Introduction

SHANNON C. STIMSON

Thomas Robert Malthus, called Bob or Robert within his family, was born in 1766 at The Rookery, a country house in Wescott, near Dorking in Surrey, the sixth child of Daniel and Henrietta Malthus. Daniel Malthus was a country gentleman of independent means and moderately radical opinions, an acquaintance of both David Hume and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and an inspired devotee of the latter. The details of the young Malthus's life in the bosom of his large and closely intermarried family circle are reminiscent of a Jane Austen novel: the "affectionate and indulgent" mother of well-established societal standing; the mercurial, imperative, and peripatetic father.¹ Add to this inner circle the sensitive but dissolute older brother living abroad and who, dying prematurely, left six stepchildren, four legitimate heirs, and one "natural child";² the four sisters and seemingly endless numbers of intermarried, maiden, and widowed aunts, together with many cousins with their numerous offspring, several of whom did not survive infancy.³ Malthus's parents were second cousins and were themselves the product of more than a century of intermarriage among four families: the Daltons, Eckersalls, Malthuses, and Grahams. Malthus's mother was a Graham; his eventual wife and cousin, Harriet, an Eckersall. Many of these marriages arose from the proximity of professional association, as the Daltons, Eckersalls, and Malthuses were historically in some form of royal service, some from the time of Charles II. Daniel Graham (1695–1778) was Apothecary to George II and George III, and Malthus's grandfather on his mother's side, while Thomas Graham, Apothecary to George I and George II, was a direct lineal forebear of both of Malthus's parents.

Daniel Malthus kept his family in a state of almost perpetual movement from one country house to another from 1768 until 1787. In the midst of his family's continual dislocations, young Robert's education was largely entrusted to others and mostly away from home. His early education fell under the guidance of Rev. Richard Graves at the Claverton Rectory near Bath, and from 1782 under the personal direction of Gilbert Wakefield at the Warrington Dissenting Academy and in Wakefield's own home in

Lancashire. From 1784, Malthus studied—as Wakefield had done—at Jesus College, Cambridge, until graduating as Ninth Wrangler in mathematics, attaining the ninth highest First Class degree in that subject, in 1788. Malthus would later be elected a Fellow of the college in 1793.

Shortly after leaving Cambridge, in 1789, Malthus became a country curate in the Church of England, licensed by the Bishop of Winchester to serve the remote curacy of Okewood in the parish of Wotton, Surrey. Such an unlikely choice of career by such an obviously talented young intellect met with Malthus's own expressed desire for "a retired living in the country," and has been partially explained by the fact that Malthus suffered from birth from a devastating physical handicap due to a harelip and cleft palate.⁴ While his personal appearance was very little affected, and his deformity almost never discussed in public or private communications, the physical challenge of speaking must have been great, and his speech in the few rare instances it has been noted in print by his contemporaries was described as "stammering" and "horrid," or more generously as "the vowels sonorous, whatever might become of the consonants."⁵

As his biographer the late Patricia James has noted, it was "impossible to tell from the records how long young Robert actively served this curacy."⁶ However, the parish records of Okewood contain other pieces of information of relevance concerning Malthus's time there. The curate at Okewood, with its remote but beautiful thirteenth-century chapel, was so poor it lacked even a heating stove for the chapel until the mid-nineteenth century.⁷ Until 1829, there was no residence for the curate, and Malthus would have had to ride horseback nine miles to serve his parishioners. Too isolated to be licensed to perform marriages, Okewood Chapel's eighteenth-century register chronicled relatively few burials but a "prodigious number of baptisms, all children of the poor."⁸ As the entire Register of Okewood is reported to have contained not one individual described as "Esquire," the country folk who labored through Malthus's sermons and who brought their infants for baptism from a pewter bowl would have been basically those common laborers at the very bottom of a subsistence economy, and whose children survived on a basic diet of bread. Malthus would thus powerfully describe them in 1798:

The sons and daughters of peasants will not be found such rosy cherubs in real life, as they are described in romances. It cannot fail to be remarked by those who live much in the country, that the sons of labourers are very apt to be stunted in their growth, and are a long while arriving at maturity. Boys that you would guess to be fourteen or fifteen, are, upon enquiry, frequently found to be eighteen or nineteen.⁹

Despite the obvious personal challenges of public speaking, Malthus was also made Rector of Walesby in Lincolnshire in 1803, with its living of just over three hundred pounds per annum, which when combined with other sources of income enabled him in 1804 to marry his second cousin Harriet Eckersall, and provided him with a permanent income for the remainder of his life.¹⁰ A year later, Malthus additionally took up a position as Professor of Political Economy at the newly founded East-India College of Haileybury in Hertfordshire, a position which he also held until his death. Malthus's post at the East-India College was the first of its kind in England, and his movement from curate to professor of political economy reflected little alteration in the importance or content of his theological commitments. Historian Boyd Hilton has described the outset of the nineteenth century as one of an "age of atonement" positioned between Britain's two great ages of empire.¹¹ Malthus's more than two decades of training the young (between the ages of fifteen and eighteen), soon-to-be civil servants of the East India Company have been argued to be largely synchronous with his ever-closer alignment to the theological-utilitarian beliefs of the noted clergyman, natural theologian, and moral and political philosopher William Paley.

