

The New Worlds of Thomas Robert Malthus

REREADING THE PRINCIPLE OF POPULATION

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Introduction

FOR MORE THAN TWO HUNDRED YEARS, people have loved to hate Thomas Robert Malthus, but have they done so with reason and (even if so) for the right reasons? The British moral philosopher and professor of political economy (1766–1834) is too often diminished and dismissed as a mere “parson.” Although described as warm and engaging in person—all the more impressive, given his harelip, cleft palate, and speech defect—he has nevertheless been thoroughly vilified. Why? Just as there are characters in books, so there are characters created by books, and Malthus was one of the latter. In his case, he was a character of his own creation. He is famous for one idea, a bleak correlation between population growth and starvation, first set out in his *Essay on the Principle of Population*. In 1798 this was a thesis that seemed to entrench and naturalize rather than ameliorate poverty, just when a new generation of utopians was imagining a brighter and better future. Subsequently, his identification with the hypothetical mismatch between potential population growth and available resources became so strong that, even within his lifetime, his name came to signify it: “Malthusian” (by 1805) and “Malthusianism” (by 1833).¹

That stark claim about population has been persistently interpreted within a European context, even as Malthusianism is today thought of overwhelmingly in relation to the developing, extra-European world. This distortion is compounded by the problem that Malthusianism has been analyzed far more than the historical Malthus. When historians have sought to contextualize Malthus’s ideas, they have defined his “life and times,” as a rule, in the political spaces either within England or between Britain and France. This is both unsurprising and correct, not least because Malthus explained the first iteration of his *Essay*, published in 1798, as a response both to William Godwin and to the marquis de Condorcet, and he explained it in his preface to have been prompted by “conversation with a friend” about the future improvement of humankind. We know that this debate was with Malthus’s radical father, devotee of John Wilkes and friend of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The father and son envisioned very different futures at a critical historical moment. In the year of their conversation, Great Britain was at war with France—Nelson defeated the French fleet at the Battle of the Nile that year—and English “Jacobins” and “anti-Jacobins” were also at war. They

fought, in large part, over the poor. What had been done, and what could possibly be done, about poverty, about future social “happiness,” and about the perfectibility of social organization? In Great Britain, this argument revolved around core economic and political business—the Poor Laws and later the Corn Laws—and Malthus had much to say about both, against the former and for the latter. Quite rightly, radical politics of the 1790s, the Napoleonic Wars, and the ethics and economics of British policy on the poor have long been the historiographical frames in which Malthus and his *Essay* have been assessed. He was, after all, a key figure in the transition from a political economy informed by moral philosophy and to an economics shorn of such philosophical concerns.²

Looked at another way, however, Malthus was, all along, a theorist who looked beyond England and especially at new worlds over which Europeans (and settlers) had been fighting long before Bonaparte drew breath. The distinguished population historian and geographer E. A. Wrigley once conceptualized Malthus as “standing between two worlds.” Wrigley meant that Malthus stood between two temporally distinct economic systems: the pre-modern organic and agricultural economy, from which and about which Malthus wrote, and the modern industrial and manufacturing economy, just beginning to accelerate. But what if we were to cast these “two worlds” not just chronologically but also into the geography of Malthus’s own life and times, the old world and the new? In fact, he defined his population principle in relation to the new world primordially within his 1798 claim that British North America provided a case study of rapid population growth, and even more significantly in the expanded second edition of his *Essay*, published in 1803. Starting with that revision, and in each that came thereafter, Malthus began with the Atlantic and the Pacific “new worlds,” not with Europe. But why? And how does recognition of the new worlds of Thomas Robert Malthus significantly change our understanding of the most famous book on population ever written, or ever likely to be?³

The unusual nature of new world societies has been deeply ingrained in examinations of those places, even as their respective scholars may have missed their significance to Malthus. Despite the initial mistaken comprehension of the first new world, the Americas, as part of the East Indies, subsequent Western understanding of them was as places distinctly unendowed with Asia’s long-settled, economically complex, and large populations. To the European eye, many parts of the Americas seemed underpopulated, with land and other resources consequently underutilized, and this would remain a central prejudice about them. English descriptions of North America as *wilderness* transformed that term’s original connotation of “wild,” as populated by wild

things (plants, animals, people) to mean also deserted, desert, waste. Thus an invidious description of new worlds was born, one that not only assumed a low person-to-acre ratio—"thin," as it was often put—but hinted at the desirability of separating indigenous persons from their acres, and hypothesized their eventual demise in any case. All imperial zones and schemes are unjust, but the way in which instrumental ideas about abounding land and receding native population informed the empires of the Americas was the distinctive element of their injustice and would generate a model for succeeding new world colonies in Australia and other parts of the Pacific. In the most extreme form of these claims, the concepts of *res nullius* and *terra nullius* asserted that new world zones were literally "nobody's land," free for the taking.⁴

