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## **Reviewing the Development of Malthus's Reformist Ideas from 1803 to 1806**

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It is of the very highest importance therefore, to know distinctly what government cannot do, as well as what it can.

Malthus, *Essay on Population*, 1806

### **ABSTRACT**

This essay explores the evolution of Thomas Robert Malthus's reformist ideas, with special reference to his criticism of Thomas Paine. A careful examination of Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*, and specifically the critical discussion of Paine's *Rights of Man* contained therein, revealed that Malthus's reformist ideas underwent a progressive and significant change between 1803 and 1806. In this period as a conservative moderate reformer, Malthus assigned greater importance to the value of educational and parliamentary reforms in connection with his plan to abolish the existing Poor Laws and reduce the poverty of the poor, and thereby additionally moved minimally closer to Paine's popular radicalism.

### **1. Introductory Remarks**

Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* was first published anonymously in 1798. The full title was *An Essay on the Principle of Population, as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society, with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers*. In the first *Essay on Population*, as its subtitle suggests, the extremely optimistic theories of continuous human progress advocated by William Godwin (1756-1836) and the Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794) were under critique. Malthus's principle of population was primarily based on the hypothesis that increases in population occur too rapidly for the means of subsistence to keep pace. He viewed this process as a

natural law that had been established by a benevolent God, and that the utopian communities supported by Godwin and Condorcet were doomed to collapse due to overpopulation. Malthus maintained that ‘lust’ regularly overtook ‘prudence’, with the inevitable consequences of ‘misery and vice’ prevailing. As early as 1798, Malthus conceptualised two ways to control population growth—‘positive checks’ enacted through increases in the death rate, and ‘preventive checks’ adopted through reductions in the birth rate.

Malthus regarded his first *Essay on Population* as an unsatisfactory statement on the principle of population, because it was constructed ‘on the spur of the occasion’ (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 1: 1)<sup>1</sup> and based mostly on his own thoughts. He decided to revise and rewrite the first edition. In 1803, Malthus produced the second edition of his work. His text was thoroughly revised and further expanded, and the long title of the work was changed to *An Essay on the Principle of Population; or, A View of Its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness; with an Inquiry Into Our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which It Occasions*. In this second edition, Malthus reduced the extent of his discussions of Godwin and Condorcet’s utopian schemes. Instead, he provided a large body of additional historical, ethnographic, and statistical evidence to support his beliefs on the principle of population, and he additionally softened his pessimism through the introduction of a new conceptualisation of ‘moral restraint’—namely delayed marriage and childbearing through abstinence—as a third means of controlling population growth. According to Malthus, ‘moral restraint’ was the only possible way to diminish the consequences of the brutal forces of ‘misery and vice’.

*Essay on Population* underwent revisions in four subsequent editions, published in 1806, 1807, 1817, and 1826. It is widely accepted that the most significant changes made to the *Essay on Population* are found between the first edition published in 1798 and the second, published in 1803. This is generally accurate, as editions three to six include relatively minor revisions to the second edition.<sup>2</sup> However, this does not imply that the changes seen between the second and the following four editions are trivial or unworthy

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<sup>1</sup> In 1806, the word ‘spur’ was replaced by ‘impulse’.

<sup>2</sup> It can be said, however, that the 1817 revision of the *Essay on Population* has attracted the particular attention of Malthus scholars, because in 1817 he demonstrated his revised and positive attitude towards public works as a temporary measure in alleviating hardship in the context of the sudden increase in unemployment that followed the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars in 1815.

of serious examination. Rather, it should be noted that the ‘alterations made to the second *Essay* over the period 1803 to 1826 provide a running commentary on Malthus’s intellectual development’ (Winch 1987, 36).

Discussions of Godwin and Condorcet’s utopian arguments were minimised in the second and the subsequent four editions of the *Essay on Population*. Despite this, Malthus’s hostility towards the visionary Godwin and Condorcet was still very strong, and so in 1803, he added a new chapter attacking the political ideas of Thomas Paine (1737-1834). Paine, along with Godwin and Condorcet, is seen as leading intellectual commentators on the French Revolution. Paine’s *Rights of Man* is known as one of the best-selling books in English history, and as the ‘bible’ of working-class radicals of the 1790s. It is therefore unsurprising that Malthus saw Paine as sharing a similar perspective as the other two radical thinkers that Malthus primarily critiqued. Paine appeared on the list of visionaries that were critiqued in the second and later editions of the *Essay on Population*, which in turn indicates that the work continued to serve anti-utopian purposes. In all subsequent editions of *Essay on Population* Malthus continued to attack those critics who focused exclusively on unjust political institutions, and maintained his hostility towards any doctrine or system of equality that was incompatible with his principle of population, such as those propagated by Godwin, Condorcet, Paine, Wallace,<sup>3</sup> Owen,<sup>4</sup> and Spence.<sup>5</sup>

Malthus’s critique of Paine’s *Rights of Man* appears most intensively in the sixth chapter (“Effect of the knowledge of the principal cause of poverty on Civil Liberty”) of BOOK IV (“Of our future Prospects respecting the removal or mitigation of the Evils arising from the Principle of Population”) of the second and later editions of the *Essay on Population*.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the critique in this chapter contains the notorious ‘nature’s mighty feast’ metaphor together with references to David Hume’s (1711-1776)

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Wallace (1697-1771): a Scottish Presbyterian minister and population writer.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Owen (1771-1858): a Welsh socialist, social reformer, and pioneer in the cooperative movement.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Spence (1750-1814): an English radical pamphleteer and pioneer of socialist land-nationalisation.

