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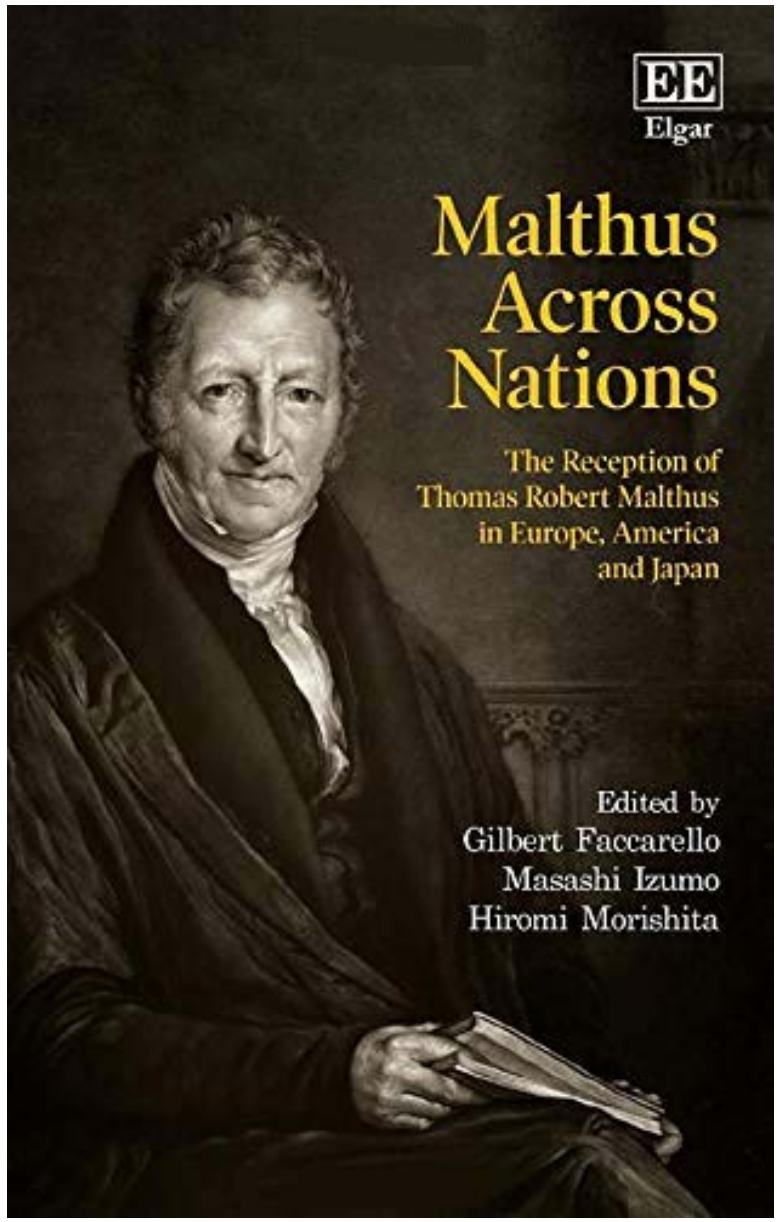
‘Enlightened Saint Malthus’ or the ‘gloomy Protestant of dismal England’? The reception of Malthus in the French language



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Contents

Abstract and acknowledgements

Abstract. Malthus's works were extensively discussed in France during the nineteenth century, raising numerous lively controversies. The present chapter is a first outline history of these receptions. The circumstances and intellectual context in which Malthus's works circulated in French-speaking countries have first to be highlighted: an assessment of some legacies from the eighteenth century is thus in order before studying the complex history of the various editions of Malthus's works in the French language. The reception of Malthus's *Principles of Political Economy* and *Definitions in Political Economy*, which led to direct exchanges with Jean-Baptiste Say, is then examined. While these discussions remained confined to specialised literature, the *Essay on the Principle of Population*, by contrast, provoked huge controversies over pauperism, morals and the social question: their most salient points are then examined. The chapter concludes with the evolution of the discussions towards the end of the period, when Malthus's name came to be associated with social Darwinism, neo-Malthusianism and some changing views on population, which shifted the emphasis from its quantity to its quality. An appendix gives a few examples of how the controversies over the *Essay* found an echo in the works written by the most celebrated novelists of the time.