So rich has this distinctive population-land element been within scholarship on new worlds that it has borne many names since "wilderness," "wasteland," or "terra nullius." Within the historiography on the Americas, Frederick Jackson Turner's idea of the *frontier*, as a cultural interaction zone in which shrinking native populations and expanding settler populations clashed over land, has prevailed since the late nineteenth century and been exported to explain frontiers elsewhere, including the Pacific. By the middle of the twentieth century, Latin Americanist Herbert Eugene Bolton modified the notion of a frontier with the concept of a *borderland*, originally to describe the boundary zones between New Spain and British America, later to identify a broader array of cultural participants within those zones, including Indians. Whatever the post-Turnerian criticisms that these concepts tend to reduce native peoples to a historically inaccurate invisibility, *frontier* and *borderland* have continued to be terms of art. Analysis of creoles, the descendants of Europeans who settled in the Americas, has likewise promoted a sense that, within these zones, and especially once the zones' creole inhabitants fashioned nations independent from Europe (beginning with the United States in 1776 and unfolding as wars of independence in "Latin America" that concluded circa 1825), native populations played secondary roles. More recently, definitions of *settler colonialism*, in which the rights and privileges of settlers are instantiated in ways that subsume those of original inhabitants, has formed a more forthright criticism of settler ideologies. This concept has been used, beginning in the latter part of the twentieth century, to interpret ongoing instances of territorial occupation as well as historic cases, with attention to the nineteenth century settler usurpation of land in new worlds stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific.⁵

Our study reinterprets Malthus's "principle of population" within these connected histories and historiographies, which have interrogated the dynamics of power in new world places that were perceived by settlers as land

abundant and population poor. North America constituted Malthus's primary example of just how rapidly population growth could occur, whenever land fit for agriculture was first exploited by Europeans. New world places and their native peoples were then analytically essential within editions of the *Essay* from 1803 onward. From selected studies of indigenous people, Malthus argued that population numbers were always kept within the limits of resources (the "principle of population") by epidemics, starvation, and human violence, and by deliberate measures to control births. And yet Malthus used his principle of population to conclude—against prevailing opinion—that for settler populations to extirpate or subsume indigenous ones was unjust. In this regard, the Reverend T. R. Malthus, long decried as scourge of the English poor, has an unexpected, if intermittent, persona: defender of native peoples.

New worlds were therefore cautionary tales for Malthus. He recognized the allure of lands that seemed to have been previously unused, with new worlds seeming to offer fresh beginnings for humanity, or at least parts of humanity. Yet he warned against the assumption that material plenty would always beckon—the enduring fantasy of new world places—and he was well aware that white settlers would be quick to claim territories that were actually being used by their aboriginal inhabitants. When read in relation to the histories of the new worlds, Malthus's "principle of population" carries a double moral: fresh starts for humanity often rely on misleading promises about natural resources, and the human beings in question are themselves quite often ethically compromised. The *Essay* is therefore an examination, in equal measures, of nature and of human nature, nowhere better exposed in their starkest forms than in new world places.

* * *

While Malthus himself never traveled across the Atlantic or into the Pacific, people from those worlds entered his book. Two of them best capture its new world dimensions, embodying in very different ways the significance of colonized worlds within British intellectual history of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is well known that Malthus inherited a kernel of an idea about rapid population growth from Benjamin Franklin, the British colonist (later independent American), who in 1751 developed a theory of rapid population growth and natural carrying capacity within British North America. Nonetheless, in Malthus studies, Franklin and America are quickly ushered off the stage after a brief mention, obscuring how America

(and Franklin) remained central to Malthus's arguments in all subsequent editions of his *Essay*, as well as to debate among Malthus's critics. Far less well known is the presence of another new world man in the *Essay*: Bennelong, a senior member of the Wangal people, whose land had recently been colonized by the British and renamed Sydney. Both Franklin and Bennelong visited London, and while neither met Malthus (so far as we know), their textual meetings in the *Essay* distill what our book is about. Their manifest difference is the point. They represent the two faces of new world history, both of which shaped the *Essay*, both of which engaged Malthus, and both of which have been the objects of major historical inquiries that need to be brought to our understanding of Malthus, the *Essay*, and the world in which it was composed and received.⁶

Benjamin Franklin represents the significant case of British colonization of North America, the ensuing settler population growth, and the white population's celebration of the consequent displacement of the indigenous population. Bennelong represents the Pacific new world, but more profoundly he was an indigenous presence in the *Essay*. The fact that Bennelong spent two years in London in the mid-1790s, but was then reduced by Malthus to an exemplar of savage economy, signals a deeper ambivalence about indigenous new world societies in the *Essay* itself. Placing Franklin, Bennelong, and the disparate views on new world empires those two men exemplified at the conceptual center of our approach to Malthus's *Essay* makes the picture of that text suddenly shift from a British or European axis, to require a new world and imperial axis of analysis.

