

Thomas Robert Malthus

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Thomas Malthus

Thomas Robert Malthus (* [13. Februar 1766](#) in [Rookery](#) bei [Guildford](#); † [23. Dezember 1834](#) in [Bath](#)) war ein [britischer Ökonom](#). Er kann zur [klassischen Nationalökonomie](#) gezählt werden.

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Leben und Wirken [\[Bearbeiten\]](#)

Thomas Malthus geboren in Surrey, einer Grafschaft südlich von London, britischer Nationalökonom und Sozialphilosoph, war ab 1797 anglikanischer Pfarrer und ab 1806 Professor für Geschichte und politische Ökonomie an dem Haileybury College. Bekannt wurde Malthus vor allem durch seine Bevölkerungstheorie, die er in zwei Werken 1798 ("An Essay on the Principle of Population") und 1820 ("Principles of Economics") entwickelte. Es erfolgten jeweils

fünf Auflagen seiner *Essays*. Jedoch unterscheiden sich ab der zweiten Auflage die Essays nur noch in Detailspekten. Er gilt dadurch als Pessimist innerhalb der Klassik.

Malthus' Bevölkerungstheorie [\[Bearbeiten\]](#)

Malthus veröffentlichte seine Bevölkerungstheorie 1798 im Buch *Essay on the Principle of Population*. Dort steht die [Überbevölkerung](#) als Problem einer sich entwickelnden Ökonomie und Gesellschaft im Zentrum seiner Überlegungen. Malthus geht davon aus, dass die Bevölkerungszahl exponentiell steige, die Nahrungsmittelproduktion in derselben Zeit aber nur linear. Dies folgt aus einfachen mathematischen Überlegungen. Wenn ein Paar vier Kinder hat und diese wieder vier Kinder pro Paar, so wächst die Bevölkerung immer schneller, die Bevölkerung verhält sich wie Zinseszinsen. Eine Steigerung der Lebensmittelproduktion folgt aber nicht dem gleichen Prinzip. Durch verbesserte Bewässerung steigt die Produktivität um 20%. Dieser Zuwachs erzeugt aber keinen weiteren Zuwachs mehr. Diese Annahme gilt nur, wenn das Bevölkerungswachstum nicht gebremst wird durch Kriege, Krankheiten, Familienpolitik usw. Die erheblichen sozialen Probleme seiner Zeit betrachtete Malthus in erster Linie als Folgen einer zu großen Bevölkerung. Seine Theorie hatte zu seiner Zeit großen Einfluss auf die [Sozialwissenschaften](#). Seine Vorhersagen treffen zumindest jedoch für die heutige^[1] industrialisierte Gesellschaft nicht zu. Trotzdem wird in der wissenschaftlichen Diskussion seine Theorie immer wieder aufgegriffen, da sie zum ersten Mal - nach der Veröffentlichung von [Johann Peter Süßmilch](#) *Die göttliche Ordnung in den Veränderungen des menschlichen Geschlechts aus der Geburt, dem Tode und der Fortpflanzung desselben* aus dem Jahre 1741 - die grundlegenden, bis heute ungelösten Fragen im Kontext der globalen Grenzen des Wachstums (siehe [Wirtschaftswachstum](#) und [Club of Rome](#)) des anhaltenden [Bevölkerungswachstums](#) und der begrenzten [Tragfähigkeit der Erde](#) thematisiert hat. Diese Ideen Malthus' wurden als [Bevölkerungsgesetz](#) bekannt. [Jared Diamond](#) ist zum Beispiel der Ansicht, dass der Völkermord in Ruanda ein Ergebnis dieses Bevölkerungsgesetzes war.

Malthus war der Inhaber des weltersten Lehrstuhls für politische Ökonomie, der 1805 am College der [East India Company](#) im englischen [Haileybury](#) eingerichtet wurde.

Malthus' zweites Hauptwerk [\[Bearbeiten\]](#)

Im zweiten Hauptwerk *Principles of Political Economy* ("Grundsätze der politischen Ökonomie") von 1820 macht er eine grundlegende Untersuchung über Wert, Grundrente, Arbeit und Arbeitslohn, um die Faktoren benennen zu können, die auf den Wohlstand eines Volkes einwirken. Vor Malthus ging man generell davon aus, dass mit wachsender Bevölkerung eine größere wirtschaftliche Leistungsfähigkeit eines Landes erreicht wird. Aus der malthusianischen Bevölkerungstheorie ergibt sich allerdings, dass das Bevölkerungswachstum stärker als das wirtschaftliche Wachstum ist und es somit zu Verarmung und Verelendung des Landes kommt. Malthus steht hier im Widerspruch zu den Ausführungen seines Freundes und wissenschaftlichen Rivalen [David Ricardo](#) und schreibt im Sinne der wirtschaftlichen Analysen von [Adam Smith](#). Diese [wirtschaftswissenschaftliche](#) Betrachtung der Bevölkerungstheorie von Malthus wird auch als [Bevölkerungsfalle](#) interpretiert. Der Biologe [Charles Darwin](#) wurde sehr stark von Malthus beeinflusst. Er übernahm viele Aspekte seiner Theorie für die Entwicklung seiner [Evolutionstheorie](#). Berühmtheit erlangte ferner ein Briefwechsel mit [Jean-Baptiste Say](#).

Ausgehend von der auch heute gültigen Annahme, dass die Hebung des allgemeinen Bildungsstandards zu einem Geburtenrückgang führen werde, empfahl Malthus eine Bildungsoffensive für die unteren Schichten. Dass das nicht gegen diese Schichten gerichtet war, zeigte Malthus bereits im „Essay“ mit seinem Hinweis, dass durch Luxus entstehende Arbeit

keinen Nutzen für die Armen habe, wenn sie damit keine Macht und Unabhängigkeit gewinnen könnten^[2].

