

The Reception of Malthus's Essay on Population in the United States

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1. Introduction

There was only one American edition of Thomas Robert Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1809) in the nineteenth century, based on the third British edition of 1806,¹ but Americans took notice of the book, unlike Malthus's other works, such as his *Principles of Political Economy*. Despite racism, slavery and genocide in British North America, the American Declaration of Independence of 1776 reflects the same Enlightenment ideals that led William Godwin in Great Britain and the Marquis de Condorcet in France to argue that it was possible to construct a new society conducive to the perfectibility of humanity.² Although written as a response to Godwin and Condorcet, Malthus's *Essay on Population* may also be read as a rebuke to Americans who, believing that European poverty and misery were due to European institutions, sought to build a new society with a different structure that would provide freedom, equality and general prosperity (at least for white men).

It was a direct corollary of Malthus's argument that the experience of prosperity in relatively new colonies such as those in North America would be temporary regardless of what policies and institutions might be constructed. Malthus argued that America's virtually unchecked growth was not sustainable because it was the result of the large supply of available uncultivated fertile land, a circumstance that would not continue indefinitely. The supply of fertile uncultivated land would run out like a reservoir of water that is gradually depleted as population increases:

Where there are few people, and a great quantity of fertile land, the power of the earth to afford a yearly increase of food may be compared to a great reservoir of

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¹ A new edition was published in 1890 in New York, based on Malthus's final revisions, but it included a biography of the author, a full analysis and a critical introduction by a Briton, George Thomas Bettany, and was published by a firm based in London, Ward, Lock and Co.

² For Malthus's connections to colonial exploitation, see Bashford and Chaplin 2016.

water, supplied by a moderate stream. The faster population increases, the more help will be got to draw off the water, and consequently an increasing quantity will be taken every year. But the sooner, undoubtedly, will the reservoir be exhausted, and the streams only remain. (1798, 34)

Malthus stressed the inevitability of the outcome:

A person who contemplated the happy state of the lower classes of people in America twenty years ago would naturally wish to retain them for ever in that state, and might think, perhaps, that by preventing the introduction of manufactures and luxury he might effect his purpose, but he might as reasonably expect to prevent a wife or mistress from growing old by never exposing her to the sun or air. The situation of new colonies, well governed, is a bloom of youth that no efforts can arrest. There are, indeed, many modes of treatment in the political, as well as animal, body, that contribute to accelerate or retard the approaches of age, but there can be no chance of success, in any mode that could be devised, for keeping either of them in perpetual youth. (1798, 107-8)

When the supply of available land ran out, the people of America would soon experience the misery and vice endured by the European masses. Malthus predicted that despite its current prosperity, America would be no exception to the rule: regardless of institutions and policy, the American experiment was doomed to fail.

Americans responded in various ways. John Adams, first Vice-President and second President of the US dismisses Malthus's originality:

That the first want of man is his dinner and the second his girl, were truths known to every democrat & aristocrat, long before the great philosopher Malthus arose, to think he enlightened the world by the discovery. It has been equally well known that the second want is frequently so impetuous as to make men and women forget the first... The natural, necessary and unavoidable consequence . . . is, the multiplication of the population so far transcends the multiplication of the means of sustenance. (cited in Cocks 1967, 345)

Earlier writers, including the American, then British colonist, Benjamin Franklin, had anticipated many of the ideas associated with Malthus in "Observations on the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.," written in 1751 and published in London as well as Boston in 1755, but there is no evidence that this has been a common response.

The first recorded American response to the publication of Malthus's *Essay* is from Thomas Jefferson from 1804. Jefferson was a slave-owning planter, lawyer, architect, the principal author of the Declaration of Independence, a politician and diplomat, the second Vice-President of the United States and the third President. A student of political economy, Jefferson corresponded with a number of leading European writers, including Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, Pierre Samuel du Pont de Nemours, Alexander Humboldt (who Jefferson received in the White House) and José Francisco Correia da

Serra (who Jefferson received at his home, Monticello, in Virginia) and Jean Baptiste Say (from whom Jefferson received a copy of Malthus's *Essay*).

In a letter to Say of 1 February 1804, Jefferson wrote that Malthus's *Essay* was 'a work of sound logic in which some of the opinions of Adam Smith, as well as of the economists, are ably examined.' This has been taken as establishing Jefferson as pro-Malthus, but it is faint praise. It does not suggest originality on Malthus's part. 'Ably' is better than 'unably' but it is hardly an enthusiastic adverb. Likewise, sound logic is better than unsound, but it would seem to be a minimal condition for acceptability rather than a great achievement.

Jefferson emphasized the distinct characteristic of the new country which rendered Malthus's argument beside the point: 'The differences of circumstances between this and the old countries of Europe, furnish differences of fact whereon to reason, in questions of political economy, and will consequently produce sometimes a difference of result.' The key difference, Jefferson claims in the same letter to Say, is productivity. While the growth of food supply in Europe might be arithmetic, Jefferson argued that in the US output 'may increase geometrically' due to 'the immense extent of uncultivated and fertile lands' which enables faster growth of labour (1903 Vol. 11, 1-3). Jefferson accepted that Malthusianism made sense of European conditions, but denied that this was a necessary outcome for the United States, challenging Malthus's conclusion that America's exceptional character would be only temporary: 'From the singular circumstance of the immense extent of rich & uncultivated lands in this country, furnishing an increase of food in the same ratio with that of population, the greater part of his book is inapplicable to us, but as a matter of speculation' (Jefferson to Cooper, February 24, 1804, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress).

Jefferson thus raises the issue that would drive American critics of Malthus: the difference in conditions between America and Europe. Some, like Jefferson, emphasize physical factors, the 'immense extent of uncultivated and fertile lands' in America. Others pointed to differences in social organization. Later critics attempted to establish a firmer ground for rejecting Malthus, sharpening the argument that Malthus had misunderstood what was different about productivity in its physical and social aspects in America compared with Europe. Many of Malthus's harshest opponents were protectionists and nationalists, such as Daniel Raymond and Henry Carey, who favored using tariffs to promote manufacturing, following the direction indicated in Alexander Hamilton's 1791 Report on Manufactures that became known as the American or National System. Malthus predicted a bleak outcome for the project and the nationalists attacked him individually as they rejected classical political economy in general.

Southern defenders of slavery, took more nuanced views of Malthus. They generally embraced free trade and classical political economy. They agreed with Malthus that the nationalist program promoting manufacturing would lead to Malthusian misery and vice.

These writers contradicted Malthus insofar as they claimed that misery and vice might be avoided through the establishment of different institutions, namely, a society based on slavery.