Paley's theology has been characterized by some historians of the period as essentially a mainstream Church of England position which saw the world as a state of trial and one that gave believers a chance to change their ways and modify their behavior.¹² The Paleyite position, suggesting a belief in the need for measuring man's commitment to moral principle by his strict attention to the consequences of his actions, would seem heuristically well-matched to the mission of imbuing newly minted administrators for the Indian service with the values of a practical theology of discipline and moral restraint. In drawing on a kind of Paleyite utilitarianism, Malthus adopted an understanding of Christian moral life that was indeed utilitarian in character, yet could never be epitomized by the terms of "implicit secular utilitarianism" that would render him "indistinguishable from those Benthamites who were to provide the early mainstay of neo-Malthusianism."¹³ Nevertheless, the Christian values or theodicy which Malthus espoused might be as easily discovered through attention to the first (1798) and second editions (1803) of his *Essay on the Principle of Population*, and his classes on political economy, as through his observance of any strictly formal religious theology. Indeed, much contemporary scholarship on Malthus has persuasively argued that considerations of Malthus's writings on population and political economy should not be sharply disengaged from his theological commitments.¹⁴ While questions of religion and theodicy remained important in the development of Malthus's principle

of population, certainly of great if not equal importance in shaping Malthus's demographic, moral, and political economic thinking in the period between 1798 and 1803 were writings of the political economist Adam Smith and the utopian writer William Godwin. Malthus's engagement with the work of both Smith and Godwin serve to place the 1803 edition of the *Essay* within the context of social, political, and economic reform in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Malthus assigned the work of Adam Smith a most important place in his thought and writing, and for many years harbored the idea of bringing out his own edition of the *Wealth of Nations*.¹⁵ Whether serving as the anvil in forging Malthus's attack in the first edition of the *Essay on Population* on the speculative visions ("phantom of the imagination") of William Godwin and Condorcet, or as his later point of departure in writing the *Principles of Political Economy* (1820) in offering critical commentary on David Ricardo's new political economy, Smith's orienting influence is there.¹⁶ This is not surprising, as Malthus was consistently a reactive and critical thinker, rather than a consummate theorist. His very first and unpublished work, "The Crisis," as well as the unsigned first *Essay*, were reactive precisely in this sense. However, despite what might be described as Smith's formative influence in Malthus's work, this is not, of course, how many of his critics and commentators from his own time to the present have tended to see their relationship.¹⁷ For example, when Malthus chose in the pages of the 1824 *Quarterly Review* to openly claim Smith as his ally in an emerging disciplinary divide between old and "new" schools of political economy,¹⁸ John Stuart Mill returned fire in the pages of the *Westminster Review* arguing that the difficulty of reconciling Malthus and Smith was insuperable.¹⁹

The debate was joined, and then as now Malthus has been required to carry a twin burden. On the one hand, the *Essay* in his own time was seen as opposing Smith's systematic thought with a loosely and erroneously labeled "dismal science," and of functioning as a demoralizer of an existing moral economy.²⁰ Beginning with Karl Polanyi in the twentieth century, commentators on the Smith-Malthus debate have persistently maintained this focus on the *Essay* in order to highlight Malthus's moral impoverishment of Smith's political economy through the introduction of a form of naturalism understood as biological reductionism. On the other hand, it has been suggested that Malthus's political economy presented a more extreme version of Smithian concepts such as the invisible hand, unintended consequences, or even, in his opposition to the Poor Law, laissez-faire. Although scholars recognize that this was not perhaps Malthus's own perception of

his enterprise, they have argued that in his hands, “more harshly than Smith, more practically than Mandeville,” private virtue had become “apparently pernicious” and “vice a source of benefit.”²¹ Certainly, Malthus’s theory of population is read fairly by some scholars to have exceeded Smith’s own reliance on unintended consequences, perhaps even to serve as a veritable test case for that “doctrine.”²² Thus, opinion remains sharply divided over whether Malthus’s effort in the first edition of the *Essay* should be understood as a direct challenge and subversion of Smith’s theory of progress,²³ or as at least originally, an actual defense of Smith’s moral and political economy from the critique leveled by another leading thinker of the eighteenth century, William Godwin.

Malthus’s initial, unpublished consideration of this question was inspired by social and political upheaval, as its title—“The Crisis”—readily confirms.²⁴ The crisis confronting Malthus appeared to take two forms: the continued political threat to Britain of the effects of an imploding French Revolution and war with France, and the visible “distresses and dissatisfactions” of a growing and increasingly immiserated rural laboring class at home.²⁵ The two were being dramatically brought together in his mind by a series of events involving the splits and defections occurring in the William Pitt administration in opposition to the war, public repression of protest, and high taxation consequent to it, and the simultaneous political debate engendered by “Mr. Pitt’s Poor Law Bill.” Malthus had yet to arrive at or at least record any systematic understanding of a population principle that might inform these debates.