<sup>6</sup> BOOK I and II of the 1803-1826 editions of the *Essay on Population* are devoted to a thoroughly empirical demographic study of the checks on population growth which have operated throughout history in all countries. BOOK III and IV seek possible non-utopian and reformist solutions to several problems presented to morality and politics posed by population pressure—pauperism (The Poor Laws), education, civil and political liberties, etc.

memorable discussion of the ‘euthanasia’ of the British constitution. The incorporation of these topics in the same chapter stimulates our intellectual curiosity about the chapter in question. In short, Malthus’s criticism of Paine is a subject worth investigating in detail, because it will almost certainly play a significant role, when exploring his intellectual development and background. Surprisingly, there are remarkably few commentators who have paid attention to this valuable subject, and, to my knowledge, no one has specifically addressed the importance of the shift of emphasis in Malthus’s criticism of Paine, particularly in the period of publication from 1803 to 1806.<sup>7</sup>

This essay seeks to demonstrate that Malthus’s reformist ideas underwent a significant change during the revision of the second *Essay on Population*, which led to the third edition of the publication, despite the existence of fundamental continuities within the work. This is achieved by accepting Donald Winch’s instructive depiction of Malthus as a ‘moderate reformer’ who preferred ‘gradual reformation [...] throughout his life’ (Winch 1987, 50) and by simultaneously delving into deeper layers of detail than have Winch and other commentators.

This essay proceeds as follows. Sections 2 & 3 are the main parts of this essay and are devoted to carrying out a detailed textual analysis of the sixth chapter of BOOK IV of the second and later editions of the *Essay on Population*. This chapter is divided into 21 paragraphs in total. As elaborated later, however, paragraph 12 appears in the second edition of the *Essay on Population*, while paragraphs 19-20 appear in the third and the following three editions of the *Essay on Population*. As a result, the sixth chapter of BOOK IV of 1803 is composed of 19 paragraphs and that of the 1806-1826 editions is composed of 20 paragraphs. A careful examination of this chapter, and specifically the critical discussion of Paine’s *Rights of Man* contained therein, will enable readers to recognise that Malthus advanced his reformist ideas forward in a progressive direction

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<sup>7</sup> Noted among them are Stephen (1900) and Stedman Jones (2004). As Stephen rightly noted, ‘Malthus’s criticism of Paine is significant’ (1900, vol. 2: 176). The fourth chapter of Volume II of this three-volume study, which deals mainly with Malthus, includes a useful summary of his criticism of Paine. But his discussion seems quite unsatisfactory because it contains nothing other than a brief abstract. He did not look at the change in tone of Malthus’s discourse from 1803 to 1806, and, as a matter of course, he failed to grasp how ‘significant’ Malthus’s criticism of Paine was in examining the development of his reformist ideas. Nearly the same critical comment is also true of Stedman Jones (2004, 103-107). James (1979) and Mayhew (2014) wrote the two best available biographies of Malthus; however neither is the definitive biography that is needed. One complaint about these two books is the lack of discussion regarding the intellectual relationship between Paine and Malthus.

between 1803 and 1806. Section 4 draws some general conclusions.

## **2. The Main Textual Analysis (1): Reviewing the Development of Malthus's Educational Reformist Ideas from 1803 to 1806**

This section discusses the first half (paragraphs 1-9) of the chapter in question with special reference to his criticism of Paine, which will highlight the development of Malthus's educational reformist ideas.

Paragraphs 1 to 3 assess the prevailing ignorance surrounding the principal cause of poverty, and the fatal consequences thereof. Malthus believed that 'the greatest part of the sufferings of the lower classes of society' (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 122) should be blamed exclusively on 'themselves' (*ibid.*), namely 'the laws of nature and the imprudence of the poor' (*ibid.*). This doctrine may appear 'unfavourable to the cause of liberty' (*ibid.*), but this is not the case. People in the lower classes were not aware of the actual causes of the distress they experienced, and so they mistook this for a simple consequence of political misrule. This misunderstanding provided opportunities for the poor to form mobs, and for well-disposed people to simultaneously align themselves with a military despot who could rescue them from the horrors of anarchy. In Malthus's view, a mob was 'generally the growth of a redundant population' (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 123) and characterised them as being 'of all monsters, the most fatal to freedom' (*ibid.*).<sup>8</sup>

Paragraph 4 is so illuminating that it is worth quoting in full:

Of the tendency of mobs to produce tyranny, we may not be long<sup>9</sup> without an example in this country. As a friend to freedom, and an enemy to large standing armies, it is with extreme reluctance that I am compelled to acknowledge that, had it not been for the organised force in the country,<sup>10</sup> the distresses of the people

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, Edmund Burke, who have often been linked with Malthus as a fellow conservative against the French revolution, routinely describes the Revolution as monstrous throughout his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). See Colling (2009, 72-73, 185).

<sup>9</sup> In 1817 this was changed to: 'we may not, perhaps, be long without an example in this country'.