This is not to say that everyone in the US rejected Malthus in the nineteenth century. Perhaps most significantly, the professors and the academic establishment north and south largely embraced the *Essay*, if at times they had some reservations about Malthus's theology. The academic unity may have contributed to a perception that Malthus's theory of population was widely held among the educated public.

This chapter explores some of the different responses to Malthus's *Essay* in nineteenth century America among his supporters and critics. To sharpen the discussion, I concentrate on only select representative figures, focusing on the theoretical questions over the biographical. I also discuss an additional set of debates in the antebellum period over the emancipation and relocation of people held as slaves that has been described as Malthusian, for example, by Dennis Hodgson (2009). This description of these debates raises a question of the use of the label and the distinctiveness of Malthus's contribution. I argue that the Malthusian label is somewhat misleading.

2. Supporters: Northern Clerical Academic Free Traders

If there was one group in early nineteenth century America that was united in its support for Malthus, it was the academic establishment. The primary mission of early American colleges and universities was to train members of the clergy and the early American academic establishment. This academic mission was defined and carried out by people concerned with the theological differences among various denominations of protestant Christianity: Unitarians, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Baptists, and Presbyterians. Political economy appeared in this world as an element of moral philosophy, infused with theology.

It was not until the 1820s that political economy came to have a distinctive presence in colleges and universities in the United States.³ In 1818 regular lectures were instituted on political economy in Columbia College and in the following decades other leading schools followed Columbia's example, including Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Dartmouth and Brown. Into the 1830s, the most widely used textbooks in the U.S., were European works. Jane Marcet's *Conversations on Political Economy* was popular, but the English translation of Say's *Treatise on Political Economy*, which went through six American editions, was most important in the 1820s and '30s. It was taken to be a clearer and more concise version of the theory of Smith, whose prestige was dominant. These works

³ See O'Connor 1944 on the origins of departments of economics in the nineteenth century United States.

accepted Malthus's doctrine of population without necessarily giving it great prominence. The academic acceptance of Malthus was largely passive, recognizing that even if American growth might prove temporary, Malthus's description of misery and vice was not relevant for the existing circumstances in America.

Professors in this period, were generally opposed to democrats and protectionists, but not systematically opposed to slavery. They tended to embrace classical British political economy, led by Adam Smith, Malthus and David Ricardo. The professors tended to be conservative and the classical school had become the conventional canon. The centre of power of the academic establishment was in the northeast, which maintained closer cultural ties to Britain than did some parts of the new country. The northeast was also the home of shipping and financial interests that supported free trade. Professors generally agreed with Malthus on withholding aid from the 'sturdy poor.' The theology of Malthus's *Essay* was neither orthodox nor widely addressed, but his theory of population was supposed not to depend on explicitly religious assumptions to derive the main conclusions or to teach them.

John McVickar (1787-1868) was both typical and influential. He was born in New York City into the family of a prosperous merchant. He attended Columbia College, received further education in England, and was later ordained as a priest in the Episcopal Church, with its close ties to the Church of England. He was Professor of Moral Philosophy and later of Political Economy at Columbia. In 1825 McVickar published a heavily annotated article written by the follower of Ricardo, John R. McCulloch, as the *Outlines of Political Economy*. McVickar was 'a man who combined theological and pedagogical interests, was under the domination of McCulloch to so great a degree that any opposition on his part to the dominant English theories was quite impossible' (Cady 1931, 627). McVickar added to McCulloch and disputed certain points in order to make classical political economy more relevant to the American context, but generally accepted classical positions.

Like McCulloch, McVickar embraced Malthus's population theory with some reservation with respect to the theological issues. Commenting on McCulloch's claim, 'Mr. Malthus has demonstrated, that population has a constant tendency not only to equal, but to exceed the means of subsistence,' McVickar writes: 'Our author uses the strong term, 'demonstrated,' in reference to the great work of Malthus on Population. It can hardly be said to be too strong, since it is a work which has settled conclusively and finally, the great operating principle which regulates the advance of national population, and the policy of government in relation to it. For its principles, with which every student of Political Economy should be familiar, reference ought to be had to the work itself' (1825, 145-6).

Henry Vethake (1790-1866) was another prominent academic admirer of Malthus. He was born in the British colony of Guiana, but later served as professor of multiple

subjects, of chemistry, geography, natural history, moral philosophy, as well as political economy—at elite schools including Columbia, Princeton and the University of Pennsylvania. His *Principles of Political Economy* (first edition published in 1838) is fundamentally classical with some concessions to the differences between the US and the UK. Vethake wrote that Malthus had “opened the eyes of political economists” to the ‘evil’ of the system, based on Biblical injunctions and the life of Jesus, of ‘indiscriminate giving of alms to the poor’ which constituted a ‘premium . . . administered to idleness and improvidence” resulting in the dormancy of industry and an increase of pauperism’ (1844, 343). He stressed the importance of teaching Malthus to people of the working class, so that they would see their poverty as the result of their own behavior and not resent the wealthy: ‘The poor, then distinctly perceiving that they are not poor because others are rich, will more willingly acquiesce to the inequalities of fortune which unavoidably result from the maintenance of property’ (cited in Cocks 1967, 359).

The first widely used American textbook on the political economy, *Elements of Political Economy* (1837), was authored by Francis Wayland (1796-1865), a Baptist pastor, long time President of Brown University and the author of books on moral philosophy. Wayland does not mention Malthus in the first edition, but it follows the classical British writers closely in arrangement and vocabulary. In a later edition he rejected Malthus’s population theory explicitly on the grounds that it assumed that subsistence a people consumed must come from the same territory on which the people live. According to Wayland, population follows capital: ‘Population always follows capital. It increases, as capital increases; is stationary, when capital is stationary; and decreases, when capital decreases. And hence, there seems no need of another means to prevent the too rapid increase of population, than to secure a correspondent increase of capital, by which that population may be supported’ (1837, 340). On the other hand, Wayland agreed with Malthus’s criticisms of the poor laws.