To what extent has this been done to date? Appraisal of the non-European context of Malthus's *Essay* has tended to be *ex post facto*—pursued from the perspective of the modern social sciences—or else fleeting, with only a glancing realization of the fuller worlds he inhabited and assessed. Some scholars have intermittently considered him as an early ethnographer, for example. His ideas about Australian Aboriginal people have been noted, sometimes within the tradition of historicizing “prehistory,” on occasion within analysis of Enlightenment exploration and encounter, and particularly in terms of indigenous people's decline. The twentieth-century demographer J. C. Caldwell intriguingly wondered why Malthus had focused so much on the “new worlds” at the expense of Asia. At the beginning of his career Donald Winch connected political economy to empire with some discussion of Malthus and colonization, and more recently Eric Richards has discussed Malthus on emigration. John Toye has noted that the new scope of the second edition situated Malthus at the very beginning of what became development

economics. These are the small steps that have been taken in thinking of the *Essay on the Principle of Population* beyond both British economic history and a late Enlightenment French-British controversy.⁷

In this book, we take the bigger leap. There is a pressing need to do so, not least because Malthus himself addressed new world societies so directly. We take account of, and account for, the primary materials on these new worlds that informed Malthus and that he actively incorporated into his long edition. These sixteenth- through-eighteenth century works themselves signaled the wider context that must also be considered. The French Revolution and its British opponents and proponents, the Poor Laws, the Corn Laws, were all important contexts, to be sure. But Malthus's life span, 1766–1834, also encompassed world-changing developments in other hemispheres.

* * *

Malthus wrote about how the old world and the new world related to one another at the turn of a new century—unsurprising, given how formative those centenary developments were to domestic British economic and political matters. That North America had contributed significantly to British wealth—the colonies that in part created its economic “great divergence”—was as apparent to contemporaries as it has become to historians. Grain-producing acres that had once been part of the British Empire were, by Malthus's late childhood, instead within the United States of America. Growing reliance on American grain unsettled British economists and was certainly to worry Malthus. The extension of the Napoleonic Wars to the Americas, waged in Malthus's adulthood, altered geopolitical relations yet again. The Louisiana Purchase was negotiated just as the second edition of the *Essay* came off the press in 1803: France relinquished its status as Britain's new world adversary even as the United States doubled its territory. Shortly thereafter the Spanish monarchy lost most of its American territories as those places broke into the independent nations of what is now called “Latin” America.

The so-called swing to the East after the American Revolution had in the meanwhile focused attention on the new economic and strategic possibilities of the Pacific Ocean. The exploration and charting of the South Sea by Bougainville, Cook, Vancouver, and La Pérouse all took place in the first half of Malthus's life. Indeed these explorers each appear in his *Essay*, often in long passages of verbatim quotation. In 1788 the colony of New South Wales was established, to which convict populations already considered “surplus” were deported. New South Wales thus made its way into the second edition of

the *Essay* in 1803, and that year British rule over indigenous people in the antipodes escalated with new penal settlements in Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania). In Tahiti and New Zealand too the British initiated commercial and missionary endeavors, building, from 1769 onward, atop James Cook's charting of these places. Even the "free" province of South Australia, enacted by Parliament the year Malthus died (1834), fell within his purview. The new idea of "systematic colonization" was of interest to him, not least because it installed the value of labor, relative to the value of land, at its core.

The antipodean colonies began as maritime ventures, closely hugging coastlines and initially lacking any clear plan to cultivate continental interiors. They were not, at first, an attempt to replace the great grain-producing acreage of the lost North American colonies. Over Malthus's lifetime, however, especially after the Napoleonic Wars, the antipodean colonies did turn into vast agricultural ventures and commercial pastoral holdings, returning considerable wealth to Great Britain and receiving emigrants in return, often from Scotland and Ireland, where linked agrarian reform was underway. Accordingly, Malthus's *Essay* and the whole population question itself were tied up with the settler colonial enterprise of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The emigration of English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish settlers, and the transportation of convicts to the new antipodean colonies, replacing the earlier trade to British America before 1776, was often figured as a mitigation of pauperism. It was part of the massive movement of Britons, domestically and internationally, that characterized the era. Some economists and statesmen thought siphoning off at least some out-of-work laborers and unemployed urban poor to the colonies was useful in keeping the price of labor high. Malthus himself was ambivalent about the economics of emigration and colonization. The morality of such endeavors also occasionally troubled him.⁸