At the time, Malthus had no theoretical or even systematic answer to this question. To address the immediate political crisis which French politics and the war were engendering in Britain under Pitt’s administration, he proposed a purely practical solution—“the revival of the true Whig principles in a body of the community sufficiently numerous and powerful to snatch the object of contention from the opposing factions,” which was to be found, he believed, in the “sense and reason of the country gentleman, and the middle classes of society.”²⁶ On the question of the means by which the crisis of the rural poor was to be alleviated, Malthus was more circumspect, supporting the Pitt proposal for continued parish relief but registering uncertainty about the principles that supported it. Acknowledging England’s growing number of indigent laboring poor, Malthus had at this point nothing systematic to say and could only comment in passing: “On the subject of population, I cannot agree with Archdeacon Paley, who says, that the quantity of happiness in any country is best measured by the

number of people. Increasing population is the most certain possible sign of the happiness and prosperity of a state; but the actual population may only be a sign of the happiness that is past.”²⁷

However, when Malthus turned to Godwin’s essay on “Avarice and Profusion,” in *The Enquirer* (1797), together with Godwin’s *An Enquiry into Political Justice and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (1793), he found just such an effort to offer a principled analysis of the very political and economic crises he was observing. It was in his opinion, however, a deeply flawed and—in the context of the times—unsettling proposal to connect a theory of man’s perfectible nature to a principle of diminishing population, and to enunciate a root-and-branch reform of both the constitution and the advancing commercial society over which it governed. In what might be described as Godwin’s futuristic utopia of Enlightenment rationalism, reason would so triumph over selfish interest that

The men therefore who exist when the earth shall refuse itself to a more extended population, will cease to propagate, for they will no longer have any motive, either of error or duty, to induce them. In addition to this they will perhaps be immortal. The whole will be a people of men, and not of children. Generation will not succeed generation, nor truth have in a certain degree to recommence her career at the end of every thirty years. There will be no war, no crimes, no administration of justice as it is called, and no government.²⁸

Malthus published a response. He found Godwin’s claims wholly lacking in either empirical or genuine logical thought, and felt Godwin’s “beautiful” system was “little better than a dream, a beautiful phantom of the imagination.”²⁹ Malthus chose to counter Godwin in a small, polemical, and unsigned piece, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, which Malthus chose to publicly acknowledge five years after its original publication in 1798. The reaction to the *Essay* was immediate and in most instances vitriolic.³⁰

While Malthus published but one edition of his *Principles of Political Economy* (1820) during his lifetime,³¹ he produced no fewer than six editions of the *Essay*, and in 1803 offered that “collection of a greater number of facts in elucidation of the general argument,” which he acknowledged in his original preface remained to be supplied.³² Indeed, while Malthus continued to make changes and adjustments through all the editions, it was clearly the second, 1803 edition that massively revised and reordered the original *Essay* to nearly four times its original length and has since been characterized as effectively a “separate work.”³³ It is this edition that remains the most fundamental statement of his work on population—the

Great Quarto—and it is upon this edition that all later corrections and revisions of the four following editions on which he spent the remainder of his life (1806, 1807, 1817, 1826) would be based. Thus, it must be considered the definitive text upon which Malthus placed his imprimatur and to which his innumerable critics responded. Importantly, it is the 1803 edition that confirmed Malthus's reputation as the leading political economist of the day until Ricardo's remarkable *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* appeared in 1817. Malthus's population principle was to remain a basic assumption of the writings of all the classical political economists up to and including John Stuart Mill.

The Great Quarto reflected a significant period of travel, as well as an extensive body of historical research and empirical observation of the demographics, climatic conditions, commodity prices, laws, and public services undertaken by Malthus in Scandinavia and continental Europe between 1799 and 1803. This material would become the basis of the two entirely new books 1 and 2 of the 1803 edition, and drew extensively upon his journals made during a six-month tour of Hamburg, the Duchies of Schleswig-Holstein, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Russia in 1799. He then traveled to France and Switzerland with his family and Harriet Eckersall between May and October 1802. Reaching beyond the material of his own observations and travel journals of the period, Malthus filled the twenty-six chapters of these two new books 1 and 2 with material prodigiously mined from the empirical, statistical, and historical research of others, including François Le Vaillant's personal 1790 account, *Voyage dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique*; Peter Simon Pallas's volumes of the 1780s on discoveries and voyages in different parts of the Russian Empire; Sir George Staunton's *Embassy to China* of 1797; and Jean Baptiste Duhalde's massive eighteenth-century account of China, *The General History of China Containing Geographical, Historical, Chronological, Political and Physical Description of the Empire of China. Chinese-Tartary, Corea and Tibet, Including an Exact and Particular Account of Their Customs, Manners, Ceremonies, Religion, Arts and Sciences*.³⁴ As his footnotes to the 1803 *Essay* document, Malthus drew also from the historical research of others on Ancient Greece and Rome, as well as from his exploration of the writings of Plato, Aristotle, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Julius Caesar, Plutarch, Tacitus, and Livy, and on comments upon climate in China by Montesquieu, and upon Roman and Greek cultural and political practices by David Hume and Edward Gibbon.