Maßnahmen der "Royal Commission" werden oft einem Einfluss Malthus zugeschrieben. So erfolgte die Verschärfung des *workhouse test*, einer Prüfung, die Bestandteil eines neuen Armengesetzes von 1834 wurde: jeder, der öffentliche Unterstützung in Anspruch nehmen musste, hatte ins *workhouse* zu gehen und dort hart zu arbeiten. Unterstützung fand nur, wer sich als arbeitsunfähig erwies. Es wurde auch festgelegt, dass der niedrigste Lohn für freie Arbeit (als *independent labour* bezeichnet) die Obergrenze für die Unterstützung sein sollte. Dieses Prinzip wurde als *less eligible*-Prinzip bezeichnet. Die Bestimmungen und der von den *workhouses* ausgehende Abschreckungseffekt diente jedoch nicht der von Malthus geforderten Stärkung der Armen durch Besitz und Unabhängigkeit, sondern der Durchsetzung der [Lohnarbeit](#) und dem [Dumping der Löhne](#).

Quellen und Anmerkungen [\[Bearbeiten\]](#)

1. [↑](#) Eine Verringerung des Bevölkerungswachstums wurde erst kürzlich beobachtet. Das ist nicht zu verwechseln mit einem Rückgang der Bevölkerung, sondern zeigt z.B. bei der [logistischen Funktion](#) an, dass die Mitte zwischen oberer und unterer Grenze erreicht wurde. Es ist dann noch nicht eindeutig genug feststellbar, ob die Vorhersagen von Malthus falsch oder richtig sind.
2. [↑](#) „The labour created by luxuries, though useful in distributing the produce of a country. without vitiating the proprietor by power, or debasing the labourer by dependence, has not, indeed, the same beneficial effects on the state of the poor.“ (T.R.Malthus: ‘‘An Essay on the Principle of Population’’, letzter Absatz im Kapitel 14, 1798 (erste Ausgabe), [ISBN 0-19-283747-8](#))

Werke in deutscher Übersetzung [\[Bearbeiten\]](#)

- *Das Bevölkerungsgesetz* (übersetzt von Christian M. Barth), Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, München 1977, [ISBN 3-423-06021-2](#)

Siehe auch [\[Bearbeiten\]](#)

- [Antinatalismus](#)
- [Überbevölkerung](#), [Bevölkerungswachstum](#), [Tragfähigkeit](#)
- [Bevölkerungsfalle](#), [Wirtschaftswachstum](#), [Club of Rome](#)
- [Pierre-François Verhulst](#), [Benjamin Gompertz](#)
- [Malthusgleichung](#)

Literatur [\[Bearbeiten\]](#)

- Jacques Dupaquier (Hrsg.): *Malthus past and present*. Academic, London 1983. [ISBN 0-12-224670-5](#)
- Patricia James: *Population Malthus. His life and times*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1979. [ISBN 0-7100-0266-1](#)
- William Petersen: *Malthus*. Heinmann, London 1979. [ISBN 0-435-54800-X](#)

- Michael Turner (Hrsg.): *Malthus and his time*. Macmillan, Basingstoke 1986. [ISBN 0-333-38753-8](#)
- Helmut Winkler: *Malthus - Krisenökonom und Moralist*. Studien-Verlag, Innsbruck 1996. [ISBN 3-7065-1132-0](#)

Weblinks [\[Bearbeiten\]](#)

- [Literatur von und über Thomas Robert Malthus](#) im Katalog der [Deutschen Nationalbibliothek](#) ([Datensatz zu Thomas Robert Malthus](#) • [PICA-Datensatz](#)) • [Einträge im Musikarchiv](#)
- [Der Urgroßvater der Grünen](#) - Detmar Doering in [Cicero](#)
- [Dr. Gudrun Eger, Malthus heute](#)
- [Biographie und weitere Links](#) (engl.)
- Artikel *Malthusianismus* im [Historischen Lexikon der Schweiz](#)
- *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.* [PDF Online](#)

Personendaten

NAME **Malthus, Thomas Robert**

KURZBESCHREIBUNG [britischer Ökonom](#)

GEBURTSDATUM 13. Februar 1766

GEBURTSORT [Rookery](#) bei [Guildford](#) ([Surrey](#))

STERBEDATUM 23. Dezember 1834

STERBEORT [Bath](#)

Von „[http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas Robert Malthus](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Robert_Malthus)“

[Kategorien: Ökonom \(18. Jahrhundert\) | Ökonom \(19. Jahrhundert\) | Klassische Nationalökonomie | Demografie | Anglikanischer Geistlicher \(18. Jahrhundert\) | Anglikanischer Geistlicher \(19. Jahrhundert\) | Mitglied der Royal Society | Brite | Geboren 1766 | Gestorben 1834 | Mann](#)

Thomas Robert Malthus, 1766-1834.



R Malthus

<http://cepa.newschool.edu/het/profiles/malthus.htm>

Robert Malthus (he went by his middle name) was born in "the Rookery", a country estate in Dorking, Surrey (south of London). He was the second son of Daniel Malthus, a country gentleman and avid disciple of Jean-Jacques [Rousseau](#) and David [Hume](#) (both of whom he knew personally). Accordingly, Malthus was educated according to Rousseauvian precepts by his father and a series of tutors. Malthus entered Jesus College, Cambridge, in 1784 and was ordained a minister of the Church of England in 1788. He earned his M.A. in 1791.

Around 1796, Malthus became a curate in the sleepy town of Albury, a few miles from his father's house. Having been elected Fellow of Jesus College in 1793, he divided his time between Cambridge and Albury. It was in the course of his interminable intellectual debates with his father over the "perfectibility of society" thesis then being advanced by William [Godwin](#) and the Marquis de [Condorcet](#), that Malthus's decided to set his ideas down on paper. It was eventually published as a pamphlet known as the *Essay on Population* (1798).

In this famous work, Malthus posited his hypothesis that (unchecked) population growth always exceeds the growth of means of subsistence. Actual (checked) population growth is kept in line with food supply growth by "positive checks" (starvation, disease and the like, elevating the death rate) and "preventive checks" (i.e. postponement of marriage, etc. that keep down the birthrate), both of which are characterized by "misery and vice". Malthus's hypothesis implied that actual population always has a *tendency* to push above the food supply. Because of this tendency, any attempt to ameliorate the condition of the lower classes by increasing their incomes or improving agricultural productivity would be fruitless, as the extra means of subsistence would be completely absorbed by an induced boost in population. As long as this tendency remains, Malthus argued, the "perfectibility" of society will always be out of reach.