<sup>10</sup> In 1806 Malthus made two alterations to this sentence: 'As a friend to freedom, and naturally an enemy to large standing armies [...] I am compelled to acknowledge that, had it not been for the great organised force in the country'.

during the late scarcities,<sup>11</sup> encouraged by the extreme ignorance and folly of many among the higher classes, might have driven them to commit the most dreadful outrages, and ultimately to involve the country in all the horrors of famine. Should such periods often recur, a recurrence which we have too much reason to apprehend from the present state of the country, the prospect which opens to our view is melancholy in the extreme. The English constitution will be seen hastening with rapid strides to the *Euthanasia* foretold by Hume; unless its progress be interrupted by some popular commotion; and this alternative presents a picture still more appalling to the imagination. If political discontents were blended with the cries of hunger, and a revolution were to take place by the instrumentality of a mob clamouring for want of food, the consequences would be unceasing change, and unceasing carnage, the bloody career of which, nothing but the establishment of some complete despotism could arrest (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 123-124; italics in original).

First, note that Malthus announced himself to be ‘an enemy to large standing armies’. In using the language of ‘Country’ Whigs,<sup>12</sup> as Winch has correctly noted, Malthus regretted that the existence of armies ‘had [been] proved [as] necessary during the food riots of 1800 and 1801’.<sup>13</sup>

Second, note the phrase ‘Euthanasia foretold by Hume’. The word ‘Euthanasia’ appears in Hume’s essay, titled “Whether the British Government Inclines More to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic” (1742).<sup>14</sup> Malthus’s reference to this essay proved

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<sup>11</sup> In 1817 a footnote was added here: ‘1800 and 1801’. In the 1770s-1780s wheat had cost 34-54 shillings per quarter, but it then rose to the higher 70-shilling range from 1794 to 1795. Despite temporarily falling to the 50- to 60-shilling range from 1796 to 1798, it rose again and was recorded as reaching the 110 shilling level from 1800 to 1801. The price of wheat subsequently fell again to the 50- to 80-shilling level from 1802 to 1806. See Gregory and Stevenson (2007, 235).

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed explanation of a ‘Country’ ideology, see Dickinson (1977, Ch. 5).

<sup>13</sup> Winch (1983, 76). My insertion. See also Winch (1987, 52).

<sup>14</sup> Hume’s collected works, titled *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, including the essay on “Whether the British Government Inclines More to Absolute Monarchy, or to a Republic”, are listed in the *Malthus Library Catalogue* (Jesus College ed. 1983, 81). Near the end of this essay, Hume

his intellectual indebtedness to Hume. While not specifically discussing a subsistence crisis, Hume's analysis of the British constitution was possibly powerful inspiration for Malthus's diagnosis of the consequences of contemporary food scarcities.<sup>15</sup> Malthus attempted to apply Hume's moderate, prudent, and anti-utopian political views of the British government to his analysis of the current and future status of the subsistence crisis of 1800-1801. Malthus feared that the actions of hungry mobs facing a subsistence crisis would lead to anarchy, and subsequently to the need of an absolute monarchy to prevent ongoing anarchy, which seemed to be a serious possibility.

Paragraphs 5 to 9 assess the causes of 'those gradual encroachments of power, which have taken place of late years' (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 124) by focusing on the actions of the landed gentry and the common people.

Malthus confirmed the traditional role of the landed gentry as 'guardians of British liberty' (*ibid.*), and lamented the fact that they had abandoned these original duties. However, he simultaneously acknowledged that the existing state of crisis had obliged them to act in this manner. Being 'actuated more by fear than treachery'<sup>16</sup> (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 126), they could not help but make concessions to an oppressive government 'on condition of being protected from the mob' (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 124). Following from Hume's discussion, Malthus concluded that 'should the British constitution ultimately lapse into a despotism, as has been prophesied [by Hume], I shall think that the country gentlemen of England will have really<sup>17</sup> much more to answer for than the ministers' (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 126; my insertion).

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stated: 'The tide has run long, and with some rapidity, to the side of popular government, and is just beginning to turn towards monarchy. / It is well known, that every government must come to a period, and that death is unavoidable to the political as well as to the animal body. [...] Here I would frankly declare, that, though liberty be preferable to slavery, in almost every case; [...] And, as such a violent government cannot long subsist, we shall, at last, after many convulsions, and civil wars, find repose in absolute monarchy, which it would have been happier for us to have established peaceably from the beginning. Absolute monarchy, therefore, is the easiest death, the true *Euthanasia* of the BRITISH constitution. / Thus, if we have reason to be more jealous of monarchy, because the danger is more imminent from that quarter; we have also reason to be more jealous of popular government, because that danger is more terrible. This may teach us a lesson of moderation in all our political controversies' (Hume [1742] 1994, 31-32; italics and bold in original).

<sup>15</sup> Following Winch's suggestion, 'Malthus may not have been the last of his generation of political economists to cite Hume's essays, written nearly a century before, but he was the last to do so as though they had been written yesterday' (1996, 371).

<sup>16</sup> In 1806 the word 'treachery' was replaced by 'corruption'.

<sup>17</sup> In 1817 the word 'really' was removed.