In relation to new worlds, the *Essay on the Principle of Population* was also a book about the human cultivation of land, and of the limits (in an age of "improvement") to which yields could be enhanced. New world colonial sites constituted for British consumers millions of what are now called "ghost acres." In *The Hungry Planet: The Modern World at the Edge of Famine* (1965), Georg Borgstrom defined ghost acreage as the actual extent of food-providing territory that a nation had at its disposal, including whatever lay beyond its direct area of sovereignty. To determine the amount of food that a country could command, it was necessary, Borgstrom argued, to take into account its trade, its fishing, and its agriculture, even though the final unit was usually the only component that was calculated—and typically only within

the nation itself, not including its imperial dependencies. Ghost acreage was in contrast the "computed, non-visible acreage which a country would require as a supplement to its present visible agricultural acreage in the form of tilled land in order to be able to feed itself." Borgstrom differentiated between fish acreage and trade acreage as indeed qualitatively distinct, depending on whether a nation had fishing rights in any available body of water (freshwater sometimes, but more typically ocean) or instead had to trade with other nations for its fish. Borgstrom further distinguished among kinds of food imports, substitutionary versus complementary. The first category encompassed items that a nation could produce but might not have done, either to reserve domestic resources for other activities, or else because a crop had failed and a substitute had to be sought. The latter category included items that could not be grown in the country in question, often because (in relation to countries in temperate climates) they were tropical or otherwise climate dependent.⁹

Although the concept of ghost acreage is recent, the economic historian Kenneth Pomeranz has pointed out that, when European nations possessed imperial zones, their leaders quite obviously thought in congruent terms. The whole aim of most early modern empires had been to gain territories and shipping zones in order to procure complementary products (spices especially; sugar eventually) and sometimes substitutionary ones, as Great Britain had done with American grain and Irish beef. Indeed, population theories since the Renaissance (at least) had incipiently analyzed the value of ghost acres. For modern empires, ghost acreage was of staggering importance. Pomeranz has estimated that by around the year 1830 Britain's ghost acres were in the neighborhood of 25 to 30 million. Even before that time, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, West Indian sugar cultivation alone constituted over 1 million acres for England and Scotland, reaching closer to 2 million for the entire United Kingdom. Nor was ghost acreage restricted to food. Although forests in most parts of western Europe would not be seriously depleted until the eighteenth century, people had, by the late Middle Ages, begun to state their perception that wood was running out. There were two solutions. The Republic of Venice sought its wood elsewhere, in the ghost acres of its regional empire. An alternative strategy, original to the German-speaking lands, was to cultivate and conserve forests at home. England would implement both solutions, though notably the Venetian one. North American forests provided an abundance of wood for building British merchantmen and warships, for example. Britain's imperial ghost acres for timber (principally in Upper and

Lower Canada) have been estimated as comprising just over a million acres by the early nineteenth century.¹⁰

In relation to the question of ghost acres, Malthus's *Essay* was an ethical treatise about who gets to cultivate whose land in other hemispheres and on other continents. The great agricultural ventures in North America and later in the Australian colonies were key parts of the global environmental shift over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, first from forest to farm, and then from grassland to grainland. This involved "clearances" not just of new world land, but also of new world people. Sometimes the latter was organized, sometimes haphazard; sometimes actively violent, at other times passively so. But the displacement of indigenous people was most often a deliberate and formal policy. Two of the most notorious outcomes of such deliberations took place in 1830, within Malthus's lifetime—the Indian Removal Act in the United States and the so-called Black Line in Van Diemen's Land. Malthus had anticipated, and deplored, such events in 1803: "The right of exterminating, or driving into a corner where they must starve, even the inhabitants of these thinly peopled regions, will be questioned in a moral view." To be sure, Malthus was interested in the effect of "new land" on the emigrant population, those neo-Britons who were busy replenishing the Earth. But it turns out that he also recognized the cost of all this replenishment in the new worlds. Indeed, as a contemporary of these global trends, he recognized their significance perhaps more keenly than many twentieth-century historians.¹¹

Malthus was, therefore, at times, and unexpectedly, a critic of both the imperial project and the politics of extermination, protection, or assimilation of indigenous peoples who came under foreign rule. For him the problem was unfolding on a global canvas, one that highlighted the distinctive tragedy of new worlds. "To exterminate the inhabitants of the greatest part of Asia and Africa, is a thought that could not be admitted for a moment," he argued, even as the reverse of this statement revealed that the thought of extermination could be (and was) openly discussed in relation to the inhabitants of new worlds.¹²

Malthus also worried about the Atlantic slave trade, the other ethical problem peculiar to new world societies. His *Essay* was written and rewritten at the most politicized moment of Atlantic abolitionism and emancipation, from US abolition of the slave trade, as written into the Constitution of 1789, to passage of the British 1807 Slave Trade Act and the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. Indeed, Malthus revised appendixes to the *Essay* just as William

