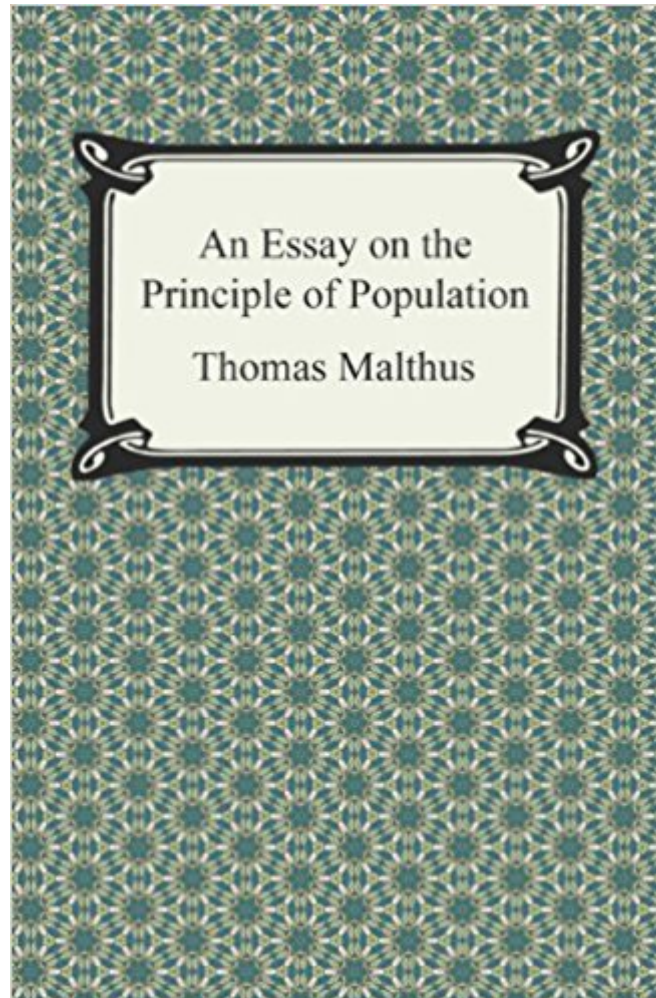




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An Essay On The Principle Of Population



Synopsis

One of the most influential works of its era on the subject of population growth Thomas Malthus's "An Essay on the Principle of Population" was first published anonymously in 1798. In it Malthus describes his "Iron Law of Population" which asserts that growing populations ultimately lead to a rising supply of labor that would inevitably lower wages and create an increasing rate of poverty. More specifically Malthus argues "The power of population is so superior to the power of the earth to produce subsistence for man, that premature death must in some shape or other visit the human race." In other words while population has the capacity to grow at an exponential rate the resources that support mans existence, i.e. food and shelter, can only grow at an algebraic rate. While ultimately time would prove Malthus's predictions to be wrong, for they did not foresee the impact of technology on productivity, the work was nonetheless highly influential to both Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace in developing the theory of natural selection. The work would also stir the debate around the impact of population growth and lead to the first national census laws in Britain.

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Customer Reviews

A classic text for demography. It is a bit of a hard read and important to keep in mind the situation and time it was wrote in.

I have been amazed over the years by how many smart people have argued for and against this essay on population without their ever having actually read it. It is not what you have heard from these people on both sides of it. Read it for yourself. It is inexpensive and short. And since there is a chance that the food tech explosion of the past 30 years may have run its course to peak, the Heinlein quote "it is never safe to laugh at Dr. Malthus, he always has the last laugh" may be truer now than it was in 1966. Or don't read it... watch Swamp People instead.

I would reccommend thisbook to anyone interested in the continued well-being of his country, or interested in a way to make his country better; to anyone with environmental concerns. His arguments regarding population are hardto refute by any sensible person. Although he does digress from the immediate topic, those digressions are into human nat ure, and are ultimately related to the topic. Although he came into disrepute for his thought in his later life, his concerns are now evident in our time.

Note: this is NOT a review of the content of the book, just the print quality. The paperback copy, which doesn't have any information on who printed or published it, is hardly readable. There are ZERO MARGINS. Parts of the book I can't even see the words in the crease. (See photo). I haven't bought any of the other versions, but I just want to warn people not to buy the paperback version.