Malthus additionally found the ultimate causes of the existing state of emergency to be ‘more [to do with] the ignorance and delusion of the lower classes of the people [...] than the actual disposition of the government to tyranny’ (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 125). As previously explained in his early short pamphlet on the *High Price of Provisions* (1800)<sup>18</sup>, it is a grave mistake to think that ‘the destruction of the Parliament, the Lord Mayor, and the monopolisers, would make bread cheap, and that a revolution would enable them all to support their families’ (*ibid.*). Prevailing ignorance surrounding the real cause of the high price of bread among the poor had led to mass demonstrations. This context provides some of the strongest motivations behind Malthus’s support for universal access to education. Like Adam Smith, Malthus’s advocacy of public education for the lower classes was advanced beyond the attitude of his time. In “Of the Modes of Correcting the Prevailing Opinions on Population”, a chapter of BOOK IV of the 1803-1826 editions of the *Essay on Population*, Malthus wrote:

The principal argument which I have heard advanced against a system of national education in England is, that the common people would be put in a capacity to read such works as those of Paine, and that the consequences would probably be fatal to government. But, on this subject I agree most cordially with Adam Smith in thinking, that an instructed and well-informed people would be much less likely to be led away by inflammatory writings, and much better able to detect the false declamation of interested and ambitious demagogues, than an ignorant people (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 154).

In this chapter, interestingly, the appearance of ‘Paine’ and his works differs from how they will be discussed in this paper. In this context, there is a prevailing fear that education would allow workers to ‘read such works as those of Paine’ and stimulate revolutionary tendencies among them. Despite this overriding concern, Malthus emphasised the importance of public education as an investment in society as a whole,

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<sup>18</sup> In this pamphlet Malthus stated: ‘The continuation of extraordinary high prices, after a harvest that was at one time looked forward to as abundant, has contributed still more to astonish and perplex the public mind. Many men of sense have joined in the universal cry of the common people, that there must be roguery somewhere; and the general indignation has fallen upon monopolisers, forestallers, and regraters [...]’ (Malthus [1800] 1986, 6).



rather than in the individual.<sup>19</sup> In discussing their respective views on education, therefore, it can be said that there was no crucial conflict between the two. Importantly, for the subsequent discussion of this paper, Malthus also expressed his expectation of the significant role of government in education in the 1806 edition more clearly than in the 1803 *Essay on Population*. He added in 1806:

The effect of a good government in increasing the prudential habits and personal respectability of the lower classes of society has already been insisted on; but certainly this effect will always be incomplete without a good system of education; [...] The benefits derived from education are among those, which may be enjoyed without restriction of numbers; and, as it is in the power of governments to confer these benefits, it is undoubtedly their duty to do it (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 155).

This should be understood as a typical presentation of Malthus's educational reformist ideas.

### **3. The Main Textual Analysis (2): Reviewing the Development of Malthus's Ideas on Parliamentary Reform from 1803 to 1806**

This section examines the second half (paragraphs 10-21) of the sixth chapter of BOOK IV of the 1803 and 1806 *Essay on Population*, which will highlight the development of Malthus's ideas on parliamentary reform.

At the beginning of paragraph 10, Malthus explicitly criticised Paine and his *Rights of Man*:<sup>20</sup>

The circulation of Paine's Rights of Man, it is supposed, has done great mischief among the lower and middling classes of people in this country. This is probably true; but not because man is without

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<sup>19</sup> Malthus's advocacy of universal education included the instruction of the fundamental principles of political economy to promote voluntary restraint amongst the population. For Malthus's views of public education see Santurri (1982), Stabile (1996, 42), Hollander (1997, 895) and Persky (2015). To my knowledge, the most detailed treatment of this subject can be found in Yanagisawa (1994). As a radical thinker of his time, of course, Paine also advocated for the creation of public education. On this subject see West (1967).

<sup>20</sup> Ten works by Paine, including the two parts of the *Rights of Man*, are listed in the *Malthus Library Catalogue* (Jesus College ed. 1983, 127-128).

rights, or that these rights ought not to be known; but because Mr. Paine has fallen into some fundamental errors respecting the principles of government, [...] Mr. Paine very justly observes, that whatever the apparent cause of any riots may be, the real one is always want of happiness; but when he goes on to say, it shews that something is wrong in the system of government, that injures the felicity by which society is to be preserved, he falls into the common error of attributing all want of happiness to government. It is evident that this want of happiness might have existed, and from ignorance might have been the principal cause of the riots; and yet be almost wholly unconnected with any of the proceedings of government. [...] If an attempt were to be made to remedy this unhappiness by distributing the produce of the taxes to the poorer classes of society, according to the plan proposed by Mr. Paine, the evil would be aggravated a hundred fold, and in a very short time no sum that the society could possibly raise would be adequate to the proposed object (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 126-127).

Malthus condemned Paine for having ‘fallen into some fundamental errors respecting the principles of government’ when Paine attributed ‘all want of happiness to government’, and for having proposed a plan for what is now known as a welfare state<sup>21</sup>— a plan of ‘distributing the produce of the taxes to the poorer classes of society’. In the fifth chapter of Part Two of *Rights of Man*, Paine had in fact proposed replacing the existing Poor Laws with various welfare measures, including funds for poor families, free education, unemployment compensation, and those in old age. All these measures were to be financed by a graduated income tax and other tax reforms. He attributed poverty to excessive taxation and poor governance. From Malthus’s perspective, however, the common people’s desire for happiness should be largely attributed to population pressure operating as a natural law, rather than to unjust political institutions.

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<sup>21</sup> Paine advocated an early-modern version of the contemporary welfare state. See Thompson ([1963] 1968, 101-102), Claeys (1989, 80-82, 98-100) and Stedman Jones (2004, 57).