In his much-expanded and revised 1803 edition of the *Essay*, Malthus concentrated on bringing empirical evidence to bear (much of it acquired on his extensive travels to Germany, Russia and Scandinavia). He also introduced the possibility of "moral restraint" (voluntary abstinence which leads to neither misery nor vice) bringing the unchecked population growth rate down to a point where the tendency is gone. In practical policy terms, this meant inculcating the lower classes with middle-class virtues. He believed this could be done with the introduction of universal suffrage, state-run education for the poor and, more controversially, the elimination of the Poor Laws and the establishment of an unfettered nation-wide labor market. He also argued that once the poor had a taste for luxury, then they would demand a higher standard of living for themselves before starting a family. Thus, although seemingly contradictory, Malthus is

suggesting the possibility of "demographic transition", i.e. that sufficiently high incomes may be enough by themselves to reduce fertility.

The *Essay* transformed Malthus into an intellectual celebrity. He was reviled by many as a hard-hearted monster, a prophet of doom, an enemy of the working class, etc. The ridicule and invective rained down on Malthus by the chattering and pamphleteering classes was relentless. But a sufficient number of people recognized his *Essay* for what it was: the first serious economic study of the welfare of the lower classes. Even Karl [Marx](#), who deplored his conservative policy conclusions, grudgingly granted him this.

In 1804, Malthus got married and thereby forfeited his fellowship at Cambridge. In 1805, Malthus was appointed Professor of Modern History and Political Economy at the East India College in Haileybury, thereby becoming the England's first academic economist.

Malthus got interested in monetary in 1800, when he published a pamphlet (much praised by [Keynes](#)), expounding an *endogenous* theory of money. Contrary to the [Quantity Theory](#), Malthus argued that rising prices are *followed* by increases in the quantity supplied of money. Around 1810, Malthus came across a series of tracts by a stockbroker, David [Ricardo](#), on monetary questions. He immediately wrote to Ricardo and the two men initiated a correspondence (and a friendship) that would last for over a decade. The Malthus-Ricardo relationship was warm in all respects but one -- economics. They found themselves on opposite sides of the fence on practically every issue.

In 1814, Malthus launched himself into the Corn Laws debate then raging in parliament. After a first pamphlet, *Observations*, outlining the pros and cons of the proposed protectionist laws, Malthus tentatively supported the free traders, arguing that as cultivation as British corn was increasingly expensive to raise, it was best if Britain at least in part on cheaper foreign sources for its food supply. He changed his mind the next year, in his 1815 *Grounds of an Opinion* pamphlet, siding now with the protectionists. Foreign laws, he noted, often prohibit or raise taxes on the export of corn in lean times, which meant that the British food supply was captive to foreign politics. By encouraging domestic production, Malthus argued, the Corn Laws would guarantee British self-sufficiency in food.

In his 1815 *Inquiry*, Malthus came up with the differential theory of rent. Although it was simultaneously discovered by [Torrens](#), [West](#) and [Ricardo](#), Malthus's pamphlet was the first of the four to be published. Refuting older contentions that rent was a cost of production, Malthus argued that it was merely a deduction from the surplus. Rent, Malthus argued, is enabled by three facts: (1) that agricultural production yields a surplus; (2) that the wage-fertility dynamics guarantee that the price of corn would remain steadily above its cost of production; (3) that fertile land is scarce. [Ricardo](#)'s own 1815 essay was actually a response to Malthus. Ricardo dismissed Malthus's arguments, arguing that Malthus's "third" cause -- that land differs in quality and is limited in quantity -- is sufficient to explain the phenomenon of rent. He incorporated Malthus's theory of rent with his own theory of profits to provide the "[Classical](#)" statement of the theory of distribution. He also dismissed Malthus's feeble attempts to defend parasitical landlords and the Corn Laws.

Malthus's own criticism of Ricardo's 1815 essay led them into a debate on the question of "value". Malthus supported Smith's old "labor-commanded" theory of value, whereas Ricardo favored the "labor-embodied" version. The outcome of the discussion was [Ricardo's](#) *Principles* in 1817, which set down the doctrine of the [Classical School](#) on value, distribution and production, incorporating at least two of Malthus's own contributions: the "natural wage" version of Malthus's population theory and an expanded version of Malthus's theory of rent.

Malthus was never comfortable as a member of the Classical school. Nowhere is this more evident than in Malthus's own treatise, *Principles of Economics* (1820). He differs from the [Classical Ricardians](#) at several points. For instance, Malthus introduced the idea of a demand *schedule* in the modern sense, i.e. as the conceptual relationship between prices and the quantity *sought* by buyers rather than the empirical relationship between prices and quantities *sold*. He also paid much attention to the short-run stability of prices, insisting on a labor-commanded theory of value and,

Thirdly, and most famously, Malthus denied the validity of Say's Law and argued that there could be a "general glut" of goods. Malthus believed that economic crises were characterized by a general excess supply caused by insufficient consumption. His defense of the Corn Laws rested partly on the need for landlord consumption to "make up" for shortfalls in demand and thus avert crisis. See our more extensive discussion of the [General Glut Controversy](#).