Stung by the charges of unoriginality and intellectual borrowing made about the 1798 *Essay*, or perhaps simply inspired to massively enlarge the

support for its fundamental argument, Malthus not only extended his project but undertook significant alterations in argument and inductive method, rewrote as well as added entirely new sections to the work, and widely acknowledged the work of others both in the preface and in copious notes to the work. The preface of the 1803 edition went to some length to reiterate for readers that in writing the original edition of the *Essay* while tucked away in the country, Malthus had had only available to him the likes of David Hume, Adam Smith, and the Revs. Robert Wallace and Richard Price. However, Malthus acknowledged that in the revisions undertaken for the 1803 edition, he had consulted as well the writings of Benjamin Franklin, the French *économistes*, Montesquieu, Sir James Steuart, Arthur Young, and Rev. Joseph Townsend. Indeed, Benjamin Franklin might legitimately be claimed to have anticipated several of Malthus's early ideas on population. However, with the publication of the second, 1803 edition, which Malthus produced—as Patricia James informs us—in an unknown “series of garrets” rented in London, Malthus moved far beyond these earlier thinkers in his own ability to collect and process an unparalleled research trove of demographic and economic data, and to connect population theory to poverty, wealth, and the growth of capital.³⁵

Malthus signaled the important advancement of his aims and contribution in the Great Quarto with the significant alteration of its title from that of a consideration of the principle of population “as it effects the future improvement of society, with remarks on the speculations of Mr Godwin, M. Condorcet, and other writers,” to its ambitious restatement of 1803: *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*. Commentators reflecting on the alteration and expansion of the 1803 edition, such as E. A. Wrigley, have noted that it consolidated Malthus's mature position, and that despite new material added to the later editions and the significant later alteration of the order of chapters, the work as a whole after the 1803 edition remained “recognizably the same”³⁶ The caesura created between his original polemic and the nearly quadrupled enlargement and alterations made in 1803 is definitive.³⁷ Malthus himself acknowledged the newness of the work at the conclusion of its preface, suggesting that “[t]hroughout the whole of the present work, I have so far differed in principle from the former, as to suppose another check to population possible, which does not strictly come under the head either of vice or misery.”³⁸ Malthus continued to maintain, throughout all the editions, his principle that population, if unchecked, had the tendency to outstrip the means of

subsistence. Yet, importantly, Malthus proceeded in the first chapter of the 1803 to formally label this new preventive check as “moral restraint,” arguing that “of the preventive checks, that which is not followed by irregular gratifications, may properly be termed moral restraint.”³⁹

The locus of this more complex preventive check was to be found in the regulating powers of a restraint from marriage, and Malthus clearly intended that the imputation of such a forward-thinking capacity in the laboring poor would not only “soften some of the harshest conclusions of the first essay” but also elevate the perception of his judgment of their capacity to address what were not unforeseen consequences of very early marriage.⁴⁰ The intended conclusion was that “the poverty and misery which prevail among the lower classes of society” was *not* “absolutely irremediable.”⁴¹ Certainly other scholars have noted that Malthus followed in these aims a kind of “theological utilitarian” belief in the need for measuring man’s commitment to moral principle by his “strict attention” to the consequences of his actions.⁴²

The impact of the Great Quarto of 1803 was immediately registered with positive, if not uncritical, reviews in the *Monthly Review*, the *Imperial Review*, and the Anglican periodical *British Critic*. And while Malthus’s harshest critics persisted among poets and literary essayists such as Robert Southey and William Hazlitt, among moralists such as William Cobbett, and economic reformers such as Robert Owen, and, later, by Nassau William Senior, the 1803 edition was now recognized as having moved beyond “a brilliant a priori polemic” to “a weighty empirical treatise and a third and fourth edition followed in 1806 and 1807.”⁴³ In Europe, the Quarto found readers through its German (1807) and French (1809) translations. In America, Thomas Jefferson wrote to Joseph Priestley in January 1804 offering the following assessment of Malthus’s Quarto: “Have you seen the new work of Malthus on population? It is one of the ablest I have ever seen. Although his main object is to delineate the effects of redundancy of population, and to test the poor laws of England, and other palliations for that evil, several important questions in political economy, allied to his subject incidentally, are treated with a masterly hand.”⁴⁴ Jefferson wrote in a similarly laudatory vein only a few days later to the French political economist Jean Baptiste Say, suggesting that he found it a work of “sound logic, in which some of the opinions of Adam Smith as well as of the economists, are examined.”⁴⁵

The influence and importance of Malthus’s work on population as definitively developed in the 1803 Quarto has been historically recognized to reach well into the middle and later decades of the nineteenth century

in the writings of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, and well beyond them to the debates over the “population bomb” of the mid-late twentieth century. Malthus’s twentieth-century biographer Patricia James alluded to his immediate influence in the first three decades of the nineteenth century when she wrote that the “currency” of the word “Malthusian” in the first three decades of that century could perhaps “be compared with the ‘Freudian’ about a century later, which was used by people who had little idea who Freud was, when or where he worked, or even what tenets he held.”⁴⁶ Malthus’s thought, and most importantly his “principle,” seemed to be assumed ever after, by writers of literature and of political and social thought, to be commonly understood.

Yet, more systematic studies of the tremendous resonance and impact of Malthus’s *Essay* are even now appearing, as with the five original, critical, and interpretive essays which accompany this complete edition of Malthus’s Great Quarto of 1803, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, by scholars in the fields of economic, political, and social history; demography; economics; and English literature.⁴⁷ The contributors to this volume were each tasked with addressing, in a set of new essays for readers and students of Malthus, what might be taken to be a signal or important contribution with regard to their own fields. What emerges in the essays that follow is a wide-ranging consideration of Malthus’s legacy which makes no pretense to be synoptic, but rather to suggest the remarkably creative and interdisciplinary significance of Malthus’s impact both in its scope and character. In the view of many at work in these and other scholarly disciplines, the 250th anniversary of Malthus’s birth has reinforced the need for a relaunch of his most famous work in its entirety, reissuing a complete version of his benchmark text that restores parts of the original now of current and particular interest both to historians and interdisciplinary scholars of the academic world concerned with what can be described as “global” issues.

