

William Petty and the colonialist roots of development economics

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Abstract

The intellectual roots of the theoretical and methodological apparatus deployed within today's development economics do not lie, as is widely and complacently assumed, to the universalistic or progressive orientation commonly ascribed to Adam Smith. Rather, the intellectual ancestry of the sub-discipline is much more closely foreshadowed in the writings of William Petty on Ireland. This raises awkward questions regarding the methodological, and indeed ethical, adequacy of the approach that has prevailed within the field, in that Petty uses his pioneering method to coldly calculate the advantages to the colonial power of the annihilation of the national life of the colonized people, their effective extinction as a demographic unit, and the imposition upon their territory of an intentionally dependent, single-export economy. Petty's writings consequently provide a valuable historical vantage-point from which to assess the extent to which development economics has surmounted the intellectual legacy of colonialist thought and moved forward to the construction of a truly post-colonial perspective on economic development in the world today.

Contents

Introduction: Development economics and pre-Smithian economic thought

1. Petty and Ireland: historical and biographical background
2. Petty on labour in early modern Ireland
3. Petty on institutions and their transformation
4. Petty and the state: metropolitan and colonial

Conclusions: Development economics and the intellectual legacy of colonialism

Introduction: Development economics and pre-Smithian economic thought

Historians of development economics commonly assume that the intellectual ancestry of the sub-discipline can be traced to the work of Adam Smith, though there are also dissenting currents which locate that ancestry in subsequent intellectual currents such as positivism. Neither of these schools of thought is likely to satisfy those acquainted with the writings of the seventeenth-century English writer William Petty, who, a century before Smith and three centuries before the emergence of development economics as an academic sub-discipline, was addressing a range of subjects which reads almost like a syllabus for a course in that subject: the relation between the subsistence and commercial sectors of the economy, the obstacles to the consolidation of a wage-earning labour force in an agrarian context, the relation of town to country, and of manufacture to agriculture, the role of institutions in economic transformation, the influence on economic life of traditional society and culture, the political-economic status of the state in the colony, and so on.

This coincidence of immediate subject-matter between Petty's writings and the development economics of today reflects a more fundamental affinity. For development economics is concerned with analysing the process of transition from one kind of socio-economic formation to another, unlike mainstream economics, whose abstract and formalistic conceptual apparatus makes it singularly unsuited to perform such a task. It is for this reason that the pioneers of development economics, for all the profound differences between their respective approaches, have commonly been perceived as falling into the one broad category -- very different from that of the mainstream -- of theorists of 'structural change'. (See, for example, Meier 1994c: 182.) Petty's writings, particularly those concerning Ireland, concern precisely such questions of 'structural change', and, moreover, change that was occurring during an era of momentous significance for world history -- the era when the world stood on the brink of the emergence of the capitalist system and the 'great divergence' in fortunes between the rich and poor countries to which that system gave rise.

Despite the manifest relevance of Petty's writings for any attempt to trace the intellectual roots of development economics, no substantial dedicated literature has yet explored the subject in any detail, though a number of writers in the

field, notably Colin Clark, have pointed out the relevance of Petty's work, and one, Amartya Sen, has even described him as 'a founder of development economics' (Sen 1988: 10). The only article claiming to address the subject (Roncaglia 1988) in fact fails to engage to any considerable extent with the development literature it purports to address. Other writers have taken up some of the relevant aspects of Petty's economic thought, but their insights still remain to be extended into the field of the history of development economics (see, in particular, Welch 1997, and also Perelman 2000: 125-129).

The task of assessing Petty's work has, in short, been neglected within development economics,¹ allowing writers within that sub-discipline to retain the comfortable assumption of its intellectual origins Smith's supposed ideal of progress, his theory of the extension of the market and the associated increase in the division of labour, his comments on the effects of the increase of population and of capital ('stock'), on technical progress, on the 'progressive state' of society, and so on. Though this literature is deeply rooted in the work of pioneers of development economics such as Arthur Lewis and their immediate successors, notably Gerald Meier, it has also, like so many branches of economic thought formerly regarded as 'heterodox', recently been subjected to a takeover bid by the 'information-theoretic' approach (see Stiglitz and Meier).