Paragraph 11 contains Malthus's specific criticisms of Paine's *Rights of Man*:

Nothing would so effectually counteract the mischiefs occasioned by Mr. Paine's Rights of Man, as a general knowledge of the real rights of man. What these rights are it is not my business at present to explain; but there is one right which man has generally been thought to possess, which I am confident he neither does, nor can possess—a right to subsistence when his labour will not fairly purchase it. Our laws indeed say that he has this right, and bind the society to furnish employment and food to those who cannot get them in the regular market; but in so doing they attempt to reverse the laws of nature; [...] (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 127).

Note the phrase 'the real rights of man'. While Malthus did not reject the overall concept of the rights of man, he found objections specifically for those rights that he regarded as illegitimate, unobtainable, and impossible to enact. He contended that a proper understanding and just interpretation of the rights of man did not include a 'right to subsistence'. For Paine the 'natural' rights of man were antecedent to all political authority, while Malthus believed that the 'natural' law of population variation preceded human rights. Malthus held this view of human rights throughout his life. What he insisted should be abolished were the existing Poor Laws which were connected with the common people's traditional and primitive belief of a right to subsistence,<sup>22</sup> and he possibly feared that Paine's fashionable doctrines would consolidate just such an erroneous belief.

There may seem odd or ill-considered in Malthus adding Paine, because Paine was not speculating in the same way as Godwin and Condorcet. Paine's proposals were intended as practical and Malthus's objections to them do not automatically apply to him. The point here is that Malthus logically rejected a right to subsistence by indicating that it is in contradiction with the 'natural' law of population. For Malthus, Paine was a believer in the 'visionary' doctrine of human rights, and he therefore was virtually the same as Godwin and Condorcet.

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<sup>22</sup> However, this does not mean that Malthus entirely rejected the effectiveness of public relief systems. On this point, see O'Fleherly (2016, 92-93) and Nakazawa (2017, 35-36).

Paragraph 12, which included the infamous passage on ‘nature’s mighty feast’, only appears in the 1803 edition of *Essay on Population*. The entire paragraph is quoted to assist with further discussion:

A man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he has a just demand, and if the society do [sic] not want his labour, has no claim of *right*<sup>23</sup> to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature’s mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him. She tells him to be gone, and will quickly execute her own orders, if he does not work upon the compassion of some of her guests. If these guests get up and make room for him, other intruders immediately appear demanding the same favour. The report of a provision for all that come, fills the hall with numerous claimants. The order and harmony of the feast is disturbed, the plenty that before reigned is changed into scarcity; and the happiness of the guests is destroyed by the spectacle of misery and dependence in every part of the hall, and by the clamorous importunity of those, who are justly enraged at not finding the provision which they had been taught to expect. The guests learn too late their error, in counteracting those strict orders to all intruders, issued by the great mistress of the feast, who, wishing that all her guests should have plenty, and knowing that she could not provide for unlimited numbers, humanely refused to admit fresh comers when her table was already full (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 127-128; italics in original).

The point to be discussed here is why this paragraph was excised from 1806 onwards.

This paragraph placed emphasis on Malthus’s principled rejection of the poor’s right to subsistence. It was directed even against innocent children who had been abandoned by their parents. The cruel and sensational tone of this sentiment<sup>24</sup> seemed to be the crux

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<sup>23</sup> This italicised ‘right’ seems to suggest Malthus’s focus on denial of a right to subsistence in emergency as grasped integrally with the existing Poor Laws.

<sup>24</sup> Mayhew (2014) critically described ‘Malthus’s comments on “Nature’s mighty feast”’ as

of his readers' resentment of his work. For example, the romantic poet Robert Southey (1774-1843) strongly condemned Malthus's ruthless attitude towards the poor in his long review of the second *Essay on Population*, found in the *Annual Review* for 1803 (but published in 1804). According to Southey, the *Essay on Population* is 'the political bible of the rich, the selfish, and the sensual' (Southey [1804] 1994, 129) and its author 'calls for no sacrifice from the rich; on the contrary, he proposes to relieve them from their parish rates: he recommends nothing to them but that they should harden their hearts. [...] He writes advice to the poor for the rich to read' (Southey [1804] 1994, 135-136). For Southey, Malthus was nothing but a spokesman for the rich and powerful. Southey considered that the folly and wickedness of this book was typically represented in the 'nature's mighty feast' metaphor, the full paragraph of which he quoted in his review in order to show that this metaphor sanctioned those social evils he wished to eradicate. Like Paine, Southey strongly believed that poverty was a creation of the modern era.<sup>25</sup>

Southey's hostile, and influential, review earned Malthus a level of notoriety that has persisted;<sup>26</sup> however, it should be noted that Southey did not fully comprehend the *Essay on Population*. He denied that the poor should have the right to subsistence not because he was hostile towards the poor, but because he believed the law of nature did not grant such right to an individual. The poor's situation cannot be improved until a proper understanding of the powerful operation of the law of nature exists, which in turn leads to positive dissemination of correct knowledge on the causes of poverty. Malthus carried the Paleyite familiar metaphor of the 'feast'<sup>27</sup> within an educational perspective to

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'equivalent in their infamy to Burke's "swinish multitude"' (125).

<sup>25</sup> Southey was enthusiastic about Paine in the 1790s when he was still sympathetic to the French Revolution. See Raimond (1989, 190-191) and Speck (2013, xi-xii). Unfortunately, very little is known about Southey's reading of Paine in the period of the early 1800s.