Academic support for Malthus, if not adherence to his ideas, continued at least through the end of the nineteenth century. Francis Amasa Walker (1840-1897) was born in Boston and educated at Amherst, a soldier and journalist who became the President of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and inaugural President of the new American Economic Association. The author of the most widely used textbook in the U.S. toward the end of the nineteenth century, Walker gives Malthus a qualified endorsement:

Mr. Malthus unquestionably committed some errors of statement and faults of reasoning in his original enunciation of the principles of population, as is likely to be the case on the first promulgation of great economic or social laws; and during his whole life he was closely followed by criticism and abuse. Since Mr. Malthus’ death has taken all personal interest out of the controversy over the principles of population, and Malthusianism has come to be merely a name for a body of doctrine, the views here presented have been a butt for the headless arrows of beginners in economics and of sundry sentimental sociologists. Meanwhile the doctrine (1) that there resides in nearly all races and tribes of men a strong, urgent,

persistent disposition to carry the increase of population beyond the limits of adequate subsistence; (2) that very few, even among the noblest of modern communities, have shown the capability to check reproduction at the line of the highest per capita production of food, clothing, shelter and fuel; (3) that, if this line be once over-passed, the procreative force proceeds thereafter with augmented force; (4) that, if the desire of luxuries and decencies does not prevail to stop the increase of population, the fear of losing necessities, and even the actual experience of privation and suffering almost certainly will fail to do so; (5) that, through the dominion of this imperious instinct, nearly all the communities of men are under the constant imminence of being swept away into misery, squalor and disease, this doctrine which we term Malthusianism has stood unshattered, impregnable, amid all the controversy that has raged around it. (1883: 319)

Given Malthusianism's strong hold on the academy in nineteenth century America, it seems obvious to suspect that a large section of the educated public might have been inclined to accept Malthus's views as well.

3. Nationalist criticism

At the turn of the nineteenth century, many people expected that European settlement would spread across North America from the Atlantic to the Pacific Ocean, but there were competing visions of how the free, independent and equal America should develop and how it should look once this settlement was complete. Hamilton's program of strong executive authority aggressively promoting manufacturing with protective infant industry tariffs, construction of infrastructure and a national bank was designed to help the US become a world economic and military power. The nationalist program was advanced politically by Hamilton's Federalist Party, but was later adopted by the Whigs and eventually the Republicans.

The nationalists clashed with Classical political economy over free trade and laissez-faire, but took Malthus's theory as a special target. They argued that Malthus's population argument was fundamentally mistaken, both theoretically and empirically. Nationalist criticisms of Malthus varied over time but also showed continuity, extending and developing Jefferson's argument that Malthus's argument did not apply to America because conditions are different.

Daniel Raymond (1786-1849), a lawyer, was born in Connecticut but lived in Baltimore. He was the author of *Thoughts on Political Economy* (1820), 'the first systematic treatise on the subject to be written by an American' (Neill 1897, 8; cited in Spiegel 1960, 55). A nationalist, his central argument was that classical political economy had misunderstood the difference between national wealth and the sum of individual wealth.⁴ Malthus arose in his discussion of pauperism, which Raymond argued, is

⁴ See Conkin (1980) on Raymond's political and philosophical thought.

incompatible on a large scale with great national wealth: 'It cannot, with any propriety be said, that a nation enjoys a very great degree of national wealth, when a large portion of its citizens are destitute, not only of the comforts, but, also, the necessaries of life' (1823, 29).

Raymond, who had met and conversed with Malthus, claims that 'the prevailing errors of the day on the subject of pauperism originated with Mr. Malthus, in his treatise on population' (1823, 67). Raymond did not simply disagree with Malthus's theory. He found it offensive and outrageous, ideas against which the human mind rebels instinctively: 'Although his theory is founded upon the principles of nature, and although it is impossible to discover any flaw in his reasoning, yet the mind instinctively revolts at the conclusions to which he conducts it, and we are disposed to reject the theory, even though we could give no reason for rejecting it' (1823, 67-8). In particular Raymond viewed Malthus as the source of the belief that pauperism among those capable of working was increased by the poor laws, a doctrine Raymond summarizes as the view 'that every man who enjoys health and strength, is capable of providing himself with the necessaries of life, by his own labour, and, therefore, it is not only unnecessary, but injurious, both to the recipient and the public, for the public to make any provision for supplying him' (1823, 32).

Against Malthus, Raymond attributed the relatively high level of pauperism in England its high level of inequality: 'The unequal division of property in England is the cause of pauperism in that country . . . Pauperism is the necessary consequence of an unequal division of property, and must, in all countries, and under all circumstances, be in very nearly the same proportion with that unequal division' (1823, 34). A high degree of inequality of property leads to a high degree of inequality in access to the product of labor. If the quantity of output is given, an assumption we might question, the more inequality of income the worse off the poorest must be.

Raymond also argues that pauperism is the result of greed among the wealthy: 'Those who hoard up for posterity . . . inflict pauperism themselves by refusing to give employment to that who have no property, so as to enable them to live by their labour' (1823, 49) 'for it is the duty of the rich either to bestow charity, or furnish labour' (1823, 60). The poor were poor because the rich were rich, and conversely, not in any individual case but overall on average.

Pauperism, then, was not an inevitable result, as Malthus claimed, but rather the result of corrupt European institutions that promote inequality:⁵

⁵ The journalist Jacob Newton Cardozo (1786-1873), a southerner and a free trader, but a critic of Malthus and Ricardo, argued similarly, in his *Notes on Political Economy* (1826), that Malthus had confused that which is natural from that which is the result of social institutions. Overpopulation is the result of the latter: 'The error of Mr. Malthus consists, then, I think, in

The rich and powerful have established a system, which has thrown all the property in the kingdom into the hands of a few; the necessary consequence of which is an immense number of paupers in the kingdom; and now they complain of this effect, and throw the blame upon the paupers. They charge them with being less industrious and frugal, than they ought to be.

According to Raymond, Malthus's error was to fail to see that current circumstances are the result of unjust behavior against the poor rather than the fault of the poor themselves:

Malthus' theory presupposes that the present proprietors of the surface of the earth—the property holders of the kingdom, have a perfect, absolute, and exclusive right to their property—that they have no more than their just share—that no injustice has been done to the poor, in consequence of those unequal laws, that have caused the present unequal division of property—that it is the fault of the poor themselves, that they are poor, and have not the means of supplying themselves with the necessaries of life—that the present possessors of property have a natural right to exercise authority over it when in their graves. (1823, 690)

Intending to refute Malthus's *Essay*, Alexander H. Everett (1792-1847) published *New Ideas on Populations with Remarks on the Theories of Malthus and Godwin* (1823), judged by Spengler to contain 'the best expression of the opposition to Malthus which developed in America during the first half of the nineteenth century' (1936, 97), despite its 'palpable theoretical weakness' and its 'misrepresentation of the basic thesis of Malthus' (1936, 117). Everett, a Harvard graduate, diplomat and writer, sometime protectionist, argues that population growth is good and should be encouraged, a view he attributes to 'the most distinguished philosophers and legislators of all ages and nations' (1826, v), but which, he says, Malthus has shockingly managed to contradict. Everett frames Malthus's view as an historical oddity that is nevertheless generally been widely accepted, a 'startling paradox . . . received at once with almost universal favor, and has maintained its ground for nearly thirty years' (1826, vi). Like Raymond, Everett is 'appalled' at Malthus's conclusions, which he describes as contrary to 'all our best and noblest natural sentiments': 'that public establishments for the relief of the poor, the infirm, and the aged, are positively injurious; that private charity is a merely imaginary virtue; that the widest destruction of human life causes no real injury to society; that all attempts to increase the happiness of existing political institutions are hopeless and visionary' (1826, vii).