A particular shortcoming of the 'Smithian origins' thesis is that, while development economics is the branch of the economics discipline most directly concerned with the colonial experience and its legacy, Smith's work only engages indirectly with the colonial context (and then almost exclusively the settler colonies of North America), his purpose being to explore general economic issues such as the effects of labour shortage and the plentiful supply of land, rather than to single out issues which are specifically colonial as such, in the sense of relating to the conquest and administration of subordinate territories.

¹ For that matter, critical currents which locate its origins in subsequent schools of thought such as positivism (for example Cowen and Shenton 1995) have been ignored within this new orthodoxy.

In what follows, it will be shown that Petty's writings on Ireland cast a new light on the intellectual roots of development economics, redirecting the focus decisively back onto the colonial context, and posing sharp, even awkward, questions regarding the conceptual, and even ethical, adequacy of the analytical framework currently deployed within that field to address the issue of economic development in the world today.

1. Petty and Ireland: historical and biographical background

William Petty (1623-87) reached the peak of his official career when, quite early in life, he served as a senior officer in Cromwell's army of occupation in Ireland in the 1650s. The aim of Cromwell's invasion of that country in 1649 had been to implement the notorious punitive measures planned by the English parliamentary authorities: mass executions of Irish 'rebels' – defined sufficiently broadly to include the great majority of all adult males in the country – as well as deportations and enslavements, and the complete removal of the remaining Irish population from three of the country's four provinces to a kind of reservation in the West. In the event, neither the planned executions nor the 'transplantation' of the Irish proved feasible on the massive scale initially envisaged. However, the expropriation and distribution of land went ahead, and, in this process, Petty's role was of pivotal importance, for it was to him that the army assigned the crucial task of surveying the expropriated land for distribution, as well as, subsequently, much of the responsibility for actually distributing it to the occupying forces and other English beneficiaries.

Petty's official position offered boundless opportunities for sharp practice, which he exploited so effectively that he emerged as one of the foremost landowners in the country, alongside the wealthiest of the incumbent colonialists and other successful Cromwellian newcomers such as himself. These elements proceeded to buy out the bulk of the land entitlements of the rank-and-file soldiery, and, before long, Ireland had fallen into their hands. The outcome was a kind of neo-feudal situation, in which large landowning grandees were left lording it over the Irish population who remained effectively enserfed on the land they had formerly owned.

Following the collapse of the Cromwellian regime and the restoration of the monarchy in England in 1660, Petty was never again entrusted with a high official position. However, he succeeded in retaining most of the land he had seized, and for the rest of his days his lifestyle remained set in a neo-feudal mode. His London residence was described by a contemporary diarist as a 'splendid palace', while his fiefdom in county Kerry in south west Ireland was run along the lines of a small principality, where he attempted to establish an iron foundry and a number of mining, fishery and forestry enterprises.

Petty's writings display a wide variety of intellectual influences, notably that of the movement for the advancement of science and technology which was fashionable in his time, and in which he was an enthusiastic participant; his own interests in such fields ranged widely, from medicine (he was himself a qualified physician) to ship-design. However, the dominating preoccupation running through his economic writings was his consuming ambition to re-launch his official career on the high-flying path it had followed during the Cromwellian period. It was this which motivates those works to which he owes his singular position in the history of economic thought -- an unending series of schemes for fiscal, administrative, naval and military initiatives which he vainly hoped would be entrusted to him. It is in the text of these proposals, whose form varies all the way from extensive treatises to brief jottings, that much of the conceptual apparatus of subsequent economic analysis first began to emerge in primitive form, not least his 'political arithmetic', the precursor of all subsequent quantitative methodology in economic analysis.