Major Works of T. Robert Malthus

- [*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*](#), 1798, Copy [\(2\)](#), Copy [\(3\)](#)
- [*An Investigation of the Cause of the Present High Price of Provisions, Containing an illustration of the nature and limits of fair price in time of scarcity and its application to the particular circumstances of the country*](#), 1800.
- [*An Essay on the Principle of Population; or a View of its past and present Effects on Human Happiness; with an Inquiry into our Prospects respecting the Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which it occasions*](#), 1803, revised and expanded 2nd edition of 1798. [3rd ed., 1806; 4th ed., 1807; 5th ed. 1817; 6th ed., 1826; 7th ed., 1872]
- *A Letter to Samuel Whitbread, Esq., M.P. on his proposed bill for the amendment of the Poor Laws*, 1807.
- *A Letter to the Right Honourable Lord Grenville occasioned by some observations of his lordship on the East India Company's establishment for the education of their civil servants*, 1813.
- [*Observations on the Effects of the Corn Laws, and of a rise or fall in the price of corn on the agriculture and general wealth of the country*](#), 1814. ([NAR 1815 version](#))
- [*An Inquiry into the Nature and Progress of Rent, and the principles by which it is regulated*](#), 1815.
- [*The Grounds of an Opinion on the Policy of Restricting the Importation of Foreign Corn*](#), 1815.
- *Statements Respecting the East-India College*, 1817.
- *Principles of Political Economy: Considered with a view to their practical application*, 1820. - ([French transl.](#))
- *The Measure of Value Stated and Illustrated, With an Application of it to the alterations in the value of English currency*, 1823.
- "Tooke -- On High and Low Prices", 1823, *Quarterly Review*

- "Political Economy", 1824, *Quarterly Review*
- "Population", 1824, *Encyclopedia Britannica*.
- *Definitions in Political economy: Preceded by an inquiry into the rules which ought to guide political economists in the definition and use of their terms; with remarks on the derivation from these rules in their writings*, 1827. ([French transl.](#))
- *A Summary View of the Principle of Population*, 1830

Resources on T. Robert Malthus

- HET Pages: [General Glut Controversy](#)
- [Letters to Thomas Robert Malthus on Political Economy and Stagnation of Commerce](#) by Jean-Baptiste Say, 1821
- "[Malthus And The Liberties Of The Poor](#)" by William Hazlitt, 1807
- "[An Examination of Mr Malthus's Doctrines](#)" by William Hazlitt, 1819
- "[On the Originality of Mr Malthus's Essay](#)" by William Hazlitt, 1819
- "[Affect on the Schemes of Utopian Improvement](#)" by William Hazlitt, 1819
- "[On the Application of Mr Malthus' Principle to the Poor Laws](#)" by William Hazlitt, 1819
- "[Queries Relating to the Essay on Population](#)" by William Hazlitt, 1819
- "[Godwin on Malthus](#)", 1822, *NAR*
- "[Everett's New Ideas on Population](#)", 1823, *NAR*
- "[Mr. Malthus](#)" by William Hazlitt, 1825, *Spirit of the Age*
- "[Review of Malthus's Definitions of Political Economy](#)", 1829, *North American Review*
- "The Malthusian Theory - Discussed in a Correspondence between Alex H. Everett and Professor George Tucker of the University of Virginia", *US Democratic Review*, 1845: [Part I \(pp. 297-310\)](#), [Part II \(pp.379-92\)](#),
- "The Condition of China, with Reference to the Malthusian Theory, Discussed in a Correspondence between Alex H. Everett and Professor George Tucker, Late of the University of Virginia", *US Democratic Review*, 1847: [Part I \(pp. 397-411\)](#), 1848, [Part II \(pp.11-18\)](#),
- "[Malthusianism](#)", 1867, *Princeton Review*
- "[Malthusianism, Darwinism, and Pessimism](#)", by Francis Bowen, 1879, *NAR*
- "[Are There Too Many of Us?](#)" by E. B. Andrews, 1892, *NAR*
- "[Neo-Malthusianism](#)", by Rev. R. F. Clarke, 1896, *NAR*
- "[Thomas Malthus](#)" by Duncan [Foley](#)
- [Malthus and his legacy: The population debate after 200 years](#), National Academic Forum, 1998

- ["The Malthus-Ricardo Correspondence: Sequential Structure, Argumentative Patterns and Rationality"](#), by Marcelo Dascal and Sergio Cremaschi.
- ["Thomas Robert Malthus"](#) from *Cambridge History* at Bartleby
- ["The Talk of the Town in 1798"](#), Henk W. Plasmeijer, HES Guest Editorial, 1999
- ["Thomas Robert Malthus \(1766-1834\)"](#) by Peter Landry at Bluepete
- [Thomas Robert Malthus Homepage](#) by Nigel Malthus
- [Biography of T.R. Malthus](#) by Nigel Malthus
- The [International Society of Malthus](#) Home Page
- ["Demographic Transition"](#) at Virtual Zambia
- [Malthus page](#) at Victorian Web
- [Malthus page](#) at the Peel Web
- [Bibliography](#) of Malthus at McMaster
- [Malthus Page](#) at McMaster
- [Malthus Page](#) at Akamac
- [Malthus](#) at Britannica.com
- [Malthus Page](#) at Laura Forgette
- [Reinventing Malthus for the 21st Century](#) by No Population Growth (NPG)
- ["Malthus on Population"](#) by Neil Weiner
- [Malthus Page](#) at Berkeley
- [Essay on the Connection](#) between Malthus and [Keynes](#).
- [Brief Bio](#) by Roger McCain

The Home Page of
The
International Society of Malthus

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Malthus's [Essay on the Principle of Population](#) (1798)

- (siehe oben) 2 Kapitel bisher herunter geladen

Thomas Malthus

An Essay on the Principle of Population

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.

LONDON, PRINTED FOR J. JOHNSON, IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD, 1798.

rendered into HTML format by Ed Stephan, 10 Aug 1997

Preface

THE following Essay owes its origin to a conversation with a friend, on the subject of Mr Godwin's essay on 'Avarice and Profusion' in his Enquirer. The discussion started the general question of the future improvement of society. and the Author at first sat down with an intention of merely stating his thoughts to his friend, upon paper, in a clearer manner than he thought he could do in conversation. But as the subject opened upon him, some ideas occurred, which he did not recollect to have met with before; and as he conceived that every least light, on a topic so generally interesting, might be received with candour, he determined to put his thoughts in a form for publication.