<sup>26</sup> Himmelfarb (1984) took the same line as Southey when developing hostility towards Malthus. She pointed out the significance of paragraph 12 in the sixth chapter of BOOK IV of the 1803 *Essay on Population* sooner than anybody else. Her antipathy towards this passage is connected with her dislike of the supposedly demoralising nature of Malthus's political economy: 'The most notorious passage, cited again and again by contemporaries as evidence of Malthus's heartlessness, appeared only in the second edition. [...] Although Malthus hastened to remove this passage from subsequent editions [...], it continued to be quoted against him' (122-123). Furthermore, Connell (2001) added that 'Malthus's rhetorical indiscretions and tactless insensitivity (over the notorious "Nature's feast" metaphor, for example) have never made it difficult to identify him as a reactionary defender of inequality and social division' and that 'Southey's article has often been discussed by historians of economic thought, and is sometimes regarded as the first public expression of an emergent "Romantic" critique of political economy' (37-38). See also Mayhew (2014, 86-88).

<sup>27</sup> Note the words 'feast', 'guests', and 'table' in paragraph 12. They appeared in a passage in the

highlight his reformist intention to his readers; however, this metaphor unexpectedly resulted in readers' feelings of anger and hatred towards the work itself. He was hurt by the reactions towards his 'nature's mighty feast' paragraph. Eventually, he had to acknowledge how unsuitable the metaphor was for his readers, which led him to delete paragraph 12 for the 1806 edition of the *Essay on Population*.

In paragraph 13, Malthus directly challenged Abbé Raynal's<sup>28</sup> assertion from his *Histoire des Indes* that a man has the right to subsist 'before all social laws' (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 128).<sup>29</sup> As already discussed at the beginning of this section, Malthus believed that the right to subsistence is contradictory to the law of nature and, more accurately, that it is denied by the law of nature. It is curious that Malthus referred to Raynal by name in this passage. This could be due to the fact that it was difficult for Malthus to definitively proclaim Paine's new justification for a right to subsistence as being derived from natural rights.<sup>30</sup>

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fourth chapter ("In what the Right of Property is founded") of Part I ("Of Relative Duties Which Are Determinate") of BOOK III ("Relative Duties") of *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* written by William Paley (1743-1805), probably the most influential English moral philosopher of the period (Paley [1785] 1830, vol. 3: 77-83). This book became a textbook at the University of Cambridge within a year of its publication in 1785, and continued to be used until 1857 (LeMahieu 1976, 155-156; Waterman 1991, 117; and Fyfe 1997, 332). Malthus, who had graduated from Cambridge in 1788, undoubtedly consulted or thought of Paley's *Principles* while writing paragraph 12. Paley used the analogy of the 'pigeons' to explain the full realisation of a natural law in the realm of nature (Paley [1785] 1830, vol. 3: 72-73), while the 'feast' served as a metaphor for the natural law in the human world whose master was God. Paley and Malthus shared a similar understanding of nature's miserliness and the powerful workings of a natural law. On this point, for example, Connell (2001, 26) stressed natural theology as the fundamental thinking framework as commonly shared by Paley and Malthus. Nevertheless, there is an important and undeniable difference between the two authors. Paley, in contrast to Malthus, admitted that the poor have the right to steal from the rich in times of urgent need. Paley adopted the perspective of traditional rights for mankind, including a right to subsistence in emergencies (Schofield 1987, 12-13; Horn 1990, 141; Waterman 1991, 121-123; and Cremaschi 2014, 146). Therefore, paragraph 12 should be interpreted as Malthus's dual rejection of Paine and Paley's doctrines regarding the right to subsistence.

<sup>28</sup> Abbé Guillaume Thomas François Raynal (1713-1796): a French historian and philosopher.

<sup>29</sup> More accurately, Malthus wrote in French: 'Avant toutes les lois sociales.'

<sup>30</sup> For this interpretation, I am indebted to Yanagisawa (2015, 14-15). McNally's (2000) interpretation was that 'Paine expanded the discourse of natural rights to include the right to subsist [...]. Paine thus bequeathed a new intellectual weapon to popular radicalism: a natural rights doctrine enlarged to include the right to subsistence, guaranteed by public means where necessary' (430-431). However, I believe that this interpretation goes too far. In my opinion, Paine 'implicitly' affirmed that subsistence was a 'natural' right of all human beings. His view as propagated in *Agrarian Justice* (1797), which is not listed in *The Malthus Library Catalogue*, can be said to be more radical than that in the *Rights of Man* in its less implicit, but still ambiguous, assertion that all mankind is equally God's children, and, as such, has a natural right to the Earth's fruits as God's gift, namely, subsistence. See Paine ([1797] 1895, 329-330). For a further discussion of Paine's idea on the right to subsistence in *Agrarian Justice*, see Claeys (1989, 203-206), Koritansky (2003, 72-74) and Lamb (2015, 111-151). Unfortunately, little

Paragraphs 14, 15 and 17 discussed the way in which improvements in government were promoted by the general dissemination of the true knowledge of the causes of poverty among poor people, and those with property.

Paragraph 16 includes the explanation of ‘the extreme probability that such a revolution would terminate in a much worse despotism than that which it had destroyed’ (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 129), which seems to recall Hume’s analysis of the British constitution. Again Hume’s discussion appears, and as already analysed in the previous section, Malthus feared that the possibility of a subsistence crisis would lead to anarchy prevailing and following the dissolution of government, an absolute monarchy would replace formal government institutions.