The culmination of Petty's efforts to apply his new-fangled quantitative methodology was a scheme to transfer the bulk of the Irish population not westwards to Connaught, as in the Cromwellian 'transplantation' scheme, but eastwards into England. The aim was to increase the compactness of England's population, such compactness of population being, in his view, the key to the advantages enjoyed by Holland, which was, in his time, not only Europe's most densely-populated country, but also its most economically-advanced. Ireland, on the contrary, would be transformed into a 'kind of factory' for rearing livestock for England, in other words one vast cattle ranch. Petty also pointed out that his scheme would have the concomitant beneficial effect of putting an end to Ireland's independent national life and its associated anti-

colonial traditions, and would accordingly bring about a “perpetual settlement” (or, in the term used prophetically by his editor in 1899, a “final solution”) that could, at last, “cut up the roots of those evils” which “have made Ireland, for the most part, a diminution and a burthen, not an advantage, to England” (TI: 551, 546 (editorial comment), 558 §5).²

This colonial context was not a peripheral or marginal aspect of Petty’s economic writings. On the contrary, even those elements of his economic thought which have attracted the most attention as contributions to the formulation of general categories of economic analysis were forged in the same colonial context, as will now be illustrated.

2. Petty on labour in early modern Ireland

The existence of the capitalist system presupposes, as Marx points out, a ‘primitive accumulation’ of capital, which precedes capitalist accumulation, and which is “not the result of the capitalist mode of production, but its starting-point”, something which “plays in political economy about the same part as original sin in theology” (Marx 1967 [1970 tr.]: 713). In Petty’s economic writings, we are clearly brought face to face with the era of primitive accumulation, though it is a complex task to establish to what degree he was aware of the definitive element of that historical era -- the process through which labour is brought into subjection to capital, so that capitalist accumulation can accordingly be set in train. The relevant elements of his writings are riven with inconsistencies, and need to be carefully situated in their biographical and historical context if their significance is to be adequately assessed. In particular, it is necessary to distinguish three successive, though overlapping, phases in his perspective on labour, each of which illustrates an aspect of the preliminary stages through which early modern political economy

² Petty’s advocacy of the advantages of compactness has gone largely unnoticed in development economics, though Clark (1957 [1940]: 492-3) comments that it contrasts with the subsequent prevalence of ‘Malthusian propaganda’ (see also Pyatt 1984: 81). There is an oblique reference to the topic in Yang (2003: 1), where it is termed ‘Petty’s theory of urbanization’.

had to pass in its path towards a formulation of the concept of capitalist accumulation.

The first phase in Petty's perspective on labour in Ireland can readily be associated with the orientation he adopted with respect to the factional struggles within the colonial establishment in the Cromwellian period. By the time he arrived there in 1652, it was becoming clear that the bankrupt Parliamentary authorities had no means of paying the army of occupation its arrears of pay other than by granting entitlements to land expropriated from the Irish. This would, it was hoped, have the added advantage that the disbanded soldiery would form the core of a massive colonial immigration that would transform the Irish countryside into a replication of that of England -- a landscape dominated by smallholdings cultivated by a peasant 'yeomanry', interspersed with larger manorial estates.³ However, by the time Petty had risen to high office in the mid-1650s, the faction of large landowners into which he integrated had become increasingly opposed to the implementation of the 'transplantation' of the Irish *en masse*. They were naturally more than happy to see the 'rebel' landowners out of the way, but wanted the actual cultivators of the land to be left where they were. For these cultivators constituted the population they aimed to enserf under their neo-feudal domination, and they had no wish to see them swept out from under their feet; least of all did they want them replaced by the soldiery of the Cromwellian army of occupation, who were, from their point of view, factious and uncontrollable 'fanatics' who had performed the task of restoring colonial rule, and were now best sent back to England as soon as possible.