In this volume, the importance of the 1803 *Essay* is the subject of renewed historical interest taken up in the essays by Niall O’Flaherty and Deborah Valenze. O’Flaherty’s essay, “Malthus and the History of Population,” successfully reorients contemporary scholarly understanding of just what Malthus might be understood to have been doing in terms of both his method and his political thought in the 1803 revision, by giving greater weight to the historical context of his theory, particularly as the principle of population purports to be an argument based on historical observation. It is this record of human experience, O’Flaherty suggests, “that comprises the ‘scientific’ underpinning” of all Malthus’s practical and policy recommendations. The essay by Deborah Valenze, “The Tortoise and the Hare:

Thomas Robert Malthus as Natural Philosopher,” enlarges upon the theme of Malthus’s focus on methodology in “natural philosophy” by placing his revisions of the first *Essay* within the framework of his need to “reinforce” history with hard data, and thus to follow “two paths” of research into the natural world. Malthus’s tours of Scandinavia, first through Germany and Denmark, then northward into Sweden and Norway, offered Malthus an opportunity “of gleaning information on reproduction and survival shaped by minimal interference of modernizing forces.” Valenze offers a fascinating look at Malthus’s methods of correlating vast amounts of meteorological data on European weather patterns and temperature fluctuations to buttress his more general theories on the power of nature and the balance of “prudential restraint” necessary to sustainable population growth. As Valenze notes, “Malthus’s understanding of rural life, supported by his empirical natural philosophy, belonged to a universe in which nature held the trump card capable of negating all efforts to match agricultural output with the level of population.” This view of nature was the basis of Malthus’s comparison of the relative speed of productive growth to that of population as a race between a tortoise and a hare. However, Valenze demonstrates that over time and in his more focused political economic writing, “the fury of Malthus’s concept of nature diminished, as it hovered over a carefully planned notion of economic life only distantly related to the communal table in Norway.”

E. A. Wrigley picks up the population principle as an element of emerging classical political economy in his essay “The Preventive Check and the Poor Law: The Malthusian Model and Its Implications.” Wrigley notes that Malthus “shared with the other classical economists the same concern about the implications of the impossibility of overcoming the ceiling set to material production by the limited amount of cultivatable land, but he added a further consideration that reinforced and extended his concern.” This consideration was his belief in the nature of two progressions—population growth and diminishing agricultural output—which would produce an ineliminable tension between population and production without the operation of either preventive checks or moral restraint. However, as Wrigley notes, the nature of the relationship between productive capacity and population was changing during Malthus’s lifetime “in ways that made his model of their linkages increasingly inapplicable.” Yet Wrigley also notes that one of Malthus’s most admired characteristics by later economists such as John Maynard Keynes was his willingness to modify his views based on empirical evidence. And evidence for this can be found in the 1803 edition, which Wrigley touches upon in his essay.

The contemporary economist and game theorist Kenneth Binmore reconsiders the question “Malthusian Economics: Right or Wrong?” in a quintessentially modern economic theorist’s consideration for the volume. Binmore suggests that no equations or other technicalities are needed to confirm that a properly stated version of this Malthusian doctrine is necessarily correct. Binmore rehearses some of the strongest contemporary claims resisting what he interprets as the most general Malthusian principle—that something cannot grow without bound if there is a bound which it cannot exceed. He suggests that contemporary resistance to this principle has rested on technological growth and advances in scientific food production rather than a continued focus on population control. In a fascinating yet contrarian argument, Binmore suggests that the wager on technology growth rather than population restraint is a very uncertain one. In an important sense, Binmore’s reflections on the continuing contemporary policy relevance of Malthus’s perspective revive something of the spirit of those who remarked that Malthus and his concerns with scarcity had been buried many times, but that “anyone who has been buried so often cannot be entirely dead.”⁴⁸

The final essay for the volume reaches beyond Malthus’s influence in either natural science or economics and takes up his afterlife in literature. In “The Cultural and Literary Significance of the 1803 *Essay*,” Karen O’Brien explores the considerable cultural and literary influence of Malthus’s work when set in the political, social, and cultural contexts of the first few decades after its publication: “The Napoleonic wars, political controversy about poverty and food scarcity, cultural debate about the rate and age of marriage, and, more specifically, the significance of the findings of the first British censuses of 1801, 1811, and 1821.” O’Brien notes that the “disconnected subhistory of the poorer part of mankind,” together with the significance of the “cognitive deficit” which Malthus ascribed to those members of society most likely to be affected by the “positive check,” was not lost on the Romantic anti-Malthusians and other early critics of the *Essay* such as William Wordsworth in the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798. However, Wordsworth’s perspective altered by 1814 to offer more a plea for moral and religious education, which Malthus shared in *The Excursion*. Juxtaposed to a Romantic conservatism that found its origins “in the powerful negative inspiration of Malthus’s ideas,” O’Brien chronicles other kinds of literary and didactic writings of the period that drew upon Malthus for a new type of literary realism and advocated for individual moral responsibility in the face of hostile economic and social conditions. Beyond the more frequently referenced Evangelical economists thought to take up the

Malthusian problem, O'Brien focuses on the work of literary figures, such as the poet George Crabbe, a great favorite with Jane Austen, and Austen herself, as well as other women writers of importance—Maria Edgeworth (*Castle Rackrent*, 1800), Elizabeth Hamilton, George Eliot (*Adam Bede*, 1859), Elizabeth Gaskell (*Mary Barton*, 1848), and Harriet Martineau (*Illustrations of Political Economy*, 1832–1834)—to suggest the depth and range of the *Essay*'s literary and cultural reach.