With Godwin and Condorcet on one side arguing that society could be improved by jettisoning bad institutions, and Malthus on the other saying that reform is useless because institutions do not matter, Everett staked out the third position for the nationalists, that institutions can serve positively to make society better: 'While Godwin considers political institutions as absolutely mischievous, Malthus affirms that they are

stating that positively as a Law of Nature, which, for what we know to the contrary, may be the result of an imperfect social organization' (1826, 124).

completely indifferent. The true answer to both is, that they are neither mischievous nor indifferent, but extremely valuable' (1826, 19).

Everett's central argument is based on the observation that every person is not just a consumer, but also a producer. When population grows, more is consumed but more is produced. Everett argued that the increase in production would be larger than the increase in consumption because of increases in productivity due to Smith's principle that the expansion of the market provides for an intensification of the division of labor:

It is sufficiently notorious, that an increase of population on a given territory is followed immediately by a division of labor; which produces in its turn the invention of new machines, an improvement of methods in all the departments of industry, and a rapid progress in the various branches of art and science. The increase effected by these improvements in the productiveness of labor is obviously much greater in proportion than the increase of population, to which it is owing. (1826, 26)

In direct opposition to Malthus, this leads to the conclusion that 'the increase of population is a cause of abundance, and not of scarcity' (1826, 120). 'Everett's reaction to the ideas of Malthus reflects the optimism of the American environment with its huge land resources that invited westward expansion and population growth' (Spiegel 1960, 62).

Henry Carey (1793-1879), journalist, industrialist and advisor to President Abraham Lincoln, is widely viewed as the outstanding representative of American economics in the nineteenth century.⁶ His father, Matthew Carey, an Irish émigré, had published protectionist tracts and tried to endow a university chair for Raymond. Although Henry Carey began as a free trader, he later presented a comprehensive alternative to British classical political economy, advocating protective tariffs, easy money and government promotion of infrastructure.

Carey's opposition to Malthus was at the heart of his argument, resting on his claim that increased population would lead to proportionately greater levels of output and rising wages, producing a harmony of interests between labor, capital and landlords. The key point was that increasing population would lead to increasing returns to labor rather than decreasing returns. The Malthusian-Ricardian rent theory is premised on declining productivity, assuming that people begin with the most productive land and move, when compelled to find more food, to less productive land. Carey argues instead that people do not first cultivate the most fertile land. The most fertile land needs the most work to prepare it for cultivation, because it is most densely packed with vegetation. So new settlers begin with the more accessible but less fertile land. Only after population has increased do workers taken on the massive task of clearing the most fertile land. Carey argues that this represents a broader principle of technological development: 'Always

⁶ On the transition from Raymond to Carey, see Teilhac (1936) pp. 79-82.

commencing with the poorest axes, he proceeds onwards to those of steel; always commencing with the poorest soils, he proceeds onward to the richer ones which yield the largest return to labor, the increase of numbers being thus proved to be essential to increase the supply of food.'

Increasing productivity has enormous implications because it means that the fundamental conflict among classes at the core of the classical theory disappears. More for workers or landlords does not mean less for capitalists. With ongoing growth, all classes benefit: 'Here is the harmony of interests directly opposed to the discords taught by Mr. Malthus.' (1858, v-vi)

Carey presented empirical evidence from the history of many nations to support his claim. He took Malthus's position to be that 'vice, wars, pestilences, and famines, causing misery and starvation, are the remedies provided by nature, for counteracting the tendency to over-population,' so that where these checks 'had been applied most frequently and copiously the supply of food bore the highest ratio to population, and that where they did not exist, the population tended most to exceed the supply of food' (1837, 54-5). The evidence pointed in the opposite direction. In the United States, where the remedies were largely unknown, there was a constant tendency for the ratio of subsistence to population to increase. In England, he claims the supply of food was small when the remedies were applied, but grew more rapidly than population after the alleged remedies had ceased to act. In Scotland, 'when subject to the remedies, the people were almost in a state of starvation.' In Ireland, 'the condition of the people is constantly improving with the withdrawal of the remedies.' He finds similar results in France, Holland, Belgium, Tuscany, Austria and Prussia.

4. Malthus and Slavery

The program for promoting manufactures with tariffs, commercial infrastructure and a national bank was opposed in the southern states as an attempt to use the federal government to promote the interests of the northern states at the expense of the South. Southern plantations using slaves to grow cotton for export produced their own basic necessities, but they relied on foreign trade for manufactured luxuries. The tariffs contained in Hamilton's plans, reciprocated by trade partners, would make both the export of cotton and importation of European manufactures more expensive. They viewed the national bank as a source of corruption and instability.

From the southern point of view, it made no sense that federal authority resulting from the union of the states might be used against the interests of some of those states. Why would states voluntarily join a union that would make them worse off than they would have been had they not joined the union at all? After the War of 1812, this political conflict was expressed primarily in struggles over tariffs, especially the 'Tariff of

Abominations' of 1828, which led to the nullification crisis of 1832-1833, in which South Carolina claimed the right to refuse to enforce federal laws within its borders. Classical political economy played a role in these debates by providing standard arguments for free trade.

Even as the conflict was debated in terms of the tariffs, however, the question of slavery was ever present. Calls for the abolition of slavery began before the American Revolution. When independence was declared in 1776 slavery existed throughout the thirteen original colonies, but by the first years of the nineteenth century, slavery had been abolished in the north, creating a sharp division between free states and slave states. Slavery had been introduced by the British and maintained as colonial policy in the early republican years. Slavery came to be widely recognized as a problem, even by slave owners, who claimed that they were not responsible for the injustice, but had rather inherited a complicated unjust situation with no easy solution. Emancipation, they believed, would have unintended consequences, destroying a considerable share of the wealth of the region and delivering a devastating economic blow.