The Essay might, undoubtedly, have been rendered much more complete by a collection of a greater number of facts in elucidation of the general argument. But a long and almost total interruption from very particular business, joined to a desire (perhaps imprudent) of not delaying the publication much beyond the time that he originally proposed, prevented the Author from giving to the subject an undivided attention. He presumes, however, that the facts which he has adduced will be found to form no inconsiderable evidence for the truth of his opinion respecting the future improvement of mankind. As the Author contemplates this opinion at present, little more appears to him to be necessary than a plain statement, in addition to the most cursory view of society, to establish it.

It is an obvious truth, which has been taken notice of by many writers, that population must always be kept down to the level of the means of subsistence; but no writer that the Author recollects has inquired particularly into the means by which this level is effected: and it is a view of these means which forms, to his mind, the strongest obstacle in the

way to any very great future improvement of society. He hopes it will appear that, in the discussion of this interesting subject, he is actuated solely by a love of truth, and not by any prejudices against any particular set of men, or of opinions. He professes to have read some of the speculations on the future improvement of society in a temper very different from a wish to find them visionary, but he has not acquired that command over his understanding which would enable him to believe what he wishes, without evidence, or to refuse his assent to what might be displeasing, when accompanied with evidence.

The view which he has given of human life has a melancholy hue, but he feels conscious that he has drawn these dark tints from a conviction that they are really in the picture, and not from a jaundiced eye or an inherent spleen of disposition. The theory of mind which he has sketched in the two last chapters accounts to his own understanding in a satisfactory manner for the existence of most of the evils of life, but whether it will have the same effect upon others must be left to the judgement of his readers.

If he should succeed in drawing the attention of more able men to what he conceives to be the principal difficulty in the way to the improvement of society and should, in consequence, see this difficulty removed, even in theory, he will gladly retract his present opinions and rejoice in a conviction of his error.

7 June 1798

Chapter 1

Question stated - Little prospect of a determination of it, from the enmity of the opposing parties - The principal argument against the perfectibility of man and of society has never been fairly answered - Nature of the difficulty arising from population - Outline of the principal argument of the Essay

THE great and unlooked for discoveries that have taken place of late years in natural philosophy, the increasing diffusion of general knowledge from the extension of the art of printing, the ardent and unshackled spirit of inquiry that prevails throughout the lettered and even unlettered world, the new and extraordinary lights that have been thrown on political subjects which dazzle and astonish the understanding, and particularly that tremendous phenomenon in the political horizon, the French Revolution, which, like a blazing comet, seems destined either to inspire with fresh life and vigour, or to scorch up and destroy the shrinking inhabitants of the earth, have all concurred to lead many able men into the opinion that we were touching on a period big with the most important changes, changes that would in some measure be decisive of the future fate of mankind.

It has been said that the great question is now at issue, whether man shall henceforth start forwards with accelerated velocity towards illimitable, and hitherto unconceived improvement, or be condemned to a perpetual oscillation between happiness and misery, and after every effort remain still at an immeasurable distance from the wished-for goal.

Yet, anxiously as every friend of mankind must look forwards to the termination of this painful suspense, and eagerly as the inquiring mind would hail every ray of light that might assist its view into futurity, it is much to be lamented that the writers on each side of this momentous question still keep far aloof from each other. Their mutual arguments do not meet with a candid examination. The question is not brought to rest on fewer points, and even in theory scarcely seems to be approaching to a decision.

The advocate for the present order of things is apt to treat the sect of speculative philosophers either as a set of artful and designing knaves who preach up ardent

benevolence and draw captivating pictures of a happier state of society only the better to enable them to destroy the present establishments and to forward their own deep-laid schemes of ambition, or as wild and mad-headed enthusiasts whose silly speculations and absurd paradoxes are not worthy the attention of any reasonable man.

The advocate for the perfectibility of man, and of society, retorts on the defender of establishments a more than equal contempt. He brands him as the slave of the most miserable and narrow prejudices; or as the defender of the abuses of civil society only because he profits by them. He paints him either as a character who prostitutes his understanding to his interest, or as one whose powers of mind are not of a size to grasp any thing great and noble, who cannot see above five yards before him, and who must therefore be utterly unable to take in the views of the enlightened benefactor of mankind.

In this unamicable contest the cause of truth cannot but suffer. The really good arguments on each side of the question are not allowed to have their proper weight. Each pursues his own theory, little solicitous to correct or improve it by an attention to what is advanced by his opponents.

The friend of the present order of things condemns all political speculations in the gross. He will not even condescend to examine the grounds from which the perfectibility of society is inferred. Much less will he give himself the trouble in a fair and candid manner to attempt an exposition of their fallacy.

The speculative philosopher equally offends against the cause of truth. With eyes fixed on a happier state of society, the blessings of which he paints in the most captivating colours, he allows himself to indulge in the most bitter invectives against every present establishment, without applying his talents to consider the best and safest means of removing abuses and without seeming to be aware of the tremendous obstacles that threaten, even in theory, to oppose the progress of man towards perfection.

It is an acknowledged truth in philosophy that a just theory will always be confirmed by experiment. Yet so much friction, and so many minute circumstances occur in practice, which it is next to impossible for the most enlarged and penetrating mind to foresee, that on few subjects can any theory be pronounced just, till all the arguments against it have been maturely weighed and clearly and consistently refuted.

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, declaring, at the same time, that so far from exulting in them, as a cause of triumph over the friends of innovation, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to see them completely removed.

The most important argument that I shall adduce is certainly not new. The principles on which it depends have been explained in part by Hume, and more at large by Dr Adam Smith. It has been advanced and applied to the present subject, though not with its proper weight, or in the most forcible point of view, by Mr Wallace, and it may probably have been stated by many writers that I have never met with. I should certainly therefore not think of advancing it again, though I mean to place it in a point of view in some degree different from any that I have hitherto seen, if it had ever been fairly and satisfactorily answered.