The volume's editor has taken the position that the contributors' essays are intended to introduce educated readers and scholars to a diverse set of contemporary interdisciplinary understandings and approaches to the wide-reaching impact of Malthus's work, rather than to attempt to settle in a single place a myriad of interpretive debates. The very breadth of impact of the 1803 edition of the *Essay* on so many fields of the humanities and social sciences has stimulated multiple approaches to thinking about this pivotal work and has mitigated against the effort either to impose a single interpretive framework or to attempt to weave one connective tissue through the interpretive essays. As such, this volume captures the renewed intervention into the political and cultural impact of a profoundly influential work of political economic thinking in the early and mid-decades of the nineteenth century. It is our hope that this volume will be of great use to both students and scholars of Malthus, of the history of political and economic thought, and of the intellectual and social history of the period. It conveys as well our confidence in the continued resonance and significance of T. R. Malthus's thought to scholarly and contemporary debate even in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

1. Patricia James, *Population Malthus: His Life and Time* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 13. Malthus died after a brief illness on 29 December 1834 from what is generally believed to have been heart disease or some disorder of the heart. He is buried in Bath Abbey. Many of the most important details of Malthus's life and family, and much of what we know of the personal context of his work, we know thanks to this monumental biography by James, based on nearly twenty years of biographical research into his personal and family papers, and in the public records. James has given us not only Malthus's definitive biography but also a definitive, two-volume variorum edition of his masterwork, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, based on the 1803 edition with the varia of 1806, 1807, 1816, and 1826 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). James has given us

as well an immensely valuable edition of *The Travel Diaries of T. R. Malthus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), including the Scandinavian journal from 1799, when the second edition of the *Essay* was already in the planning, and from his Continental travels in 1810, 1825, and 1826. James's unrivalled research as presented in these three scholarly resource works has been drawn upon for a number of details concerning Malthus's life and travels discussed below. In addition, important contemporary reflections on Malthus's life and his historical significance have been recently brought to light by Robert Mayhew's biography, *Malthus: The Life and Legacies of an Untimely Prophet* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014). Any errors of fact or interpretation that remain are the responsibility of this author alone.

2. James, *Population Malthus*, 39.
3. *Ibid.*, 6–9.
4. James Bonar, *Malthus and His Work*, 2nd ed. (London: Allen and Unwin, 1924), 9, cited in James, *Population Malthus*, 3.
5. Henry Holland, *Recollections of Past Life* (London: Longmans, 1872), 4; Maria Edgeworth quoted in *Maria Edgeworth: Letters from England, 1813–1844*, ed. Christina Colvin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 331; Harriet Martineau, *Harriet Martineau's Autobiography*, 2nd ed. (London: Smith, Elder, 1877), 1:327–328, cited in James, *Population Malthus*, 3.
6. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. James, 1:ix. As James notes there, Malthus obtained the title to the curacy in 1824 and held it until his death.
7. James, *Population Malthus*, 45.
8. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. James, 1:ix.
9. T. R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population as It Affects the Future Improvement of Society with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers* (1798), in *The Works of Thomas Robert Malthus*, ed. E. A. Wrigley and David Souden (London: W. Pickering, 1986), 1:29–30 (original pagination, 71–76; hereafter *First Essay*). One topic of contemporary as well as historical concern, that of Malthus's objections to birth control in the form of artificial methods of contraception, are briefly addressed by two of the contributors to this volume (Binmore and O'Brien). Both consider aspects of an answer offered most frequently by historians, which is to recur to Malthus's status as an Anglican priest. It would seem important to add as well that Malthus's objections to effective birth control were consonant with his theological opinions about the providential purposes served by population pressures, and would not be fairly dismissed as the emanations of any personal shyness or prudery. Indeed, I am reminded that

Malthus was certainly aware that his proposals for the delay of marriage could not entirely alleviate the pressures of population growth as he understood them, and that the vices of prostitution and abortion were the likely byproducts of this dilemma. The editor wishes to thank an anonymous press reader for emphasizing the importance of this aspect of Malthus's theological perspective.

10. A. M. C. Waterman, *Revolution, Economics, and Religion: Christian Political Economy, 1798–1833* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 83–85. As Waterman notes, there was no record either of Malthus giving up the stipendiary curacy of Okewood nor of a new curate's appointment being made there. See also Donald Winch, *Malthus: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 14. Winch is the editor of the abridged, one-volume version of the 1803 *Essay* based on Patricia James's variorum edition together with a separate editor's introduction. See T. R. Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population; or, A View of Its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness*, ed. Donald Winch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). This edition did not print large sections of books 1 and 2, which this present complete edition has now restored.
11. Boyd Hilton, *The Age of Atonement: The Influence of Evangelicalism on Social and Economic Thought, 1795–1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).
12. For a classic statement of this position, see Waterman, *Revolution, Economics, and Religion*, 146–147, 172. But see also the important work on this subject by Donald Winch in “Robert Malthus: Christian Moral Scientist, Arch-Demoralizer, or Implicit Secular Utilitarian?” *Utilitas* 5, no. 2 (November 1993): 239–253, and *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
13. For a discussion of Malthus in the context of his secular opponents and followers, as well as his contemporary interpretation by economic historians, see Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, 243.
14. The relationship of Malthus's developing ideas on population to religious orthodoxy and theodicy, from their first expression in 1798 to their suggested reformulation by 1803 as well as later, has been one of considerable debate in the literature on all the editions of the *Essay*. This debate reflects importantly on an understanding of the critical reactions to Malthus's *Essay* within both the Church of England and by Christian political economists and reformers, which has been productively discussed by these authors, as well as others, and is not developed further here. However, for two important examples of this debate, see J. M. Pullen, “Malthus' Theological Ideas and Their