Wilberforce was arguing through abolitionist bills in Westminster. Although the *Essay* was occasionally used to defend the slave trade, Malthus himself favored abolition. Yet he addressed slavery reluctantly and belatedly in his *Essay*. Most surprisingly, given the status of the West Indian colonies, his corpus as a whole failed to assess the sugar islands as economically meaningful parts of the empire; in effect, it failed to assess new world slavery at all. In this regard, it is significant that Malthus spent most of his adult life at the core of Britain's institutional imperialism: the East India Company. Not just his income but the very roof over the Malthus family head was provided through his long-standing position as professor of general history, politics, commerce, and finance at the East India Company College, Haileybury. There, from 1805 until his death in 1834, Malthus trained generations of young men to be company clerks and sent them to India. In this way, Malthus participated in the British sanitization of imperial activity, away from the slave-trading and land-grabbing model of new worlds and toward an exploitation that, in contrast, parasitically attached itself to existing populations. The new style of imperialism would make what has become known as the Second British Empire distinctive, reflecting considerable effort in reforming and justifying empire, as well as greater confidence in the results, whatever their injustices to extra-European peoples. Perhaps for this reason, Malthus's objections to the moral hazard of taking aboriginal lands in new worlds had been only timidly stated and were gradually superceded by other concerns.

* * *

Why has the centrality of new worlds to Malthus's population principle not been perceived before or, more correctly, not been perceived as important? The block in the past has been partly intellectual and partly about publishing logistics. Many people, including many scholars, have simply read the first, short edition of the *Essay*. And although all Malthus scholars know that the long 1803 edition is altogether different in both scale and content, the early chapters—the fascinating, if not horrifying, studies of indigenous people in the Atlantic and Pacific new worlds—have nevertheless been omitted in widely used abridged reprints. For this reason alone, the frequently omitted sections warrant special focus. It was Patricia James, Malthus's most diligent biographer, who could see at least the antiquarian delights of inquiring into the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century voyagers' accounts on which Malthus relied so heavily: "I wonder nobody has ever produced an annotated edition of the second version of the *Essay* simply as an excuse for the

pleasure of thoroughly studying the sources.” But these sources were far more than traveler’s tales, and their contents are often unpleasant. From those accounts, Malthus received and reproduced a historically specific image of the savage, the foundational actor in his era’s universal history, denizen of the first economic stage within the development of commercial civilization, and typically sited within the new worlds, first America, later the Pacific.¹³

Malthus’s focus on new worlds was thus a way to consider the question of how resources might be divided among human populations that were (or seemed) different at the time of their historical contact. His major ambition was to establish a universal, mathematically expressed, and therefore scientific principle about all of humanity, and to do so he knew he needed to canvass the inhabited world and find a way to theorize his worldwide exempla. To organize and give meaning to his global survey, he relied to a large extent on stadial theory, the conjectural four stages of human development from hunting and gathering to pastoralism, agriculture, and finally commerce. Malthus did not simply use stadial theory but reconfigured it to place population dynamics at its core, drawing from the late Enlightenment theorists of universal history—Hume, Montesquieu, Kames, Smith, Gibbon, and above all Robertson—in order to do so. The *Essay* is thus important as a contribution to a historically significant (and still-running) debate over the nature of humanity: are human beings more similar to each other than they are dissimilar? Malthus attempted to define a universal principle for all humans, yet he did so during a period of intense racism and by using sources that reflected (if not participated in) the imperial activities that seemed to naturalize cultures as superior and inferior. The result was a profound meditation on the problem of human inequality, though not a solution to it.

The *Essay* for that reason contains both a universalizing history of civilization and a dead-end history of savagery, a paradox contained within Malthus’s new world examples and one that he never reconciled. He cited instances from the world over, and from representative societies of all stages of development (past and present). The multiple case studies distilled his thesis and reduced it to its barest and, for him, clearest, principles: by what means are the inhabitants of any society reduced to such a number as can subsist? Just this question, he insisted, should be asked of “the best peopled countries in Europe and Asia.” But the universalization of this question did not mean that Malthus believed that the peoples of Europe, Asia, Africa, and the new worlds were equal to each other. The Americas and the Pacific new worlds were formative of Malthus’s universal principle because they were distinctive in displaying a contrast between indigenous savagery, a hunter-gathering