At the time that this work was written in the early 1800s, it was evident that his fear was far from speculative. Violent revolution had broken out in France, Britain’s immediate neighbour. The energy of the poor had exploded into uncontrolled and disorderly protests and riots, driven by the Paineite idea of the right to subsistence. Napoleon Bonaparte, the great military genius had suppressed political confusion in his rise to power, which resulted in the country being under his dictatorship. Unfortunately, Bonaparte’s rule proved to be much worse than the reign of Louis XVI. Therefore, in England in 1803, immediately after the peak of the food riot, it was reasonable for Malthus to believe in the possibility of actual outbreaks of revolution in Britain. Thus, despite the announcement by Malthus that he was ‘a friend to freedom, and an enemy to large standing armies’, he reluctantly had to acknowledge the necessity of ‘organised force in the country’. Here again, therefore, it should be emphasised that he was not a reactionary lacking sympathy for the poor, but rather a reformer dedicated to changing conditions for those who were not empowered. He abhorred anarchy and tyranny led by the ignorance of the poor, but not the poor themselves. In the context of the disruptive years from 1800 to 1801, the reformatory aspects of his thought could not help but move in a conservative, if not outright reactionary direction for the 1803 edition of *Essay on Population*. The socio-economic and political environment of the period 1802-1810, however, improved and stabilised (O’Gorman 1997, 266-267) and this context shaped the

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is known about Malthus’s response to *Agrarian Justice*, nor do we have any indication of Paine’s response to Malthus’s attack on the *Rights of Man*.

1806 *Essay on Population*.

As discussed earlier, the 1806 *Essay on Population* emphasised the effects of the government policies in poverty-alleviation efforts more strongly than in the 1803 edition. Corresponding to this, the 1806 edition of the *Essay on Population* contained this additional passage from paragraph 18:

Though government has but little power in the direct and immediate relief of poverty, yet its indirect influence on the prosperity of its subjects is striking and incontestable. And the reason is, that though it is comparatively impotent in its efforts to make the food of a country keep pace with an unrestricted increase of population, yet its influence is great in giving the best direction to those checks, which in some form or other must necessarily take place (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 130-131).

Here, Malthus expresses his positive expectations for those government measures aimed at alleviating poverty that might be adopted. This passage suggests that Malthus's attitude towards government policies had changed between 1803 and 1806.

Paragraphs 19 to 20 were new additions to the 1806 edition of the *Essay on Population*. Both paragraphs contained a greater emphasis on the effectiveness of government policies in poverty alleviation than had been seen in the 1803 edition:

The first grand requisite to the growth of prudential habits is the perfect security of property; and the next perhaps is that respectability and importance, which are given to the lower classes by equal laws, and the possession of some influence in the framing of them. The more excellent therefore is the government, the more does it tend to generate that prudence and elevation of sentiment, by which alone in the present state of our being poverty can be avoided (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 131).

It has been sometimes asserted that the only reason why it is advantageous that the people should have some share in the government, is that a representation of the people tends best to



secure the framing of good and equal laws; but that, if the same object could be attained under a despotism, the same advantage would accrue to the community. If however the representative system, by securing to the lower classes of society a more equal and liberal mode of treatment from their superiors, gives to each individual a greater personal respectability, and a greater fear of personal degradation; it is evident that it will powerfully cooperate with the security of property in animating the exertions of industry, and in generating habits of prudence; and thus more powerfully tend to increase the riches and prosperity of the lower classes of the community, than if the same laws had existed under a despotism (*ibid.*).

Poverty can be gradually reduced and alleviated through effective government policies, but not abolished or entirely eliminated. Malthus felt that it is not possible to secure property ‘under a despotism’. Malthus was an advocate of gradual parliamentary reform,<sup>31</sup> because he thought that incremental progress through this measure would ‘increase the riches and prosperity of the lower classes of the community’, while simultaneously promoting ‘the security of property’.

The new passage added to paragraph 21 in the second *Essay on Population* provides a clearer reflection of the development of Malthus’s reformist ideas from 1803 to 1806:

But though the tendency of a free constitution and a good government to diminish poverty be certain,<sup>32</sup> yet their effect in this way must necessarily be indirect and slow, and very different from the direct and immediate relief, which the lower classes of people are too frequently in the habit of looking forward to as the consequence of a revolution. This habit of expecting too much, and the irritation occasioned by disappointment, continually give a wrong direction to their efforts in favour of liberty, and constantly tend to defeat the accomplishment of those gradual

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<sup>31</sup> Contrastingly, Paley’s *Principles* expressly rejected calls for a reform of the representation of Parliament’ (O’Flaherty 2010, 9).

<sup>32</sup> Yanagisawa (2016) critically commented: ‘its mechanism is not unclear’ (148).

reforms in government, and that slow melioration of the condition of the lower classes of society, which are really attainable. It is of the very highest importance therefore, to know distinctly what government cannot do, as well as what it can (*ibid.*).

Here, Malthus becomes favourably inclined towards moderate and gradual parliamentary reforms as a means of preventing violent revolutions, and more so than he had been before. As ‘a friend to freedom, and an enemy to large standing armies’ (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 2: 123),<sup>33</sup> he may have expected that a gradual execution of parliamentary reform would concurrently promote the reduced necessity of these armies in a similarly gradual fashion.<sup>34</sup>

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

This essay presented an in-depth analysis of the text of *Essay on Population*. Through a concurrent discussion of the development of Malthus’s central theories and perspectives and the changes thereof found throughout the various editions of the publication, the following possible conclusions have been drawn from this research.

