as an urgent problem. But Wallace did not mention that collapse of utopia was in the distant future. This idea was that of Godwin not of Wallace. Malthus confused the idea of Wallace with Godwin. The intention of Wallace was that even if utopia was established, it could be collapsed by reason of overpopulation. It was not important for him when it could happen. He used it as a part of his Theology. Godwin acknowledged him as a critic of utopia and argued that utopia could be collapsed by reason of overpopulation, but it might happen in the future, not in this age. Therefore, unlike Godwin, Malthus did not understand fully the idea of Wallace. The intention of Malthus’s criticism of utopia was almost same as Wallace.

With these extraordinary encouragements to population, and every cause of depopulation, as we have supposed, removed, the numbers would necessarily increase faster than in any society that has ever yet been known. (Malthus 1798, p.68)

Malthus criticized Godwin’s utopia by reason of overpopulation. This is his main intention of the first edition of Population.

I have read some of the speculations on the perfectibility of man and of society, with great pleasure. I have been warmed and delighted with the enchanting picture which they hold forth. I ardently wish for such happy improvements. But I see great, and, to my understanding, unconquerable difficulties in the way to them. These difficulties it is my present purpose to state: …… (Malthus 1798, p.7)

It was one of the main intentions for Malthus to criticize Godwin. Godwin who described utopia, and wished to establish it thought that human reason was sufficient to check overpopulation, even if it might happen: it was the problem of the distant future, not the one in this age. Therefore, from this point of view, he criticized Wallace who opposed utopia. Malthus criticized Wallace as well as Godwin. But it was not so
important for Wallace when utopia could be collapsed. The most important thing for him was to oppose establishing utopia in this world. Unlike Godwin, Malthus could not understand the intent of Wallace and criticized him. Though it was true that Malthus thought overpopulation was the urgent problem unlike Wallace, their main intention was to criticize utopia. This was one of the most important ideas for them.

5. Ricardo’s population theory

Ricardo published *Principle of political Economy and taxation* in 1817. He did not stress the importance of population so much as Wallace and Malthus did. But his population theory was quite unique.

Ricardo and Malthus who were close friends supported their opinion in some cases and disagreed in others. In point of view of population theory, Ricardo supported Malthus during Malthus-Godwin controversy, but he did not internalize overpopulation theory of Malthus. When Godwin published *Of Population* in 1820, Ricardo wrote a letter to Malthus.

I have read a very good critique on Godwin in the Edin. Review, and I am quite sure that I know the writer. It is very well done, and most satisfactorily exposes Godwin’s ignorance as well as his disingenuousness. (Ricardo 1952, Vol. IX, p.84)

And the following letter was from Trower to Ricardo. Trower summarized population theory of Malthus. His summary was quite the same as the population theory of Wallace.

I have been reading Godwin’s attack upon Malthus. It is not written in the true spirit of philosophick enquiry. It is intemperate and abusive; and with all the pretence of systematrick investigation, it is a rambling disjointed performance. It proceeds upon a gross misconception of Malthus’s system, and is supported by scandalous misrepresentations of his opinions. As an attack upon the great principle inculcated in the Essay it is perfectly impotent. Whether population will double itself in 25 or 50 years is of no moment as far as principle is concerned; and Godwin himself is forced to admit the tendency of population to increase. I have always thought Malthus did not place his doctrine upon its proper basis. It is not the more rapid multiplication of animal life, than vegetable life, which occasions population to out run food, but it is the limited extent of land, and the rate at which it can be encreased—that is to say, at which fresh land can be taken
into cultivation. The mere increase of vegetable life is infinitely more rapid than that of vegetable life; and industry of every man, properly directed, is capable of producing much more food than is necessary for his own existence. But the quantity of land from which that produce can be obtained is limited, whilst the growth of population is not affected by the limit, consequently this growth will have a tendency to run on till it is stopped by the want of subsistence. Of course, this is what Malthus means, but it is not what he has said and therefore he has laid himself open to the attacks of those, who object to the literal terms, in which his doctrine is delivered. (Ricardo 1952, Vol. VIII, pp.361-362, Trower's italics)

Trower summarized the population theory of Malthus, which was almost similar to the idea of Wallace, and criticized Godwin for misunderstanding Malthus.

Ricardo sympathized with Malthus and it seemed he agreed with him about the population theory. However, Ricardo did not acknowledge overpopulation.

Mr. Malthus appears to me to be too much inclined to think that population is only increased by the previous provision of food, —“that it is food that creates its own demand,”—that it is by first providing food, that encouragement is given to marriage, instead of considering that the general progress of population is affected by the increase of capital, the consequent demand for labour, and the rise of wages; and that the production of food is but the effect of that demand. (Ricardo 1821, p.406)

It is capital for Ricardo that increases population, whereas it is food for Malthus that increases population. Therefore Ricardo thought population increased rapidly in America not because abundant supply has been previously provided, but because food can be produced at cheap price.