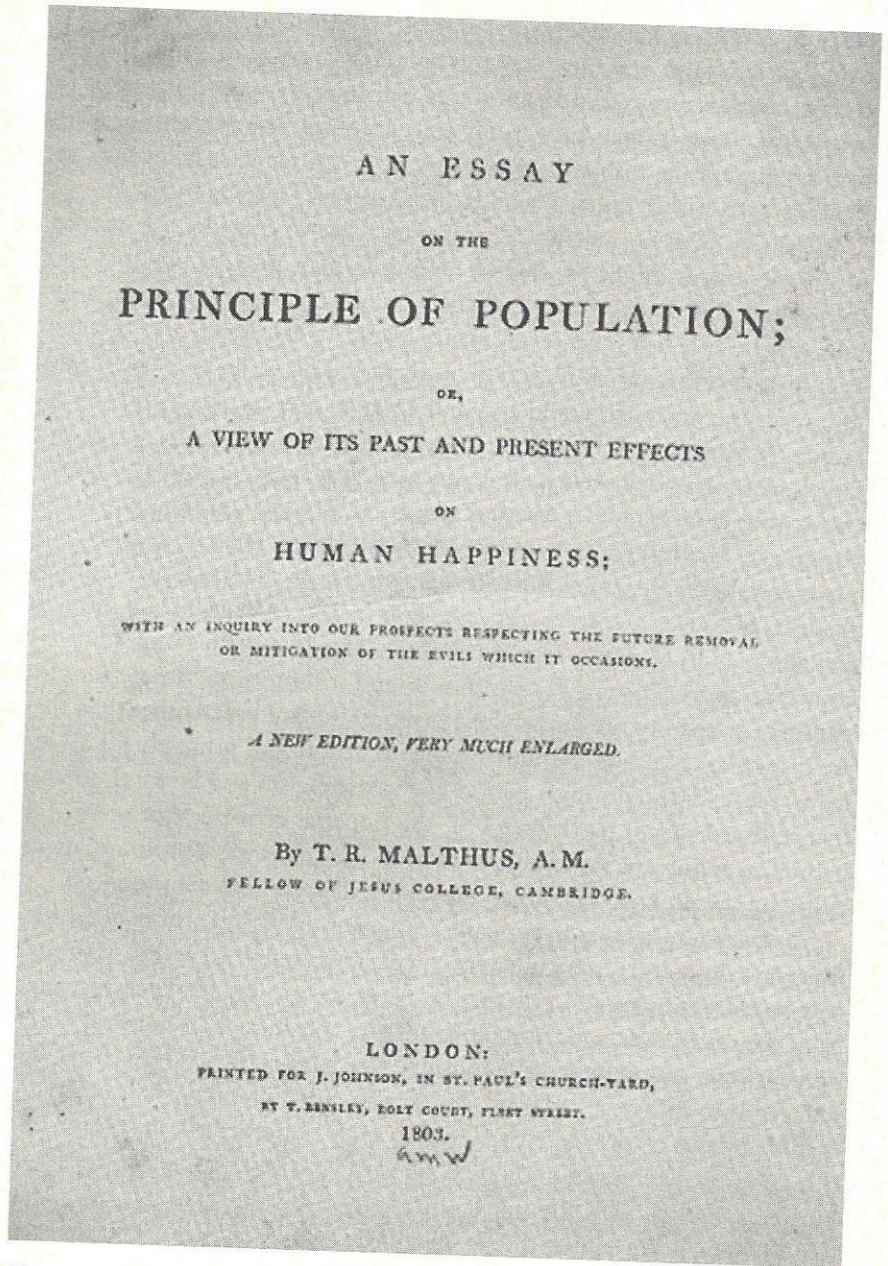


Figure 0.1. The second edition of Malthus's principle of population, "very much enlarged." T.R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (London J. Johnson, 1803). Courtesy of the University of Chicago Library, Crerar Special Collections.

economy that elsewhere had become a pastoral economy, and the agrarian, commercial, and civilized economies that settlers had introduced. The essentially new-world contrast in socioeconomic forms, meaning the clash between them, was at the heart of the principle of population, in which one group of humans, settlers, grew rapidly, while the other, the indigenes, underwent collapse, processes observable nowhere else in the world. The second edition of Malthus's principle of population, "very much enlarged."¹⁴

The six editions of the *Essay*, the books that Malthus read and cited, his private correspondence, his other publications and public testimony, and the writings of a variety of people who knew him or about him are the central evidence of our study. The slimness of the personal Malthus archive (some letters, almost no manuscript versions of his writing intended for publication), particularly compared to his contemporaries, is somewhat mysterious. But many sets of documents that were never gathered into his personal collection, which remain dispersed across multiple archives, are nevertheless highly revealing. So too are many of his underexamined public statements, including his evidence at the 1826–1827 Select Committee on Emigration. His intellectual development within his family is likewise significant; his early tutor, the sometime poet Richard Graves, evoked members of a Malthus family intent "on books; with maps and globes surrounded." That early and global education seems to have mattered, along with the intellectual genealogies that went into it. Finally, and perhaps most important, a close reading of the new world sections of Malthus's *Essay* offers important revelations into its author's logical force.¹⁵