The neo-feudalism of Petty and his fellow land magnates was far from being a mere reversion to 'true' feudalism as it had existed in the middle ages. On the contrary, as the enterprises which Petty subsequently established in his own fiefdom illustrate, a more commercial orientation differentiated such 'new seigneurs' as him from the feudal lords of the former epoch, just as the trade in

³ The case of Ireland thus breaches the neat distinction, which is current in some of the literature on the geography of development, between the 'new Englands' or 'neo-Europes' of colonial policy in the temperate zones, and the more oppressive 'extractive states' established in the tropics (see Goodacre 2004).

grain surplus underlay the equivalent ‘new feudalism’ arising in areas of central and eastern Europe in the same period.⁴ Nevertheless, from a conceptual point of view at least, Petty’s standpoint towards labour at this stage shared more in common with feudalism than capitalism, in the sense that he advocated a situation in which labour was to be retained *in situ* as effectively an adjunct to the land.

A second phase in Petty’s perspective on labour may be discerned following the restoration of the English monarchy in 1660. He now remained in England for a number of years, during which time his attention naturally focused more on English than on Irish affairs. In this phase, a contradiction opened out between his own continuing neo-feudal status and his increasing interest in the advance of the wage system. The idea that labour is, or should be, an adjunct to the land, in feudal style, now gave way in his writings to ideas and concepts that pointed forward to the world of emergent capitalism. Indeed, at the macro level, he ran ahead of the times in his celebrated formulation of a system of national accounts, in that he categorized the income of the entire labouring population purely and simply -- and as yet utterly unrealistically -- as ‘wages’ (see, for example, VS: chapter 2). At the micro level, he discussed the motivation of labour in terms of the concept which has subsequently been termed the ‘backward-bending labour supply curve’ -- the idea that an excessive wage level, or, in real terms, ‘over-feeding of the people’, results in ‘indisposing them to their usual labour’ (PA: 275).

Such simplifying assumptions and schematic concepts exemplify the manner in which Petty’s thought prefigures what was eventually to become economics; they also, however, misrepresent the actual situation in England at the time. For while dispossession of the peasantry was indeed far advanced, it by no means follows that the resulting dispossessed population had as yet become a wage-earning labour force, least of all a homogenous one. The reality was that the social dislocation, vagrancy and high mortality suffered by the dispossessed

⁴ It is disappointing that the debate among historians on the ‘new feudalism’ of the period has focused almost entirely on central and eastern Europe (see, for example, Brenner 1976: 50-60), despite the evident relevance of the situation in Ireland (as demonstrated by Morgan 1985: 274-8).

in the sixteenth century had to a large extent been replaced only by the political and national upheaval, civil wars and high mortality of the seventeenth. If such was the case in England, then it was incomparably more so in Ireland, and, when Petty returned to that country in 1666, his writings began to express increasing frustration over the problems involved in establishing a wage-earning labour force at all in the conditions prevailing there. For the Irish socio-economic system, based as it still was on communal as well as individual patterns of land use, remained, even at this time, 'highly flexible and uniquely suited, in environmental terms,' to its material circumstances (Morgan 1985: 278), and was fully capable of reabsorbing into itself those who might otherwise have constituted the demographic base for a wage-earning class.

Petty roots his comments on this situation in observation. The Irish, he states,

are able to perform their husbandry with such harness and tackling as each man can make with his own hands, and living in such houses as almost every man can build; and every housewife being a spinner and dyer of wool and yarn, they can live and subsist after their present fashion, without the use of gold or silver money (PA: 273).

Such being the case, the cash economy constitutes, by his estimate, only a fifth of all their 'expense', the rest of their consumption being 'what their own family produceth' (PAI: 192); the principal exception is tobacco, which was evidently spearheading the introduction of cash transactions for consumption goods into the agrarian economy -- the Coca Cola of its day. He furthermore asserts that the Irish are able to supply themselves with 'the necessities above-named without labouring two hours per diem' (PA: 273). He consequently asks:

What need they to work, who can content themselves with potatoes, whereof the labour of one man can feed forty, and with milk, whereof one cow will in summertime give meat and drink enough for three men, when they can everywhere gather cockles, oysters, muscles, crabs, etc., with boats, nets, angles or the art of fishing, [and] can build an house in three days? (PAI: 201.)