The cause of this neglect on the part of the advocates for the perfectibility of mankind is not easily accounted for. I cannot doubt the talents of such men as Godwin and Condorcet. I am unwilling to doubt their candour. To my understanding, and probably to that of most others, the difficulty appears insurmountable. Yet these men of acknowledged ability and penetration scarcely deign to notice it, and hold on their course in such speculations with unabated ardour and undiminished confidence. I have certainly no right to say that they purposely shut their eyes to such arguments. I ought rather to doubt the validity of them, when neglected by such men, however forcibly their truth may strike my own mind. Yet in this respect it must be acknowledged that we are all of us too prone to err. If I saw a glass of wine repeatedly presented to a man, and he took no notice of it, I should be apt to think that he was blind or uncivil. A juster philosophy might teach me rather to think that my eyes deceived me and that the offer was not really what I conceived it to be.

In entering upon the argument I must premise that I put out of the question, at present, all mere conjectures, that is, all suppositions, the probable realization of which cannot be inferred upon any just philosophical grounds. A writer may tell me that he thinks man will ultimately become an ostrich. I cannot properly contradict him. But before he can expect to bring any reasonable person over to his opinion, he ought to shew that the necks of mankind have been gradually elongating, that the lips have grown harder and more prominent, that the legs and feet are daily altering their shape, and that the hair is beginning to change into stubs of feathers. And till the probability of so wonderful a conversion can be shewn, it is surely lost time and lost eloquence to expatiate on the happiness of man in such a state; to describe his powers, both of running and flying, to paint him in a condition where all narrow luxuries would be contemned, where he would be employed only in collecting the necessaries of life, and where, consequently, each man's share of labour would be light, and his portion of leisure ample.

I think I may fairly make two postulata.

First, That food is necessary to the existence of man.

Secondly, That the passion between the sexes is necessary and will remain nearly in its present state.

These two laws, ever since we have had any knowledge of mankind, appear to have been fixed laws of our nature, and, as we have not hitherto seen any alteration in them, we have no right to conclude that they will ever cease to be what they now are, without an immediate act of power in that Being who first arranged the system of the universe, and for the advantage of his creatures, still executes, according to fixed laws, all its various operations.

I do not know that any writer has supposed that on this earth man will ultimately be able to live without food. But Mr Godwin has conjectured that the passion between the sexes may in time be extinguished. As, however, he calls this part of his work a deviation into the land of conjecture, I will not dwell longer upon it at present than to say that the best arguments for the perfectibility of man are drawn from a contemplation of the great progress that he has already made from the savage state and the difficulty of saying where he is to stop. But towards the extinction of the passion between the sexes, no progress whatever has hitherto been made. It appears to exist in as much force at present as it did two thousand or four thousand years ago. There are individual exceptions now as there always have been. But, as these exceptions do not appear to increase in number, it would surely be a very unphilosophical mode of arguing to infer, merely from the

existence of an exception, that the exception would, in time, become the rule, and the rule the exception.

Assuming then my postulata as granted, I say, that the power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man.

Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio. A slight acquaintance with numbers will shew the immensity of the first power in comparison of the second.

By that law of our nature which makes food necessary to the life of man, the effects of these two unequal powers must be kept equal.

This implies a strong and constantly operating check on population from the difficulty of subsistence. This difficulty must fall somewhere and must necessarily be severely felt by a large portion of mankind.

Through the animal and vegetable kingdoms, nature has scattered the seeds of life abroad with the most profuse and liberal hand. She has been comparatively sparing in the room and the nourishment necessary to rear them. The germs of existence contained in this spot of earth, with ample food, and ample room to expand in, would fill millions of worlds in the course of a few thousand years. Necessity, that imperious all pervading law of nature, restrains them within the prescribed bounds. The race of plants and the race of animals shrink under this great restrictive law. And the race of man cannot, by any efforts of reason, escape from it. Among plants and animals its effects are waste of seed, sickness, and premature death. Among mankind, misery and vice. The former, misery, is an absolutely necessary consequence of it. Vice is a highly probable consequence, and we therefore see it abundantly prevail, but it ought not, perhaps, to be called an absolutely necessary consequence. The ordeal of virtue is to resist all temptation to evil.

This natural inequality of the two powers of population and of production in the earth, and that great law of our nature which must constantly keep their effects equal, form the great difficulty that to me appears insurmountable in the way to the perfectibility of society. All other arguments are of slight and subordinate consideration in comparison of this. I see no way by which man can escape from the weight of this law which pervades all animated nature. No fancied equality, no agrarian regulations in their utmost extent, could remove the pressure of it even for a single century. And it appears, therefore, to be decisive against the possible existence of a society, all the members of which should live in ease, happiness, and comparative leisure; and feel no anxiety about providing the means of subsistence for themselves and families.

Consequently, if the premises are just, the argument is conclusive against the perfectibility of the mass of mankind.

I have thus sketched the general outline of the argument, but I will examine it more particularly, and I think it will be found that experience, the true source and foundation of all knowledge, invariably confirms its truth.

Chapter 2

The different ratio in which population and food increase - The necessary effects of these different ratios of increase - Oscillation produced by them in the condition of the lower classes of society - Reasons why this oscillation has not been so much observed as might be expected - Three propositions on which the general argument of the

Essay depends - The different states in which mankind have been known to exist proposed to be examined with reference to these three propositions.

I SAID that population, when unchecked, increased in a geometrical ratio, and subsistence for man in an arithmetical ratio.

Let us examine whether this position be just. I think it will be allowed, that no state has hitherto existed (at least that we have any account of) where the manners were so pure and simple, and the means of subsistence so abundant, that no check whatever has existed to early marriages, among the lower classes, from a fear of not providing well for their families, or among the higher classes, from a fear of lowering their condition in life. Consequently in no state that we have yet known has the power of population been left to exert itself with perfect freedom.

Whether the law of marriage be instituted or not, the dictate of nature and virtue seems to be an early attachment to one woman. Supposing a liberty of changing in the case of an unfortunate choice, this liberty would not affect population till it arose to a height greatly vicious; and we are now supposing the existence of a society where vice is scarcely known.

In a state therefore of great equality and virtue, where pure and simple manners prevailed, and where the means of subsistence were so abundant that no part of the society could have any fears about providing amply for a family, the power of population being left to exert itself unchecked, the increase of the human species would evidently be much greater than any increase that has been hitherto known.