The New Worlds of Thomas Robert Malthus begins with an analysis of the population studies that antedated the *Essay* and inspired the genesis of Malthus's central ideas. Chapter 1 traces the long and rich tradition of analyzing population dynamics in relation to empires and to the Americas, through the eighteenth century. Next, chapter 2 closely examines the contexts in which the first edition (1798) and the expanded second edition (1803) were written. Three subsequent chapters (3, 4, 5) explore the new world sites with which Malthus opened the 1803 edition; his study of indigenous people in New Holland, in the Americas, and in the Pacific Islands respectively. We consider how theorists,' voyagers,' and colonists' accounts shaped the *Essay*, carrying forward, well into the nineteenth century, the problem of reconciling universality and particularity within theories of human development.¹⁶

The next three chapters consider Malthus and his editions of the *Essay* in relation to three important historical contexts. Chapter 6 explores the *Essay* in terms of one of the era's most acute discussions of freedom, tyranny, and economy: slavery and the slave trade, with particular focus on the British

debates in which Malthus was directly implicated. The penultimate chapter (7) turns to Malthus's larger thoughts on colonization as succeeding British governments considered the political economy of actively distributing "surplus" British populations to new colonial destinations. Upper Canada was one option; the antipodes another. Toward the end of his life Malthus engaged with various colonization schemes and schemers and with colonial policy architects who were particularly concerned with Scotland and Ireland. He eventually agreed with their expectation that emigration and colonization solved domestic problems of poverty and pauperism. Finally, chapter 8 explores the reception of Malthus in new worlds, especially the Americas, where his text enjoyed robust circulation and commentary, but also in the Australian colonies, where his name and thesis likewise had impact. It is notable that new world settlers in these places did not always read or use his population principle as he had intended. Uptake of his criticism of the usurpation of indigenous lands in particular was revealingly uneven. (In terms of the book's division of labor, the two authors worked together on the introduction; Joyce Chaplin was primarily responsible for chapters 1, 2, 4, 8, and the coda; Alison Bashford for chapters 3, 5, 6, 7.)¹⁷

This book has implications for the history of Malthus and political economy, for the history of universal theories of human societies, and for the history of colonialism and population. Above all, Malthus was a crucial figure in the identification of the cost of European population growth on new world indigenous peoples, a point that is worth making in relation to ongoing debates about global population growth and the limits of natural resources, however much the latter may seem to offer materially new frontiers. Historians know that, after 1492, total world population grew while new world indigenous populations declined. Malthus recognized both trends and analyzed them as they were unfolding within his lifetime. He did so within the most-discussed population text of all time, if not always in terms we would now accept and often with a diffidence that undercut their critical force. The convergence of imperialism and economics within his *Essay* demonstrates that colonial history is always part of economic history and that political economy is never just a domestic matter. The concept, if not the fantasy, of new worlds is central to these realizations about the impact of the "old world" on the rest of the planet. The new world, for Thomas Robert Malthus, had revealed, as no other part of the world could do so well, that human population expanded, struggled, and collapsed within limits set out by nature, and the new world had indeed suggested the possibility of that notorious principle of population in the first place.

NOTES

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1. OED, s.v., "Malthusian" and "Malthusianism."
2. The Library of Congress lists 79 books with "Malthus" as the key subject, but more than twice that number, 183, under "Malthusianism." On Malthusianism in the developing world (both for scholars who broadly agree with his proposition and those who do not): Sachs, "Are Malthus's Predicted 1798 Food Shortages Coming True?"; Rao, *From Population Control to Reproductive Health*; Rao and Sexton, *Markets and Malthus*. On the "conversation with a friend": [Malthus], *An Essay on the Principle of Population*; Pullen, "Correspondence between Malthus and his Parents." On the centrality of the English poor: Huzel, "Malthus, the Poor Law and Population"; Petersen, *Malthus*; James, *Population Malthus*; Winch, *Riches and Poverty*; Hilton, *Age of Atonement*; Hollander, *Economics of Thomas Robert Malthus*; Jones, *An End to Poverty*. In a different tradition, see Dean, *Constitution of Poverty*; Dean, "The Malthus Effect." And on Malthus as a political economist, Pullen, "Last Sixty-five Years of Malthus Scholarship."
3. Wrigley, "Standing Between Two Worlds." As coeditor of Malthus's complete works, Wrigley is naturally aware of the geographic range of the *Essay*. See Wrigley and Souden, *Works of Thomas Robert Malthus*.
4. Kupperman, "Changing Definition of America"; Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*; Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*; Banner, *Possessing the Pacific*; Fitzmaurice, *Sovereignty, Property, and Empire*.
5. On the frontier: Turner, "Significance of the Frontier"; Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence*. Comparison among frontiers was of interest in roughly the middle of the twentieth century; see, for instance, Wyman, *Frontier in Perspective*, though focused comparisons among two or a few specific places are now more common, as for example with Hogg, *Men and Manliness on the Frontier*. For critiques of the frontier thesis: White, *Middle Ground*; White and Limerick, *Frontier in American Culture*. On borderlands: Bolton, *Spanish Borderlands*; Adelman and Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders"; Readman, Radding, and Bryant, *Borderlands in World History*. On creoles and nationhood: Brading, *First America*; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 49–68. On settler colonialism/settler society: Wolfe, "Land, Labor, and Difference"; Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*; Bateman and Pilkington, *Studies in Settler Colonialism*. For Malthus, Malthusianism, and frontiers within imperial and global contexts, see Richards, "Malthus and the Uses of British Emigration"; Bashford, *Global Population*, 31–36.
6. For brief versions of the Franklin-Malthus connection, see Aldridge, "Franklin as Demographer"; Zirkle, "Benjamin Franklin,"; James, *Population Malthus*, 106–7; Appleman, "Introduction," xvi; Hodgson, "Benjamin Franklin on Population." For a fuller account, see Chaplin, *Benjamin Franklin's Political Arithmetic*.