- Influence on His Principle of Population,” *History of Political Economy*, 13, no. 1 (1981): 39–54, and Boyd Hilton, “Malthus and the Dismal Science,” *Times Literary Supplement*, 16 August 1996, 9.
15. Donald Winch, *Malthus: A Very Short Introduction*, 15
 16. *First Essay*, 65 (original pagination, 175). Malthus’s considerations of the work of Robert Owen would usurp Malthus’s earlier focus on Godwin by the 1817 edition. See also Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. James, 1:xii.
 17. E. A. Wrigley has written an important essay on the pitfalls of drawing an extreme distinction between the interests of Smith and Malthus in the limits to growth and the implications of “population, resources and environment, a viewpoint they shared with David Ricardo.” See Wrigley, “The Limits to Growth: Malthus and the Classical Economists,” in *Population and Resources in Western Intellectual Traditions*, ed. M. S. Teitelbaum and J. M. Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 30–48, 30–31.
 18. See Malthus’s critical review of J. R. McCulloch’s “Essay on ‘Political Economy,’” *Supplement to the Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. VI, part I (Edinburgh, 1823),” *Quarterly Review* 30, no. 6 (1828): 297–334.
 19. Mill’s exact words are, “The difficulty of serving God and Mammon is proverbial, but it is a mere trifle in comparison with that of reconciling Mr. Malthus and Adam Smith.” See John Stuart Mill, “The Quarterly Review, no. LX, Art. 1 ‘On the Essay on Political Economy, in the Supplement to the Encyclopaedia Britannica,’” *Westminster Review* 3, no. 5 (January 1825): 213–232, reprinted in Bernard Semmel, ed., *Occasional Papers of T. R. Malthus on Ireland, Population, and Political Economy from Contemporary Journals Written Anonymously and Hitherto Uncollected* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1963), 211–230.
 20. For a valuable discussion of the contemporary literature on Malthus as “arch demoralizer,” see Winch, “Robert Malthus.”
 21. John Burrow, *Whigs and Liberals* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 59
 22. *Ibid.*, 59. Burrow adds, “In embracing Political Economy and defending Malthus, the Philosophic Radicals accepted the doctrine of unintended consequences in economic life as one of their chief defining characteristics, and so won a large part of their reputation for being harsh, unfeeling, and coldly mechanical” (59).
 23. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty* (New York: Knopf, 1984), 107–122.
 24. “The Crisis, a View of the Present State of Britain, by a Friend to the Constitution.” Surviving paragraphs of his unpublished pamphlet of 1796 may be seen in Bernard Semmel’s reprint of William Empson’s memoir, “Life,

Writings, and Character of Mr. Malthus," as originally published in the *Edinburgh Review*, January 1837, 469–506. See Semmel, ed., *Occasional Papers of T. R. Malthus*, 231–268.

25. Patricia James notes that at the close of the eighteenth century, the poor of England were "near starvation," and their condition in 1800 was to be exacerbated by another late harvest. In Yorkshire, robberies of storehouses and inns were increasing as one local observer noted: "That want must surely be dreadful, which would brave the gallows to obtain a single meal." James, *Population Malthus*, 86. Indeed, William Empson noted in his 1837 *Edinburgh Review* memoir that as of 1796, Malthus's position on population was at best at its "threshold," and that "he had seen so little of his way" that Malthus was at that point a "warm advocate of Mr. Pitt's Poor Law bill and of the *jus trium liberorum*," which in the tradition of the Roman Empire rewarded families producing three or more children with state supplements. See Semmel, ed., *Occasional Papers of T. R. Malthus*, 244, 246. James Bonar quoted William Pitt's 1796 speech in Parliament reprising the principle: "Let us make relief a matter of right and honor. This will make a large family a blessing and not a curse; this will draw a proper line of distinction between those who are to provide for themselves by their labour and those who after enriching their country with a number of children, have claim upon its assistance for their support." Bonar, *Malthus and His Work* (London: Macmillan, 1885), 127.
26. "The Crisis," quoted in Semmel, ed., *Occasional Papers of T. R. Malthus*, 241.
27. *Ibid.*, 244.
28. William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on General Virtue and Happiness* (London: G. G. Robinson, 1793), vol. 2, book 8, chap. 7, p. 871. William Godwin, *The Enquirer. Reflections on Education, Manners, and Literature. In A Series of Essays* (London: G. G. and J. Robinson, 1797).
29. *First Essay*, 1:64–65 (original pagination, 173–178).
30. Notable among his many savage critics, which famously included the poets Samuel Coleridge, William Wordsworth, and Robert Southey, were also Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who characterized the principle of population as "this vile, infamous theory, this hideous blasphemy against nature and mankind." See Karl Marx, *Capital*, ed. Ernest Mandel (New York: Vintage, 1977), 1:472–473n27. See also Friedrich Engels, "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy," in *Collected Works of Karl Mark and Frederick Engels* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 3:437. Of course, Malthus's supporters have characterized the work otherwise, though hardly less extremely, as when John Maynard Keynes praised the *Essay* as a landmark in