Petty's discussions of how the Irish are to be 'kept to their labour' (PAI: 189) thus illustrate the obstacles to the subjection of labour to capital in conditions where they have the alternative of an independent livelihood on the land -- conditions which were to remain characteristic of much of the colonial world in the following centuries (see Marx 1867 [1970]: chapter 33, and, for discussion, Rodriguez Braun 1987, and Welch 1997: 164-5).

From frustration and over-simplification it is only a short step to fantasy, and it was to this mode of thought that Petty turned in what signaled a third and final phase in his changing perception of labour -- his scheme for the wholesale transfer of the Irish population to England -- which he initially put forward 'rather as a dream or reverie than a rational proposition' (PA: 285). The scheme nevertheless took on an increasingly realistic character, until it finally assumed a form whose elaborate statistical apparatus pioneered the entire genre of the economic policy proposal as it has existed ever since. Moreover, it now represented labour in yet another guise. For here Petty took forward his celebrated three-fold division of the macro economy into labour, capital and land -- a division which unmistakably foreshadows the subsequent concept of factors of production -- and assigned to labour the role of what would, in today's spatial-economic analysis, be termed a 'mobile factor of production'.

However, to indulge in such retrospective analogies only highlights the limited extent to which Petty actually anticipates the 'factors of production' approach of subsequent economic theory, predicated as this is upon the endorsement of capitalist competition in the market, an institution which he dismisses as a game of dice won 'rather by hit than wit' (TTC: 52-3; see also Aspromourgos 1996: 50-51, and Roncaglia 1988: 165-7). Rather, he turned spontaneously to the state as the sole force capable of imposing a solution to the problems of consolidating a wage-earning labour force in general, let alone implementing his own scheme.

Such was the long and complex process through which Petty's perspective on labour evolved from the neo-feudal standpoint of his Cromwellian years, to the empirical and observational approach of the subsequent period, and finally to a more abstract approach which began to foreshadow -- though only dimly and partially -- that of the mature classical political economy of the following

century, and, beyond it, the economics that was to follow. In the process, his life and thought had exemplified all those day-to-day realities which Marx associates with the primitive accumulation of capital -- violence, social upheaval, expropriation of the cultivators from their land, the centrality of the state as the prime economic agent, and ‘passions the most infamous, the most sordid, the pettiest, the most meanly odious’ (Marx 1867 [1970]: 762).

Marx wrote that what characterises Smith as “the political economist *par excellence* of the period of manufacture is the stress he lays on division of labour” (Ibid.: 348). Similarly, the centrality accorded by Petty to the ‘transplantation’, or mobility, of labour might equally earn him the less reputable title of ‘the political economist *par excellence* of the period of primitive accumulation’.

3. Petty on institutions and their transformation

There is some remarkably close resonance with aspects of the development economics literature in Petty’s comments on what would now be termed ‘institutions’, or, more specifically, the commercial and financial infrastructure, the legal institutions relating to the security of property rights, and the conditions for a culture of enterprise.

Regarding commercial institutions, Petty poses the question: ‘Why should they [i.e. the Irish] raise more commodities, since there are not merchants sufficiently stocked to take them of them, nor provided with other more pleasing foreign commodities to give in exchange for them?’ (PAI: 201). Moreover, commercial transactions are impeded by corresponding deficiencies in the financial institutions, in the form of ‘difference, confusion and badness of coins, [and] exorbitant exchange and interest of money’ (PAI: 196).

As for what are now termed property rights, Petty asks the question: ‘Why should men endeavour to get estates, where the legislative power is not agreed upon, and where tricks and words destroy natural right and property?’ (PAI: 202). This issue of secure land tenure was, of course, one with which he was deeply concerned throughout his career, first as both surveyor of Ireland and beneficiary of the Cromwellian confiscations, and subsequently in ongoing

legal battles to retain possession of the lands he had seized. It is consequently no surprise that he repeatedly returns to this theme, calling for ‘clear conditions’ upon leases (PAI: 203), and, in the political sphere, ‘certainty’ over where ultimate legislative authority lies (PAI: 159-60). At the same time, he cautions that laws might not be readily transferable between countries, since if ‘first made and first fitted to thick-peopled countries’, they might overload the more summary legal apparatus available in ‘thin-peopled countries such as Ireland’ (PAI: 202).