Some Southern defenders of slavery argued that life in a system of patriarchal agrarian slavery is fundamentally better than the "free labor" system of urban industrial life, in which freedom is completely illusory. In this argument, the characteristically Malthusian idea of the inevitability of misery and vice (at least in industrial societies) plays a crucial role. Malthus was seen as having demonstrated that the condition of the 'free' urban industrial worker was doomed to be miserable, essentially a slave to his employer, but without the employer taking any responsibility for the worker's well-being. Slaves were no less free, this implies, but they were, according to the argument, better fed, better clothed, better housed, and happier because that was in the interest of the slave-owner:

Advocates of southern interests embraced the pessimistic Malthusianism of Ricardo and Malthus's first edition of the *Essay* when 'vice' and 'misery' were the only mechanisms containing population growth. They contended that this bleak picture revealed the true nature of all 'free-labor'" systems.⁷ The growth of a manufacturing and trade advocated by the North ultimately could not produce a prosperous republic, but only a mass of 'free' workers living at the edge of subsistence and a few wealthy landlords and capitalists. They presented the slave system, with plantation workers behaving according to the dictates of their masters, not their passions, as a humane alternative to the bleak 'free-labor' system; one that avoids the ruinous consequences of redundant reproduction" (Hodgson 2009, 744).⁸

⁷ See 'The Problem of Free Society' (1858) on the effect of being 'free' on the workers, which cites Malthus explicitly (403).

⁸ Malthus explicitly called for abolition after he discovered his ideas were being used to defend slavery, hoping 'to rescue my character from the imputations of being a friend of the slave trade' (Drescher 2002, 43; cited in Hodgson 2009, 745).

Virginian George Fitzhugh (1806-1881), a lawyer influenced by Thomas Carlyle, is the exemplar in this case. He used Malthus as a bogeyman, as the representative of a possible outcome, industrial capitalism, that was simply too frightening to be allowed to occur if there were some way it could be avoided, due to its inhumane treatment of workers. His book, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society*, published in 1854, presented a critique of liberal society from its foundations, aimed at such liberal theorists as John Locke, Thomas Jefferson and Adam Smith. He viewed slavery as a form, the best form, of socialism, that was in the interests of poor whites as well as poor blacks. Though not himself free of racism, Fitzhugh denied racially based arguments for slavery.

Fitzhugh accepted that an economic system based on individual freedom and *laissez faire* would 'stimulate energy, excite invention and industry, and bring into livelier action, genius, skill and talent' (1854, 11-12), but he argued that this would only benefit a minority consisting of people like Adam Smith and his friends. He believed that such a system would be against the interests of the majority consisting of 'the unemployed poor, the weak in mind or body, the simple and unsuspecting, the prodigal, the dissipated, the improvident and the vicious' (1854, 12): 'In such society the astute capitalist, who is very skilful and cunning, gets the advantage of every one with whom he competes or deals; the sensible man with moderate means gets the advantage of most with whom he has business, but the mass of the simple and poor are outwitted and cheated by everybody' (1854, 23). Slavery, he contends, provides for the care of poor people:

The association of labor properly carried out under a common head or ruler, would render labor more efficient, relieve the laborer of many of the cares of household affairs, and protect and support him in sickness and old age, besides preventing the too great reduction of wages by redundancy of labor and free competition. Slavery attains all these results. (1854, 28)

Hitting a Malthusian note, Fitzhugh points out that with growing families, wages of free laborers decrease because the additional time that must be spent fulfilling family responsibilities reduces the amount of time available for wage earning work. Slavery, he claims, operates under a communistic principle: 'With negro slaves, their wages invariably increase with their wants. The master increases the provision for the family as the family increases in number and helplessness. It is a beautiful example of communism, where each one receives not according to his labor, but according to his wants' (1854, 29).

On Fitzhugh's view, Free society breeds selfishness, competition, antagonism, jealousy and corruption by putting the interests of different individuals and classes into opposition with one another. Politicians in free societies

vainly endeavor, by preaching fine sentiments, to produce that good feeling between the rich and the poor, the weak and the powerful, which slavery alone can

bring about. Liberty places those classes in positions of antagonism and war. Slavery identifies the interests of rich and poor, master and slave, and begets domestic affection on the one side, and loyalty and respect on the other” (1854, 43).

Fitzhugh argued that industrial workers were slaves of capital, but that the capital was not a master who owned the slaves and therefore had an interest in taking care of them, with the result that ‘the unrestricted exploitation of the so-called free society, is more oppressive to the laborer than domestic slavery’ (1857, ix): ‘the profits which capital exacts from labor makes free laborers slaves, without the rights, privileges or advantages of domestic slaves, When masters, with all the advantages, and none of the burdens and obligations of the ordinary owners of slaves’ (1857, xxii).

In this context, Malthus appears as a threat, a ‘spectre,’ a symbol of the misery and vice of urban industrial economies such as that found in the northern states:

At the slaveholding South all is peace, quiet, plenty and contentment. We have no mobs, no trades unions, no strikes for higher wages, no armed resistance to the law, but little jealousy of the rich by the poor. . . . We produce enough of the comforts and necessaries of life for a population three or four times as numerous as ours. . . . Population increases slowly, wealth rapidly. In the tide water region of Eastern Virginia, as far as our experience extends, the crops have doubled in fifteen years, whilst the population has been almost stationary. . . . We have enough for the present, and no Malthusian spectres frightening us for the future. Wealth is more equally distributed than at the North, where a few millionaires own most of the property of the country. . . . We have poor among us, but none who are over-worked and under-fed. (1854, 253-4)

5. Malthus and the Debates over the Effects of Emancipation and Relocation of Slaves

As the Civil War approached, there were a number of debates over the likely effects of various proposals—emancipating, relocating or expelling blacks—on the relative size and well-being of populations of blacks and whites, in which Malthus was cited as an authority. One the most important of such debates was about the admission of Missouri as a new state. As population grew more quickly in the north than in the south, northern representation in the House of Representatives grew, even with three fifths of the slaves included in the population of the slave states. In order to maintain its ability to defend its legislative interests at the federal level, the south had to rely on the Senate, in which each state has equal representation. It was necessary for the south to maintain at least the same number of slave states as free states, regardless of population, as new states were admitted

to the union, if they were to retain any significant power to block legislation they understood to be opposed to their sectional interest.⁹

Missouri was the first state proposed from the Louisiana territory acquired from the French in 1803, of great importance because it would set a precedent for the admission of future states, potentially disrupting the political balance and causing a crisis. If no solution had been found, secession from the union might have been attempted earlier than it was. A political compromise, essentially to extend the Mason-Line westward and to thereby maintain the equal balance averted a crisis, but an intense debate arose in Congress in which Malthus was cited by both sides (Hodgson 2009, 747).

George Tucker (1775-1861) was an attorney, politician, author, member of the U.S. House of Representatives for Virginia, and later professor of political economy at the University of Virginia. He presented his fellow representatives in Congress with a description of the development of the debate over population:

These principles of population, now so familiar to all, were first distinctly stated, so far as my information extends, by Sir James Steuart. They are also noticed by Dr. Franklin, and seem to have been an original suggestion of his own good sense and sagacity. But their influence in producing human misery and vice, and in circumscribing the efficacy of governments, were never fully developed, before the appearance of Mr. Malthus' *Essay on Population*, which I cannot but consider as a work of great ability. (Tucker 1820, col 1532; cited in Hodgson 2009, 747)

(Note that Taylor gives credit to Malthus for developing the principles of population rather than inventing them. His assertion that Malthus's *Essay* is 'a work of great ability' falls far short of an endorsement.)