From the Introduction: "Malthus began with two physiological assumptions: humans must have food, and the sex drive will always be a fundamental part of our make-up. (Both assumptions had been called into question, half-seriously, by Godwin.) His next assertions were less self-evident but crucial to the argument: an unchecked population grows at a 'geometric' rate, as in the series 1, 2, 4, 8, 16, and the means of subsistence can only be increased at an 'arithmetic' rate, as in 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Because man's powers of reproduction so greatly exceed his powers of food production, population will always press against the available resources. Thus a substantial portion of society is condemned to live at the ragged edge of subsistence. Any significant rise in general living standards

will trigger a period of earlier marriages and lower mortality, bringing faster growth of population than of food supplies. Per capita consumption, having risen temporarily above 'subsistence' level, will be forced back down to that level, or even below it. Almost as famous as this grim analysis, which prompted Thomas Carlyle to dub economics the 'dismal science', is the conceptual apparatus that supports it. Malthus argued that population was held within resource limits by two types of 'checks': positive ones, which raised the death rate, and preventative ones, which lowered the birth rate. The positive checks included hunger, disease, and war; the preventative checks, abortion, birth control, prostitution, postponement of marriage, and celibacy. All of these population retardants, without exception, led mankind into 'misery' or 'vice'. Thus commentators have mapped out four Malthusian quadrants of woe: positive of misery (disease; malnutrition) or of vice (the waging of war), and preventative checks of misery (the postponement of marriage; celibacy) or of vice (prostitution; birth control). Let me first say, most emphatically, that Malthus was not wrong; anyone who believes that Malthus was wrong is either misguided, or simply restating something they heard another misguided person say. The fact of the matter is that Malthus has never been a popular figure (it's rumored that Charles Dickens based his character Ebenezer Scrooge on Malthus) and in today's extremely bi-partisan environment - it's a pretty safe bet to say that he would be sitting in the Republican aisle of Congress. Nevertheless, and all politics aside, much of what has been attributed to Malthus has been reverse-engineered to make him sound like a cold-hearted elitist prude, which he wasn't. I only recommend reading this book and making up your own mind. Lastly, this is really one of my favorite polemics, so naturally I am biased; however, I can't help but see Malthus in many of my other favorite books: Jared Diamonds - *The Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed: Revised Edition*, Garrett Hardin's - *Living within Limits: Ecology, Economics, and Population Taboos*, Nafeez Ahmed - *A User's Guide to the Crisis of Civilisation: And How to Save it*, or Chris Martenson's - *The Crash Course: The Unsustainable Future Of Our Economy, Energy, And Environment*. I think the ideas of 'The Tragedy of the Commons', 'The Tyranny of Small Decisions', and even the great big theory of 'Darwinian Evolution', all have their genesis in Thomas Malthus and *An Essay on the Principle of Population*. This is a great book - possibly required reading even - and at about 175 pages, including the Introduction, I think everyone might want to read it.

as expected

Don't make the mistake of reading this book as text book for possible consequences of human overpopulation but read it as a remarkable essay based on a Christian sermon given in circa 1790

postulating the future of the world upon the advent of the great quantum leap of human development which was the Industrial Revolution. I think that Malthus' basic self-evident postulate of, "(A) population cannot increase without the means of subsistence", seems so simple as to be moronic but given the real possibility of the human population today as potentially acting as an evasive species upon the entire planet, the ramifications of this simple statement seem as relevant as ever. I don't think Malthus in his wildest imagination could have predicted that the scientific and industrial revolution that began in 1800 would enable the human population to go from just under 1 billion people at the time of the writing of his book to 8 billion people in a span of only a little over 200 years, (Incidentally it would take 300 years for an individual to just count to 8 billion!). So Hey! As someone who has worked on a farm and have also tried to live off of hunting and gathering, I have always been very skeptical of the prospect of the planet Earth NEVER reaching a saturation in terms of its potential for production of calories for human existence. And then one day, while researching the Milankovitch theory for a speech I was going to make on Human Migration, I accidentally find tucked away in some obscure report that the U.N. has indicated that we have reached the peak production of many grains, produce and other plant based foodstuffs and will never be able to increase production. While doing the research I also stumbled upon the Maltusian Theory and heck I recommend this little book of ideas to be read by anyone who feels like me, that there is something is funny about the world but can't quite figure out what it is. And what is that nagging feeling of doom? Don't read any further if you want to read Malthus for yourself...otherwise here it is: Malthus indicates that man's need for perpetual prosperity is indeed the ultimate mark of hubris which will eventually lead to the fall of mankind and that there is a divine, natural cycle for man which has been exercised for the previous 1 million years, (And needs to be once more)...Sustainability.

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