In the United States of America, where the means of subsistence have been more ample, the manners of the people more pure, and consequently the checks to early marriages fewer, than in any of the modern states of Europe, the population has been found to double itself in twenty-five years.

This ratio of increase, though short of the utmost power of population, yet as the result of actual experience, we will take as our rule, and say, that population, when unchecked, goes on doubling itself every twenty-five years or increases in a geometrical ratio.

Let us now take any spot of earth, this Island for instance, and see in what ratio the subsistence it affords can be supposed to increase. We will begin with it under its present state of cultivation.

If I allow that by the best possible policy, by breaking up more land and by great encouragements to agriculture, the produce of this Island may be doubled in the first twenty-five years, I think it will be allowing as much as any person can well demand.

In the next twenty-five years, it is impossible to suppose that the produce could be quadrupled. It would be contrary to all our knowledge of the qualities of land. The very utmost that we can conceive, is, that the increase in the second twenty-five years might equal the present produce. Let us then take this for our rule, though certainly far beyond the truth, and allow that, by great exertion, the whole produce of the Island might be increased every twenty-five years, by a quantity of subsistence equal to what it at present produces. The most enthusiastic speculator cannot suppose a greater increase than this. In a few centuries it would make every acre of land in the Island like a garden.

Yet this ratio of increase is evidently arithmetical.

It may be fairly said, therefore, that the means of subsistence increase in an arithmetical ratio. Let us now bring the effects of these two ratios together.

The population of the Island is computed to be about seven millions, and we will suppose the present produce equal to the support of such a number. In the first twenty-five years the population would be fourteen millions, and the food being also doubled, the means of subsistence would be equal to this increase. In the next twenty-five years the population would be twenty-eight millions, and the means of subsistence only equal to the support of twenty-one millions. In the next period, the population would be fifty-six millions, and the means of subsistence just sufficient for half that number. And at the conclusion of the first century the population would be one hundred and twelve millions and the means of subsistence only equal to the support of thirty-five millions, which would leave a population of seventy-seven millions totally unprovided for.

A great emigration necessarily implies unhappiness of some kind or other in the country that is deserted. For few persons will leave their families, connections, friends, and native land, to seek a settlement in untried foreign climes, without some strong subsisting causes of uneasiness where they are, or the hope of some great advantages in the place to which they are going.

But to make the argument more general and less interrupted by the partial views of emigration, let us take the whole earth, instead of one spot, and suppose that the restraints to population were universally removed. If the subsistence for man that the earth affords was to be increased every twenty-five years by a quantity equal to what the whole world at present produces, this would allow the power of production in the earth to be absolutely unlimited, and its ratio of increase much greater than we can conceive that any possible exertions of mankind could make it.

Taking the population of the world at any number, a thousand millions, for instance, the human species would increase in the ratio of -- 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32, 64, 128, 256, 512, etc. and subsistence as -- 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, etc. In two centuries and a quarter, the population would be to the means of subsistence as 512 to 10: in three centuries as 4096 to 13, and in two thousand years the difference would be almost incalculable, though the produce in that time would have increased to an immense extent.

No limits whatever are placed to the productions of the earth; they may increase for ever and be greater than any assignable quantity. yet still the power of population being a power of a superior order, the increase of the human species can only be kept commensurate to the increase of the means of subsistence by the constant operation of the strong law of necessity acting as a check upon the greater power.

The effects of this check remain now to be considered.

Among plants and animals the view of the subject is simple. They are all impelled by a powerful instinct to the increase of their species, and this instinct is interrupted by no reasoning or doubts about providing for their offspring. Wherever therefore there is liberty, the power of increase is exerted, and the superabundant effects are repressed afterwards by want of room and nourishment, which is common to animals and plants, and among animals by becoming the prey of others.

The effects of this check on man are more complicated. Impelled to the increase of his species by an equally powerful instinct, reason interrupts his career and asks him whether he may not bring beings into the world for whom he cannot provide the means of

subsistence. In a state of equality, this would be the simple question. In the present state of society, other considerations occur. Will he not lower his rank in life? Will he not subject himself to greater difficulties than he at present feels? Will he not be obliged to labour harder? and if he has a large family, will his utmost exertions enable him to support them? May he not see his offspring in rags and misery, and clamouring for bread that he cannot give them? And may he not be reduced to the grating necessity of forfeiting his independence, and of being obliged to the sparing hand of charity for support?

These considerations are calculated to prevent, and certainly do prevent, a very great number in all civilized nations from pursuing the dictate of nature in an early attachment to one woman. And this restraint almost necessarily, though not absolutely so, produces vice. Yet in all societies, even those that are most vicious, the tendency to a virtuous attachment is so strong that there is a constant effort towards an increase of population. This constant effort as constantly tends to subject the lower classes of the society to distress and to prevent any great permanent amelioration of their condition.

The way in which these effects are produced seems to be this. We will suppose the means of subsistence in any country just equal to the easy support of its inhabitants. The constant effort towards population, which is found to act even in the most vicious societies, increases the number of people before the means of subsistence are increased. The food therefore which before supported seven millions must now be divided among seven millions and a half or eight millions. The poor consequently must live much worse, and many of them be reduced to severe distress. The number of labourers also being above the proportion of the work in the market, the price of labour must tend toward a decrease, while the price of provisions would at the same time tend to rise. The labourer therefore must work harder to earn the same as he did before. During this season of distress, the discouragements to marriage, and the difficulty of rearing a family are so great that population is at a stand. In the mean time the cheapness of labour, the plenty of labourers, and the necessity of an increased industry amongst them, encourage cultivators to employ more labour upon their land, to turn up fresh soil, and to manure and improve more completely what is already in tillage, till ultimately the means of subsistence become in the same proportion to the population as at the period from which we set out. The situation of the labourer being then again tolerably comfortable, the restraints to population are in some degree loosened, and the same retrograde and progressive movements with respect to happiness are repeated.