In a pamphlet on *The Missouri Question* (1819) opposed to slavery in the new states, Daniel Raymond argued that growth in the population of black slaves would necessarily displace whites. He bitterly denounced the treatment of Africans and native Americans by Europeans in the past, but his argument focused on the future. He viewed slavery as a curse, 'a poison plant' that would grow worse over time as the slave population grew. He believed the rapid growth of the slave population would lead to a significantly larger slave population than free population. This would require harsher treatment of the slaves to keep them in line resulting, eventually, in a rebellion by the majority slaves with disastrous consequences:

⁹ 'During the 1820s political economy also became established in southern universities, with Thomas Cooper first teaching the subject at South Carolina College in 1820, George Tucker at the University of Virginia in 1825, and Thomas Dew at the College of William and Mary in 1827. As will be seen, all were to weave a defense of slavery into their teaching of the subject that employed pessimistic Malthusian predictions about the ultimate fate of free labor societies.' (Hodgson 2009, 748)

Who can tell what is to be the issue of this, and where is it to end? If the slave population increase faster than the white, it will ere long be that the most numerous, and not only the most numerous, but vastly the most numerous. And shall ten men be in subjection to one, how will a thousand quietly remain in bondage to an hundred? Such things cannot be—it was not intended by Him who made the black man as well as the white, that such things should be. We may put far off the evil day, but it will surely come upon us or our posterity. (1819, 22)

He favored gradual manumission beginning as soon as possible, because with the passage of time, the problem would become increasingly difficult.

He pointed out that the rapid growth of the slave population compared with the relatively slower plausible pace at which slaves might be resettled to Africa meant that colonization could not solve the slavery problem. His central argument was based on the following propositions that he supported with empirical evidence (1819, 9):

1. The free black population does not increase as fast as whites in free states
2. The free black population does not increase as fast as the slave population
3. The white population of slave states does not increase as fast the white population in free states.
4. The slave population increases faster than the population of white population of slave states.

The slave population grows faster because its means of subsistence are more abundant because the slaves belong to rich men (1819, 23). The free black population grow more slowly than the white population because of 'superior advantages, political and moral, which the whites enjoy over the blacks,—their superiority in intelligence, enterprise and provident habits which enables them to make better and more effectual provision for the families and to marry and raise more children. In political point of view, the blacks are a degraded race, they have not the same motives for exertion' (1819, 24).

From these premises, it follows that restraints on the increase of the slave population promote the increase of the white population and conversely: 'Every slave in the world, especially in our country, occupies the place of a free man' (1819, 20). With population limited by the availability of subsistence, the aggregate population was fixed. A greater slave population meant a smaller free population:

The question is not . . . whether the increase of the human species ought to be restrained in an absolute sense, but whether the increase of one proportion of them, ought to be restrained in order to promote the increase of another. . . . In a political, a moral, an intellectual, and a religious point of view, is not a white population better than a black one? (1819, 25)

In his view the choice was unambiguous: 'Does that man live and breathe the air of this free country, who would dare to say, that a legislature ought to hesitate for a moment,

in adopting that policy which would promote the increase of a white population, rather than of a black slave population? If there be such a man, he is a disgrace to his species' (1819, 9).

For Raymond this was a question of slave and free rather than any inherent superiority of whites over blacks, because he thought that free blacks would be likely to either fail to reproduce or adopt the ways of free whites:

for the idle, vagabond blacks do not raise families or comparatively none.—If they are industrious, provident and raise families, then they are good citizens, and teach their child to become such . . . In short, the character of manumitted slaves materially changes in the course of one or two generations. The industrious thrive and increase—their offspring, accustomed to liberty, acquire the habits of whites, and make equally as good citizens, that is, the laboring class. (1819, 27-8)

Moreover, if slavery were expanded into the west, it would increase the demand for slaves and therefore increase their value, making manumission a greater sacrifice for slave owners. Restricting slaves to the old slave states would lower their price, rendering manumission more attractive.

Manumission presents a simple, natural, and practical mode of remedying the evil of slavery; and although it does not present a mode of getting rid of the black population entirely, yet it presents a mode by which the number will be more effectually prevented from increasing, than any other that has ever yet been proposed. It is also more consonant to the principles of justice and humanity, than any other that has ever been suggested. (1820, 451).

Against this view, Virginian Thomas Dew (1802-1846), professor of history, metaphysics and political economy, and later President of the College of William and Mary, argued against the tariff and the national bank, but was best known for his arguments supporting slavery. He used the principles of population to argue against both manumission and colonization. He wrote an extended review, published in 1832, of a debate over slavery in the Virginia state legislature, provoked by one of the most famous slave rebellions in US history, led by Nat Turner in 1831. Dew acknowledged that slavery was 'a violation of the principles of humanity,' and that it had not only 'given rise to much suffering and to considerable destruction of human life" but was "based upon injustice in the first instance' (1832, 347-348). This injustice was not, according to Dew, the fault of the colonists or their successors, the citizens of the US. The US had not invented slavery. Slavery was an inherited reality, a problem for which the most obvious solution might not be the best. Responsibility for 'the original sin by which slavery was first introduced into this country' fell upon the British, the recognized political authority during the period in which African slavery in North America commenced. Dew pointed out that the colonists were the first to oppose slavery and tried to restrict it: South Carolina passed a law prohibiting importation of slaves in 1760, a law that the British 'rejected with indignation' (1832, 352). Virginia and other colonies made similar attempts,

submitting a petition to the British in 1772 citing the grave danger of continuation of the practice of slavery. Slavery, Dew contended, was forced upon the colonies and maintained against their wishes.