7. Malthus as ethnographer: Godelier, "Malthus and Ethnography"; Hamilton, "Malthus, Yesterday and Today—and Tomorrow?"; Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings*, 33–36; Blainey, *Triumph of the Nomads*, 93–95, 99; Mulvaney, "Australian Aborigines, 1606–1929," 141; Frost, "Pacific Ocean"; Strong, "Fathoming the Primitive"; Konishi, "The Tantalising Cannibal,"; Konishi, "Wanton with plenty." Cf. the invisibility of Malthus's chapter on New South Wales in "Malthus and his Legacy," though this does not include all papers delivered. For glancing appreciations of Malthus's attention to extra-European worlds: Caldwell, "Malthus and the Less Developed World"; Winch, *Classical Political Economy and Colonies*; Richards, "Malthus and the Uses of British Emigration"; Ghosh, "Malthus on Emigration and Colonization"; Toye, "Keynes on Population and Economic Growth," 8. See Bashford, "Malthus and Colonial History."
8. Jonsson, *Enlightenment's Frontier*, 193–95, 251–52; Richards, "Malthus and the Uses of British Emigration," 42–43.
9. Borgstrom, *Hungry Planet*, 70–85.
10. Pomeranz, *Great Divergence*, 276, 313–14; Wrigley, *Energy and the English Industrial Revolution*, 99, 174, 208; Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*, 443–46; Bashford, *Global Population*, 362; Mayhew, *Malthus*, 3, 103–27; Albion, *Forests and Sea Power*; Grove, *Green Imperialism*, 57–67; Williams, *Deforesting the Earth*, 193–209; Appuhn, *Forest on the Sea*; Warde, "Invention of Sustainability"; Wing, "Keeping Spain Afloat."
11. British economic historians certainly frame Malthus in terms of land and organic economies, but rarely in terms of the politics of colonial land. However, for organic economies and extra-European land figured as "areas of recent settlement," see Wrigley, *Poverty, Progress, and Population*, 4–5, 12, 219; quotation from Malthus, *An Essay* (1803), 6.
12. Malthus, *An Essay* (1803), 6; Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, ch. 12 "The Destruction of Native Peoples and Ecological Depredation" and "Conclusion: The Great Acceleration."
13. "Chapters iii to xiv omitted from this edition": Malthus, *An Essay*, ed. Donald Winch, 29; James, *Population Malthus*, 93–94.
14. Malthus, *An Essay* (1826), vol. 1, 67.
15. *MUP*; [Graves], "A domestic scene in rural life." Graves noted, "This is a real though imperfect sketch of a worthy family, who have happily united in their domestic economy, the elegant simplicity of the pastoral ages with the refinement of modern life" (40).
16. We engage with historians of stadial theory, including Hont and Ignatieff, *Wealth and Virtue*; Chaplin, *An Anxious Pursuit*, 23–65; O'Brien, "Between Enlightenment and Stadial History"; Pocock, *Barbarians, Savages and Empires*; Wolloch, "Civilizing Process, Nature, and Stadial Theory"; Sebastiani, *Scottish Enlightenment*. We are also in dialogue with scholars of theories of human nature more generally, as with Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage*; Pagden, *Fall of Natural Man*; Jones, *Science of Man in the Scottish Enlightenment*; Garrett, "Anthropology: The 'Original' of Human Nature"; Wolff and Cipolloni, *Anthropology of the Enlightenment*.
17. Hodgson, "Malthus' Essay on Population."