economic thought and one “profoundly in the English tradition of human science . . . a tradition marked by the love of truth and most noble lucidity, by a prosaic sanity free from sentiment and metaphysic, and by an immense disinterestedness and public spirit.” See Keynes, *Essays in Biography*, in *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes*, ed. Elizabeth Johnson and Donald Moggridge (London: Macmillan, 1972), 10:86.

31. The second, 1836 edition, with his substantial changes all but complete, appeared shortly after his death.
32. *First Essay*, 1:i (original pagination, i–iii).
33. T. R. Malthus, *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. A New Edition, Very Much Enlarged* (London: J. Johnson, 1803; reprint New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2017) (hereafter *Essay of 1803*); James, *Population Malthus*, 81.
34. James, *Population Malthus*, 94 nn. 34–35.
35. *Ibid.*, 79, 81.
36. *First Essay*, 1:8.
37. James, *Population Malthus*, 81.
38. *Essay of 1803*, 5. Throughout, the page numbers cited for this work are to the present edition.
39. *Ibid.*, 19.
40. *Ibid.*, 5. Debate exists over whether moral restraint is perhaps implied in the first *Essay*. However, the specific terminology and the direct clarification of this preventative appears first in the much more mature and comprehensive work of the Great Quarto. William Empson, in particular, emphasized the importance to Malthus of the introduction of moral restraint in the 1803 edition, in that “he hoped that he had ‘not violated the principles of just reasoning, nor expressed any opinion respecting the probable improvement of society, in which he was not borne out by the experience of the past.’” (*Ibid.*) For Empson, its introduction in the second edition was a recognition that “as civilization practically descended into the mass of the people, the influence of moral restraint upon the course of the population might become more and more perceptible.” Semmel, ed., *Occasional Papers of T. R. Malthus*, 250.
41. *Essay of 1803*, 5. Malthus’s belief in the potential of moral restraint persisted within his theory and perhaps sought to reach beyond his own experience as a rural rector. Church records document that Malthus presided over two marriages of poor and illiterate couples at his parish in May 1804. The same records also indicate that he christened the first child of one of the couples on

2 September. The Walesby register records that this same mother gave birth to thirteen children over the course of her lifetime, losing four to infant death before the age of six months. James, *Population Malthus*, 164.

42. See Hilton, *The Age of Atonement*; Winch, *Riches and Poverty*, 243; and Timothy L. Alborn, "Boys to Men: Moral Restraint at Haileybury College," in *Malthus, Medicine, and Morality: "Malthusianism" after 1798*, ed. Brian Dolan (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 33–55.
43. Lord Robbins, foreword, in James, ed., *Travel Diaries of T. R. Malthus*, viii. Robert Southey published a withering review of the work in the *Annual Review* for 1803 (London: T. N. Longman and O. Rees, 1804), 292–300.
44. Thomas Jefferson to Joseph Priestly, 29 January 1804, in *Writings of Jefferson*, ed. A. E. Bergh (Washington, D.C.: Jefferson Memorial Association, 1903), 10:447–448.
45. Thomas Jefferson to Jean Baptiste Say, 1 February 1804, in *ibid.*, 11:1–3. Say would hold fundamental disagreements with Malthus on the political economic question of effectual demand and the possibility of systemic gluts, on which themes, later economists such as John Maynard Keynes, writing in the aftermath of the Great Depression, held Malthus to have had the better of the argument. For discussions of American antebellum attitudes supporting or opposing Malthus's population principle, see C. Vann Woodward, *American Counter-Point: Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), chap. 3; Robert Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: Norton, 1989), chap. 5; and Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Genovese, "Slavery, Economic Development, and the Law: The Dilemma of Southern Political Economists, 1800–1860," *Washington and Lee Law Review* 41, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 1–29.
46. James, *Population Malthus*, 346.
47. See Robert Mayhew, *Malthus: The Life and Legacies of an Untimely Prophet* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014). The remarkable new contribution to Malthus scholarship by Alison Bashford and Joyce E. Chaplin, *The New Worlds of Thomas Robert Malthus: Rereading the Principle of Population*, appeared too late to be incorporated in the considerations of the volume. It is clear, however, that Bashford and Chaplin have focused important and new attention on Malthus's fundamental reworking of the first *Essay* in the Great Quarto of 1803 as "altogether different in both scale and content," and on the need for a new edition and reprinting of the 1803 *Essay*, which it is hoped this new edition goes some way to provide. Bashford and Chaplin, *The New Worlds of Thomas Robert Malthus: Rereading the Principle of Population* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2016), 10.

48. Remarks to this effect have been attributed both to the late ecologist Garrett Hardin, perhaps best known as author of “The Tragedy of the Commons,” *Science*, 13 December 1968, 1243–1248, and quoted again by the late Herman E. Daly, *Steady-State Economics: The Economics of Biophysical Equilibrium and Moral Growth*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1991), 42–43.