Despite the inherent injustice of slavery and its origins, Dew argued that slavery has become a practical issue rather than one of abstract principles. He relied on estimates of population growth to show that the plans of abolitionists would ruinous effects due to unintended consequences. As the result of Malthus, Dew claimed, 'It is now well known to every student of political economy, that in the wide range of legislation, there is nothing more dangerous than too much tampering with the elastic and powerful spring of population' (1832, 366). Immediate and total emancipation, Dew argued, would represent such a loss of wealth as to be catastrophic for the southern economy, with correspondingly negative effects for whites and blacks. The question of population growth arose in the context of the abolitionist proposal that the number of slaves might be held constant by sending the increase to colonies such as Liberia, so that with a growing white population, the relative numbers of blacks would fall such that their eventual emancipation would be on such a small scale as to be harmless. Against this view Dew argued that the growth rate of the slave population rendered this approach too expensive to be practical, due to the expenses of purchasing, transportation and resettlement. Moreover, government demand for slaves would tend to increase the price. Creating an incentive for slave holders to spur the rate of reproduction of slaves, for example, by exempting mothers from regular labor, thus increasing rather than decreasing their number. In addition, the burden of taxation required by such a plan would lead the white population to limit its growth and even to leave the state, reducing the number of whites, leaving more subsistence available for further growth of the slave population. Dew cited Malthus on the difficulties of setting up new colonies:

The first establishment of a new colony generally presents an instance of a country peopled considerably beyond its actual produce; and the natural consequence seems to be, that this population, if not amply supplied by the mother country, should, at the commencement, be diminished to the level of the first scanty productions, and not begin permanently to increase till the remaining numbers had so far cultivated the soil as to make it yield a quantity of food more than sufficient for their own support, and which consequently they could divide with a family. The frequent failures of new colonies tend strongly to show the order of precedence between food and population. (Dew 1832, 401; citing Malthus 1809, 140-1)

Dew's racism led him to believe that emancipation without deportation, was impossible: 'the slaves, in both an economical and moral point of view, are entirely unfit for a state of freedom among the whites' (1832, 421-2).

Dew advanced the argument—also put forward by others, including George Tucker—that the increasing population of free whites would reduce wages until free labor becomes cheaper than slave labor, with the result that slave labor would disappear: 'with the

increasing density of population, free labor becomes cheaper than slave, and finally extinguishes it, as has actually happened in the west of Europe' (1832, 484).¹⁰

6. Malthus's originality and the label "Malthusian"

Is it correct to describe debates such as that between Raymond and Dew, with the label 'Malthusian'? Although Malthus is often cited as an authority, as having given attention to the principles of population and perhaps developing or stating them well, he was not the first to discover. Malthus's chief conceptual contribution would seem to be his assertion of the inevitability and severity of misery and vice. This means that at least some of the debates over emancipation and relocation of captives held as slaves are not strictly Malthusian, in that their terms of reference—population growth, displacement of one population by another, the effects of scarcity of labour on wages—were well known before Malthus and do not include the characteristically Malthusian element, namely, extreme and inevitable misery and vice. Raymond does not mention Malthus in this context and Dew uses Malthus as an authority for principles of population rather than as creator of the framework.

Aside from claims about misery and vice, the most important elements of Malthus's theory of population, can be seen in Benjamin Franklin's 'Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.' This was an important source for Malthus, although not cited by name in the first edition of the *Essay*.¹¹ Franklin takes the position that it was against Britain's interest to restrict manufacturing in its American colonies. Against London's concern to avoid the emergence of a competitor, Franklin argue that the vast tracks of land available for independent settlement in America ensured a small supply of workers willing to work as wage labourers. The small supply of workers would always lead to high rates of wages and therefore high costs for manufacturers, resulting in prices that would keep America from posing any threat to British manufacturing. Implicitly Franklin acknowledges that the available land would eventually run out, but he believed that this would take many generations to occur.

This discussion of the consequences of American population growth for the future led Franklin to consider the ethnic composition of the future population. He favoured racially based immigration restrictions so that white settlers would not be displaced by the growth of the 'black' and 'tawny' population. After pointing out that the English and the Saxons 'make the principal body of white people on the face of the earth,' Franklin asks 'why should we in the sight of superior beings, darken [America's] people? why increase the

¹⁰ Cf. Anderson 2003, Carlander and Brownlee 2006.

sons of Africa, by planting them in America, where we have so fair an opportunity, by excluding all blacks and tawneys, of increasing the lovely white and red?' (1755, 224).¹²

Franklin's argument rests on foundations that anticipate a number of Malthus's claims. He pointed out that population growth can be rapid but it is limited by available subsistence, warranting that a people "cannot increase . . . beyond the means provided for their subsistence" (1755, 221). He claimed that if available subsistence could support a greater population, natural generation would rapidly fill the gap, so that the supply constraint would bind. As a result, in a passage repeated by Malthus, Franklin argued that different population groups could compete over resources: "There is in short, no bound to the prolific nature of plants or animals, but what is made by their crowding and interfering with each others' means of subsistence" (1755, 223).

This competition could lead to the displacement of an existing group by another: 'The importation of foreigners into a country that has as many inhabitants as the present employments and provisions for subsistence will bear, will be in the end no increase of people; unless the new comers have more industry and frugality than the natives, and they will provide more Subsistence, and increase in the country; but they will gradually eat the natives out' (1755, 222).

We find in Franklin the same principles that we find in Malthus, Raymond and Dew, that population growth was limited by subsistence, that there were periods of improvement and decline, that populations compete and as the result of that competition some are displaced by others.

In a fragment on the treatment of the poor, Franklin also expressed ideas that bear a strong resemblance to those of the political Malthus, opposing material assistance to the poor for the alleviation of poverty:

I think the best way of doing good to the poor, is not making them easy *in* poverty, but leading or driving them *out* of it. In my youth I travelled much, and I observed in different countries, that the more public provisions were made for the poor, the less they provided for themselves, and of course became poorer. And, on the contrary, the less was done for them, the more they did for themselves, and became richer. . . . The day you passed that act, you took away from before their eyes the greatest of all inducements to industry, frugality, and sobriety, by giving them a dependence on somewhat else than a careful accumulation during youth and health, for support in age or sickness. In short, you offered a premium for the encouragement of idleness, and you should not now wonder that it has had its effect in the increase of poverty. (Franklin 1766)

¹² Franklin was enamored with the indigenous population of the Americas and defended them from accusations of savagery, charges that Malthus nevertheless perpetuated. Later in his life Franklin would abandon his belief in the inferiority of Africans.

Franklin thus anticipates the limit subsistence imposes on population growth, the resulting competition, the effects on wages of changes in the labour supply and the difficulty of treating pauperism with alms. Franklin did not claim any particular originality for his ideas on population, describing them as 'observations,' without denying that others had observed or could observe the same points. Franklin used these observations to make political arguments, to argue against British restrictions on the growth of American manufacturing and in favour of racially based restraints on immigration.

This review of Franklin's writing supports Adams's claim that Malthus did not express original ideas when he presented the principles of population. Franklin, and others, had the same basic idea of the principles of population that Malthus had. The label Malthusian is misleading if it is applied to ideas over which Malthus held, but held along with others. It is more descriptive when it is associated with Malthus's most characteristic and distinctive features. If we look to the differences between Franklin and Malthus to locate Malthus's originality, one main point stands out. Franklin was much more optimistic than Malthus about the prospects for what Malthus would label 'moral restraint' for limiting population growth, misery and vice. Franklin took it for granted that when the cost of living increased and it became more difficult to support a family, people would avoid or delay marriage and childbearing with the result that the quantity of labour would eventually fall and wages would rise, allowing earlier marriage and more childbearing, which would eventually lead to more labour and lower wages, in a continually repeating cycle.