Against the background of such weak commercial, financial and legal institutions, it is no surprise that a culture of enterprise was failing to take root. Reflecting on the ‘indisposition’ of the Irish to take to maritime trade, he complains that ‘the Irish had rather eat potatoes and milk on dry land than contest with the wind and waves with better food’ (PAI: 208).

Petty’s argumentation in favour of his populating transfer scheme displays a grimly practical character, incorporating as it does all the different means he had at various times considered for wiping out Ireland’s national traditions -- economic, social and cultural -- which had proved so resilient to transformation in accordance with the requirements of colonialism and emergent capitalism. The experience of the Cromwellian period had shown that it was unrealistic to expect that English colonists could be mustered in sufficient numbers to swamp Ireland’s national traditions *in situ*; his scheme was, he argued, a more realistic means to achieving the same aim. It would, for example, facilitate the eradication of the Irish language, along with the replacement of ‘those uncertain and unintelligible’ Irish place names (PAI: 208). It would provide ample scope for cross marriages, in particular between Irish men and English women, so that the offspring would be reared in the language and culture of their mothers (PAI: 202-3). In short, ‘the manners, habits, language and customs of the Irish... would all be transmuted into English’ (TI: 573).

It is an irony of history that, by dismissing the market in favour of the blunter instrument of state action, Petty was in fact turning his back on precisely those forces that were ultimately to achieve what, for him, had been only a ‘dream or reverie’. For Petty’s scheme was grimly prophetic of what would actually be achieved by ‘market forces’ in the two centuries that followed, when Ireland

was indeed emptied of the majority of its inhabitants, many of them moving abroad, not least to England as he had advocated, its language and traditional way of life fighting for survival, and much of the country's territory converted into one vast cattle ranch (as pointed out by Goblet 1930: 2, 305). But this superior power of 'market forces' – underpinned, of course, by colonialist repression – was yet to become manifest in the earlier era of 'primitive accumulation', when the state retained its role as the primary economic agent – a role which that era's 'political economist *par excellence*' discussed in characteristically elaborate terms, as will now be shown.

4. Petty and the state: metropolitan and colonial

The idea of economic planning by the state was in Petty's time strongly linked with Utopian currents in social thought, not least in connection with colonial policy, Thomas More's *Utopia* having itself been described as marking 'a watershed in the development of colonial theory' (Morgan 1985: 269). One topical pamphlet in this genre emanated from the intellectual circles in which Petty had moved prior to his arrival in Ireland. It described a mythical kingdom named 'Macaria', whose 'excellent government' included a number of 'councils' handling the different aspects of state policy, one of these being a 'council for new plantations [i.e. colonies]' (Webster 1979: 67-8). Petty greatly elaborated such ideas in his later writings, and in his final scheme for the transformation of Ireland into a 'kind of factory', he outlined the tasks of a proposed 'council of fitting persons' in terms which vividly portray the transition from utopian speculation to the practicalities of administering a planned economy:

pitching the number of each species of cattle, for every sort of land within the whole territory of Ireland; the same may pitch the number of cow-herds, shepherds, dairy-women, slaughter men and others, which are fit and sufficient to manage the trade of exported cattle, dead or alive, of hides, tallow, butter and cheese, wool and sea-fish, etc.; to appoint the foreign markets and ports where each commodity is to be shipped and sold, to provide shipping, and to keep account of the

exportation above mentioned, and of the imported salt, tobacco, with a few other necessaries (TI: 575).