With a population pressing against the means of subsistence, the only remedies are either a reduction of people, or a more rapid accumulation of capital. In rich counties, where all the fertile land is already cultivated, the latter remedy is neither very practicable nor very desirable, because its effect would be, if pushed very far, to render all classes equally poor. But in poor countries, where there are abundant means of production in store, from fertile land not yet brought into cultivation, it is the only safe and efficacious means of removing the evil, particularly as its effect would be to elevate all classes of the people.
The friends of humanity cannot but wish that in all countries the labouring classes should have a taste for comforts and enjoyments, and that they should be stimulated by all legal means in their exertions to procure them. There cannot be a better security against a superabundant population. (Ricardo 1821, pp.99-100)

When overpopulation should occur, remedies are either a reduction of people, or a more rapid accumulation of capital. Since he thought capital was sufficient to check overpopulation in poor countries, the problem of overpopulation remained in rich countries. But in rich countries, a taste for comforts and enjoyments, that is a taste for luxury could prevent overpopulation. Therefore he did not think overpopulation was critical problem for society. He should be included in optimism like Wallace and Godwin. However, his idea of population theory was different from that of Godwin. His uniqueness of population theory can be found in the rent theory apart from capital theory.

The most fertile, and most favorably situated, land will be first cultivated, and the exchangeable value of its produce will be first cultivated, and the exchangeable value of its produce will be adjusted in the same manner as the exchangeable value of all other commodities, by the total quantity of labour necessary in various forms, from first to last, to produce it, and bring it to market. When land of an inferior quality is taken into cultivation, the exchangeable value of raw produce will rise, because more labour is required to produce it. (Ricardo 1821, p.72)

The rise of rent is always the effect of the increasing wealth of the country, and of the difficulty of providing food for its augmented population. It is a symptom, but it is never a cause of wealth; for wealth often increases most rapidly while rent is either stationary, or even falling. (Ricardo 1821, p.77)

Godwin who thought overpopulation could be prevented by human reason insisted that as there were many rooms for population growth, so it should take long time to fill the earth with mankind. Wallace mentioned that since there were three fundamentals of a limited earth, a limited degree of fertility, and the continual increase of mankind under the utopia, the earth could no longer maintain mankind. Malthus described overpopulation as urgent problem in this world. Unlike them, Ricardo emphasized capital and rent related to population. If population increased, inferior lands were cultivated, and rent was raised. He concluded that rise of rend was either
stationary or falling, when wealth of the country often increased.

6. Concluding remarks

This paper is intended to clarify the concepts of the population theory of Wallace, Godwin, Malthus, and Ricardo.

Wallace mentioned in *Numbers* that population in modern times was decreasing compared to the one in the ancient. He calculated population would be doubled in a generation, but population could not increase in reality by reason of many causes, such as luxury, neglect of agriculture, the right of primogeniture, and so on. Therefore he considered in *Prospects* utopia which was best society to increase population was established, what would happen in that society. His conclusion was utopia could be collapsed by overpopulation. But his intention was not only to describe it but also to explain theodicy. Relationship between Wallace and Malthus in geometric progression of population growth has been focused in previous researches, but the method of criticism of utopia is the most important idea of both of them.

Godwin who wished to establish equitable society in this world criticized population theory of Wallace. He could not approve the collapse of utopia of Wallace. He thought human reason is sufficient to prevent overpopulation, and even if it might happen, since there were many rooms for population growth, it should take long time until population fills this earth. Though they are considered as optimistic thinkers, their population theories are different in detail. Wallace who criticized utopia did not have to think about overpopulation in reality, Godwin who wished to establish equitable society in reality had to think how prevent overpopulation.

Malthus who criticized Godwin by reason of overpopulation also criticized Wallace. He mentioned that Wallace thought overpopulation could occur in the distant future. But this idea was that of Godwin not of Wallace. Since the one of main intentions of Wallace was to disclose impossibility of utopia, it was not important for him when this utopia could be collapsed. Even though there is a difference whether overpopulation is urgent problem or not, their main population theory is almost similar.

Unlike the three thinkers on population, Ricardo who emphasized the role of capital and rent of the role of population theory did not have any sense of danger of overpopulation. He should be included in optimistic group together with Wallace and Godwin. However, unlike Ricardo, it is possible for Wallace and Godwin to increase population till the limited extend of the earth. The idea of population theory of Ricardo was quite different from both of them who did not describe capital and rent theory with relation to population theory. These theories are soon to be developed on a new
dimension by Malthus and Ricardo.

References


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