Although Malthus's position seems to evolve on the topic after the first edition, the distinctive feature of his argument, if there is one, must be his belief in the inevitability and severity of misery and vice, which would arrive regardless of institutions and policies. Malthus softened his conclusions, but this is how Malthus was received by all sides in America. While debates over the effects of emancipating or relocating blacks held as slaves on the relative populations of whites and blacks took place, it would seem to be a mistake to consider them 'Malthusian' unless they rely on the distinctively Malthusian element.

7. Malthus Postbellum

After the Civil War interest in Malthus appears to have waned. Harvard Professor Francis Bowen (1811-1890), refuting Malthus in 1879, argued that public opinion had begun to turn away from Malthus already in 1846-47 (1879, 451). For some at least, the shortcomings of Malthus's predictions became increasingly apparent. Albion Tourgee (1838-1905), writer, soldier, lawyer, politician and diplomat, could write in 1896, 'There is no general lack of food, clothing, or sufficient shelter in any part of the world' (1896,

14). Those returning from study in Europe in the later nineteenth century, marginalists influenced by Austrians and institutionalists influenced by German historicists, failed to take much interest in Malthus's writings.

The journalist and political reformer Henry George (1839-1897) is an exception to this trend. In his *Progress and Poverty* (1890), George provided an account of the coexistence of great wealth and great poverty, in which Malthus appears as the author of a rival explanation of the same phenomena. The entire second section of the book is devoted to refuting Malthus's *Essay*. George attacks it as a political work, designed to appease the wealthy and power:

instead of menacing any vested right or antagonizing any powerful interest, it is eminently soothing and reassuring to the classes who, wielding the power of wealth, largely dominate thought . . . the Malthusian doctrine parries the demand for reform, and shelters selfishness from question and from conscience by the interposition of an inevitable necessity. It furnishes a philosophy by which Dives as he feasts can shut out the image of Lazarus who faints with hunger at his door. (1890, 98-9)

George looks unsuccessfully at the history of the world to find evidence for Malthus's theory. He examines the special cases of India, China and Ireland, and concludes that their problems are different.

George's main argument is, as those before him, that Malthus had misunderstood the relationship between productivity and population:

The denser the population the more minute becomes the subdivision of labor, the greater the economies of production and distribution, and, hence, the very reverse of the Malthusian doctrine is true; and within the limits in which we have reason to suppose increase would still go on, in any given state of civilization a greater number of people can produce a larger proportionate amount of wealth, and more fully supply their wants, than can a smaller number. (1890, 150)

Again following earlier arguments, George blamed unjust human institutions for inequality: 'the injustice of society, not the niggardliness of nature, is the causes of the want and misery which the [Malthusian] current theory attributes to overpopulation' (1890, 141).

George contributed a colourful refutation of the argument for Malthus's theory of human population growth by appeal to the analogy of the natural world. George pointed out that humans alone through cultivation control the population growth rates of other creatures, those that make up their subsistence:

Of all living things, man is the only one who can give play to the reproductive forces, more powerful than his own, which supply him with food. Here is the difference between the animal and the man. Both the jayhawk and the man eat

chickens, but the more jayhawks the fewer chickens, while the more men the more chickens" (1890, 130-1)

Malthus continued to appear in the literature, but rarely. In the later nineteenth century, socialist writers saw Malthus, not as a possible future that alternative policies might avoid, but rather as a reality to be superseded. One such writer was Edward Bellamy, whose *Looking Backward* (1888) described in detail a socialist utopian future for the United States. In his early 1890s essay 'To a disciple of Malthus' (1938), Bellamy addressed Malthus's claim that a utopia would quickly lead to overpopulation due to the absence of checks on reproduction. He argued that the wealthy and educated classes already practiced moral restraint, so that if the condition of the working classes could be raised, they too would practice moral restraint.

Another socialist novelist, with sharply different views, Jack London, wrote in his essay *The Human Drift* that Malthus was essentially correct. Human life is fundamentally concerned with getting food, as Malthus's argument implies:

And this brings us to that old bugbear that has been so frequently laughed away and that still persists in raising its grisly head--namely, the doctrine of Malthus. While man's increasing efficiency of food-production, combined with colonisation of whole virgin continents, has for generations given the apparent lie to Malthus' mathematical statement of the Law of Population, nevertheless the essential significance of his doctrine remains and cannot be challenged. Population DOES press against subsistence. And no matter how rapidly subsistence increases, population is certain to catch up with it.

Socialism, in London's view, was just another phase in the problem of getting food, but one that is technologically advanced:

And still another change is coming in human affairs. Though politicians gnash their teeth and cry anathema, and man, whose superficial book-learning is vitiated by crystallised prejudice, assures us that civilisation will go to smash, the trend of society, to-day, the world over, is toward socialism. The old individualism is passing. The state interferes more and more in affairs that hitherto have been considered sacredly private. And socialism, when the last word is said, is merely a new economic and political system whereby more men can get food to eat. In short, socialism is an improved food-getting efficiency.

Yet London did not think that even socialism would solve the Malthusian problem:

Undreamed-of efficiencies in food-getting may be achieved, but, soon or late, man will find himself face to face with Malthus' grim law. Not only will population catch up with subsistence, but it will press against subsistence, and the pressure will be pitiless and savage. Somewhere in the future is a date when man will face, consciously, the bitter fact that there is not food enough for all of him to eat.

8. Conclusion

Malthus was a well known figure in nineteenth century America, but generalizations about the positions taken on his work are difficult. While the academic establishment tended to be pro-Malthus, especially in supporting his views of the poor laws, the solidity of academic support weakened over time. While the sharpest critics of Malthus were non-academics, many non-academics accepted his views. While many of those harsh critics were protectionists, and Malthus's strongest American supporters were free traders, there were others who supported free trade even as they criticized him. There was a strong sectional divide between the North and the South, with some of Malthus's strongest supporters coming from the South, but there were Southern critics as well. The North was split over Malthus, with supporters and opponents in Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

It is difficult to conclude that Malthus's views had any great influence on American thought or political life. Even as they may have expressed the thinking of slaveholders, it is difficult to imagine that the arguments of Fitzhugh and other promoters of slavery were very effective in changing the minds of their opponents. The loudest voices regarding Malthus were the nationalists, but their fight was primarily political. Carey's theoretical alternative to classical political economy never achieved prominence, even in the US. The academic world may have had a considerable effect on the educated public, but while this might explain the repeated claims that Malthus's views were dominant, I find little evidence that such domination had any great impact.

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