This sort of oscillation will not be remarked by superficial observers, and it may be difficult even for the most penetrating mind to calculate its periods. Yet that in all old states some such vibration does exist, though from various transverse causes, in a much less marked, and in a much more irregular manner than I have described it, no reflecting man who considers the subject deeply can well doubt.

Many reasons occur why this oscillation has been less obvious, and less decidedly confirmed by experience, than might naturally be expected.

One principal reason is that the histories of mankind that we possess are histories only of the higher classes. We have but few accounts that can be depended upon of the manners and customs of that part of mankind where these retrograde and progressive movements chiefly take place. A satisfactory history of this kind, on one people, and of one period, would require the constant and minute attention of an observing mind during a long life. Some of the objects of inquiry would be, in what proportion to the number of adults was the number of marriages, to what extent vicious customs prevailed in consequence of the

restraints upon matrimony, what was the comparative mortality among the children of the most distressed part of the community and those who lived rather more at their ease, what were the variations in the real price of labour, and what were the observable differences in the state of the lower classes of society with respect to ease and happiness, at different times during a certain period.

Such a history would tend greatly to elucidate the manner in which the constant check upon population acts and would probably prove the existence of the retrograde and progressive movements that have been mentioned, though the times of their vibrations must necessarily be rendered irregular from the operation of many interrupting causes, such as the introduction or failure of certain manufactures, a greater or less prevalent spirit of agricultural enterprise, years of plenty, or years of scarcity, wars and pestilence, poor laws, the invention of processes for shortening labour without the proportional extension of the market for the commodity, and, particularly, the difference between the nominal and real price of labour, a circumstance which has perhaps more than any other contributed to conceal this oscillation from common view.

It very rarely happens that the nominal price of labour universally falls, but we well know that it frequently remains the same, while the nominal price of provisions has been gradually increasing. This is, in effect, a real fall in the price of labour, and during this period the condition of the lower orders of the community must gradually grow worse and worse. But the farmers and capitalists are growing rich from the real cheapness of labour. Their increased capitals enable them to employ a greater number of men. Work therefore may be plentiful, and the price of labour would consequently rise. But the want of freedom in the market of labour, which occurs more or less in all communities, either from parish laws, or the more general cause of the facility of combination among the rich, and its difficulty among the poor, operates to prevent the price of labour from rising at the natural period, and keeps it down some time longer; perhaps till a year of scarcity, when the clamour is too loud and the necessity too apparent to be resisted.

The true cause of the advance in the price of labour is thus concealed, and the rich affect to grant it as an act of compassion and favour to the poor, in consideration of a year of scarcity, and, when plenty returns, indulge themselves in the most unreasonable of all complaints, that the price does not again fall, when a little rejection would shew them that it must have risen long before but from an unjust conspiracy of their own.

But though the rich by unfair combinations contribute frequently to prolong a season of distress among the poor, yet no possible form of society could prevent the almost constant action of misery upon a great part of mankind, if in a state of inequality, and upon all, if all were equal.

The theory on which the truth of this position depends appears to me so extremely clear that I feel at a loss to conjecture what part of it can be denied.

That population cannot increase without the means of subsistence is a proposition so evident that it needs no illustration.

That population does invariably increase where there are the means of subsistence, the history of every people that have ever existed will abundantly prove.

And that the superior power of population cannot be checked without producing misery or vice, the ample portion of these too bitter ingredients in the cup of human life and the

continuance of the physical causes that seem to have produced them bear too convincing a testimony.

But, in order more fully to ascertain the validity of these three propositions, let us examine the different states in which mankind have been known to exist. Even a cursory review will, I think, be sufficient to convince us that these propositions are incontrovertible truths.

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Thomas **Malthus** (1766-1834). ... (1876). This often quoted passage reflects the significance Darwin affords **Malthus** in formulating his theory of Natural Selection. ...

Beschreibung: Brief piece on the influence of **Malthus** on Darwin's ideas.

Kategorie: [Science > Social Sciences > ... > People > Malthus, Thomas Robert](#)

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"In October 1838, that is, fifteen months after I had begun my systematic inquiry, I happened to read for amusement Malthus on *Population*, and being well prepared to appreciate the struggle for existence which everywhere goes on from long- continued observation of the habits of animals and plants, it at once struck me that under these circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved, and unfavourable ones to be destroyed. The results of this would be the formation of a new species. Here, then I had at last got a theory by which to work".

Charles Darwin, from his autobiography. (1876)

This often quoted passage reflects the significance Darwin affords Malthus in formulating his theory of Natural Selection. What "struck" Darwin in *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798) was Malthus's observation that in nature plants and animals produce far more offspring than can survive, and that Man too is capable of overproducing if left unchecked. Malthus concluded that unless family size was regulated, man's misery of famine would become globally epidemic and eventually consume Man. Malthus' view that poverty and famine were natural outcomes of population growth and food supply was not popular among social reformers who believed that with proper social structures, all ills of man could be eradicated. Although Malthus thought famine and poverty natural **outcomes**, the ultimate reason for those outcomes was divine institution. He believed that such natural outcomes were God's way of preventing man from being lazy. Both Darwin and Wallace independantly arrived at similar theories of Natural Selection after reading Malthus. Unlike Malthus, they framed his principle in purely natural terms both in outcome and in ultimate reason. By so doing, they extended Malthus' logic further than Malthus himself could ever take it. They realized that producing more offspring than can survive establishes a competitive environment among siblings, and that the variation among siblings would produce some individuals with a slightly greater chance of survival.

Malthus was a political economist who was concerned about, what he saw as, the decline of living conditions in nineteenth century England. He blamed this decline on three elements: The overproduction of young; the inability of resources to keep up with the rising human population; and the irresponsibility of the lower classes. To combat this, Malthus suggested the family size of the lower class ought to be

regulated such that poor families do not produce more children than they can support. Does this sound familiar? China has implemented a policy of one child per family (though this applies to *all families*, not just those of the lower class).



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Beschreibung: **Malthus's** 1798 essay on population and its effects on society.

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