The demography of the population remaining in Ireland is also to be placed under the control of this Council, which may ‘adjust’ it in such a way as to

pitch how many of them shall be English, or such as can speak English, and how many Irish, how many Catholics and how many others, without any other respect, than the management of this trade, for the common good of all the owners of these lands, and its stock indifferently (TI: 575).

This power of the Council extends to ‘managing the multiplication’ of the population (TI: 605): since the entire population is to be ‘all aged between 16 and 60 years’ (TI: 563), the Council will also be obliged to ‘carry away children and superannuated persons’.

Despite the normally positive connotations which the term ‘utopia’ enjoys today, there has, from Plato’s *Republic* onwards, traditionally been, explicitly or implicitly, an associated ‘dystopia’ for those excluded from its highest privileges, and it is in this sense that Goblet describes Petty’s proposal as a system of ‘twin utopias’ (Goblet 1930: 2, 280-306). The polarity between the two comes across vividly in Petty’s writings as a whole: on the one hand, the variety and luxury of the glittering colonial metropolis of London, on the other, the dour homogeneity of Petty’s scheme for a ‘new model Ireland’ (TI: 567) -- housing that reaches a standard of basic habitability (TI: 577), clothes that are ‘uniform’ (TI: 569), and a humble country diet of potatoes and dairy products, enlivened only by foraging (PAI: 201, as quoted above).

Conclusions: Development economics and the intellectual legacy of colonialism

A few decades after Petty’s death, Jonathan Swift, author of *Gulliver’s Travels*, drew attention to the appalling reality behind the clinical terms of Petty’s

‘political arithmetic’ in satirical pamphlet (Swift 1729). Imitating Petty’s mode of expression with icy accuracy, Swift put forward a gruesome proposal for the breeding of Irish children as livestock, commenting that they would make ‘excellent nutritious meat’ -- ‘whether stewed, roasted, baked or boiled’ -- for sale to ‘persons of quality and fortune’. This ‘modest proposal for the public benefit’ is advanced complete with Petty’s characteristic panoply of statistical justification, covering the demographic aspects, the average weight of each carcass, the costs (‘about two shillings per annum, rags included’), potential uses for the hides (‘gloves for ladies, and summer boots for fine gentlemen’), the export potential, the implications for the revenue of the church, the numbers to be ‘reserved for breed’, and so on.

Swift’s parody tellingly exposes both the unconcealed predatory intent and the reality of colonialist devastation that lie behind Petty’s pioneering attempts to address what are now seen as issues of economic development. In other words, the search for the roots of the theoretical and methodological apparatus of today’s development economics does not lead back, as is widely and complacently assumed, to the universalistic or progressive orientation commonly associated with the Enlightenment movement in eighteenth-century philosophy. Rather, the search for such roots leads back to Petty, who, applying his pioneering quantitative method, coldly calculated the advantages to the colonial power of the annihilation of the national life of the colonized people, their effective extinction as a demographic unit, and the imposition upon their territory of an intentionally dependent, single-export economy. Petty’s writings provide, in short, writings provide a valuable historical vantage-point from which to assess the extent to which development economics has surmounted the intellectual legacy of colonialist thought and moved forward to the construction of a truly post-colonial perspective on economic development in the world today.

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Writings of William Petty, with abbreviations

All page numbers for works of Petty refer to those in the following edition:

EW	Hull, Charles H. (ed.) (1899). <i>The economic writings of Sir William Petty</i> . 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
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The individual works of Petty, in the order in which they were written, are:

TTC	<i>A treatise of taxes and contributions</i> . Published 1662. In EW: 1-97.
VS	<i>Verbum sapienti</i> . Written 1665. First published 1691. In: EW: 99-120.
PAI	<i>The political anatomy of Ireland</i> . Written ca. 1671. First published 1691. In EW: 121-231.
PA	<i>Political arithmetic</i> . Written ca. 1671-2 and amended in subsequent years. First authorised edition published 1690. In EW: 233-313.
TI	<i>A treatise of Ireland</i> . Written 1687. First published 1899. In EW: 545-621.

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