Malthus advocated that the integration of habits of prudence and diligence within the lower classes of society tended to be promoted by positively introducing universal education and gradually expanding popular participation in politics. This process in turn

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<sup>33</sup> In 1806, as previously explained in footnote 10, Malthus emphasised his disgust towards large standing armies by changing ‘an enemy to large standing armies’ to ‘naturally an enemy to large standing armies’.

<sup>34</sup> Malthus’s reformist ideas in 1806 precipitated some of the ideas he expressed more progressively in later years, particularly regarding the expansion of popular participation in politics. In a footnote in the 1836 edition of the *Principles of Political Economy*, Malthus welcomed the extension of the franchise (which was presumably the 1832 Reform Act): ‘Imperious circumstances have since brought on a reform of a more sudden and extensive nature than prudence would have perhaps suggested, if the time and the circumstances could have been commanded. Yet it must be allowed, that all which has been done, is to bring the practical working of the constitution nearer to its theory. And there is every reason to believe, that a great majority of the middle classes of society, among whom the elective franchise has been principally extended, must soon see that their own interests, and the interests and happiness of those who are dependent upon them, will be most essentially injured by any proceedings which tend to encourage turbulence and shake the security of property. If they become adequately sensible of this most unquestionable truth, and act accordingly, there is no doubt that the removal of those unsightly blots, of those handles, which, with a fair show of reason, might at any time be laid hold of to excite discontents and to stir up the people, will place the British Constitution upon a much broader and more solid base than ever’ (Malthus [1820-1836] 1989, vol. 2: 270). For a discussion of the development of Malthus’s political attitudes expressed in this new footnote, see the editorial comment by Pullen in (Malthus [1820-1836] 1989, vol. 2: 453-454).

would give rise to the economic and moral improvement of the lower classes. Therefore, Malthus was neither a reactionary nor a pessimist, but undoubtedly a conservative moderate reformer who preferred gradual change throughout his life.<sup>35</sup> However, it was simultaneously demonstrated that, despite the existence of fundamental continuities in his thinking, Malthus's reformist ideas underwent progressive change between 1803 and 1806. Thus, it could be concluded that Malthus's reformative ideas were significantly modified (but not transformed) during this period. This modification probably reflected on the one hand the lowering of the possibility of actual outbreaks of revolution in Britain in this period, and on the other hand his sufficient recognition that stressing the powerful mechanism of the law of nature and not articulating his reformist intention or his expectations to government policies in poverty-alleviation tended to mislead naïve readers such as Southey. Thus, it might be said that Malthus, as a conservative moderate reformer, additionally moved minimally closer to Paine's popular radicalism,<sup>36</sup> as shown through the analysis of this essay. This essay also allowed for a greater understanding of the intellectual sources Malthus drew upon when moulding his ideas—principally Paine, as well as Hume, Raynal and others (including Paley<sup>37</sup>), and it further discovered and articulated the inter-related logic of Malthus's criticisms of Paine and the existing Poor Laws.

While these conclusions are important, they are provisional in nature and therefore need to be expanded upon and validated through further research. This essay concentrated on Malthus's critical discussion of Paine's *Rights of Man* between 1803 and 1806. In

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<sup>35</sup> See Winch (1996, 224), Petersen (1999, 234-239) and Teichgraeber III (2000, 97, note 23). Seeing Malthus in this way will help us to consider why Joseph Johnson (1738-1809), the leading radical publisher of the age, was willing to publish the first edition of the *Essay on Population* and the *High Price of Provisions*. I think it is highly possible that Johnson saw these Malthus's works as something of reform pamphlets protesting the government's tyrannical measures such as the existing Poor Laws (see Nakazawa 2012, 21-23). Malthus's lifelong preference for gradual change and reform was evident in his statement: 'what I have really proposed is [...] the *gradual* and *very gradual* abolition of the poor-laws' (Malthus [1803-1826] 1989, vol. 1: 374; italics in original). This statement appears in the second and all subsequent editions of the *Essay on Population*. It is also worth noting that both Malthus and Paine wished to do away with the existing Poor Laws.

<sup>36</sup> Kates (1989) states: '(nineteenth-century European) Liberalism, which argued for a constitutional monarchy based upon political freedom but an unequal electoral system. [...] (nineteenth-century European) Radicalism: democratic republicanism based upon universal manhood suffrage and a commitment to the amelioration of the lower classes through significant social and economic legislation' (571).

<sup>37</sup> See footnote 27.

doing so, it gave minor attention to the wider issues; specifically Paine's other works such as *Agrarian Justice* and Raynal's *Histoire des Indes*, and the further development of Malthus's reformist ideas from 1806 onwards, including those regarding the division of the landed property (Malthus [1820-1836] 1989, vol. 1: 431-433). Moreover, the epigraph to this essay ought to remind the informed reader of John Maynard Keynes's well-known statement in *The End of Laissez-Faire* (1926): 'Perhaps the chief task of economists at this hour is to distinguish afresh the *Agenda* of government and the *Non-Agenda*' (Keynes [1926] 1972, 288; italics in original). Considering Keynes's famous praise of Malthusian methodology in economics and economic policies,<sup>38</sup> the similarity of the two great economist's views regarding the role of government is also worthy of further investigation. An extension of this research would be needed to address these issues.

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<sup>38</sup> For one of the latest studies on this subject, see Nakazawa (2017).

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