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Introduction

> A man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents . . . and if society do not want his labour, has no claim of *right* to the smallest portion of food . . . 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. (Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 1803)

> Malthusian carnivora . . . you shall never persuade the people . . . that, with the exception of yourselves, there is one too many on the earth. (Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, 'Les Malthusiens', 1848)

> . . . as barbarous as this passage might seem, the fact remains that it is the expression of truth. (Gustave de Molinari, *Les soirées de la rue Saint-Lazare*, 1849)

WHILE NOT NECESSARILY PROPERLY READ and understood, Malthus's main works were extensively discussed in French-speaking countries until the First World War. The number of editions of the French translation of his *Essay on the Principle of Population* is astonishing: while the first edition in 1798 seems to have gone unnoticed, eight editions of translations of the successive versions were published during the first half of the nineteenth century, from 1809 onward. Moreover, large excerpts of the second, 1803, edition were published as early as 1805, and abridged editions came out during the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Malthus's *Principles of Political Economy* (first and second editions) and *Definitions in Political Economy* were not overlooked, but less extensively discussed. This certainly made France a special case in the study of the reception of Malthus, all the more if we realise that French books in political economy were also read and used in some non-French-speaking continental countries.

This chapter studies the reasons for this success and the logic of the different receptions. Throughout the nineteenth century, however, Malthus's works raised numerous lively controversies, and the literature is immense. As a consequence, the present investigation had to be limited to some main themes and authors and forms a first outline history of these receptions.[1] It is organised as

[1] On some specific points see Armengaut (1966, 1968, 1975), Gani (1979), Ronsin (1979,

follows. First, it is important to stress the typical circumstances and intellectual context in which Malthus's works circulated in French-speaking countries — an environment where the spirit of the Enlightenment and the hectic events of the French Revolution had a huge impact. In this perspective, an assessment of certain legacies from the eighteenth century is in order (section 1) before studying the complex history of the various editions of Malthus's works in the French language (section 2). The reception of Malthus's *Principles* and *Definitions*, which raised more technical discussions than the *Essay* and led to a direct confrontation with Jean-Baptiste Say, is then examined (section 3). While these discussions remained more or less confined to some specialised literature, the *Essay* on population, by contrast, was widely discussed and provoked huge controversies over pauperism, morals and the social question: the most salient points in these discussions are then examined (section 4). The chapter concludes with the evolution of the discussions towards the end of the period, when Malthus's name came to be associated with social Darwinism, neo-Malthusianism and certain changing views on population which shifted the emphasis from its quantity to its quality (section 5). Finally, an appendix gives an indication on how the controversies over the *Essay* impacted public opinion and found an echo in the works of the most celebrated novelists of the time.

1980), Charbit (1981, 1988, 2004), Lécuyer (1984), Perrot (1984), Béjin (1984, 1988b), Drouard (1992), Bernardini (1997), Tapinos (1999), Breton and Klotz (2006), Fréry (2014), Feretti and Pelletier (2015), Hello (2016), MacDonald (2017).

1 Setting the stage: legacies from the Enlightenment

TO UNDERSTAND THE MAIN FEATURES of the reception of Malthus in the French language, an assessment of certain legacies from the Enlightenment is in order, on themes which played an important role in this reception: population,[2] of course, but also the possibility of economic crises.

1.1 Population and power

The first point to note is the appearance, in the French language, of the word 'population' itself. This happened roughly during the fifth decade of the eighteenth century, especially in the writings of Victor Riqueti de Mirabeau, François Véron de Forbonnais and François Quesnay who all greatly contributed to its diffusion. In 1756, Mirabeau published the first volume of his celebrated series, with 'population' in the title: *L'Ami des hommes, ou Traité de la population*. Forbonnais, in the entry 'Commerce' of the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (vol. III, 1753), used the word 12 times; Quesnay used it twice in the entry 'Fermiers' (Encyclopédie, vol. VI, 1756) but 35 times in 'Grains' (Encyclopédie, vol. VII, 1757) and 63 times in his (at that time) unpublished manuscript 'Hommes' (Théré and Rohrbasser 2002). A few years later were published *L'homme en société, ou Nouvelles vues politiques et économiques pour porter la population au plus haut degré en France*, by Henri Goyon de la Plombanie (1763), and Jean-Daniel Herrenschwand's treatise, *De l'économie politique moderne. Discours fondamental sur la population* (1786).

The importance for a country of its number of inhabitants was hardly a new theme. Throughout the *Ancien régime*, many of the writings on the subject were variations on a celebrated sentence by Jean Bodin who, in Book V, Chapter 2 of *Les six livres de la République* (1576) asserted that 'one should never be afraid of too many subjects, too many citizens: since there are no riches nor strength other than men' — ('il n'y a richesse, ni force, que d'hommes')

[2] On the views on population during the *Ancien Régime*, the literature is abundant. A classical study is Spengler (1942). On the history of the French population during the *Ancien Régime* and our period, see Dupâquier (ed.), (1988a, 1988b).

(Bodin [1576] 1579, 491). This sentence was picked up in the so-called 'mercantilist' literature — the 'science of commerce' or, in France, 'political commerce' — and became a kind of populationist motto. It should be noted, however, that, in this assertion, Bodin was not referring to economic problems: he was dealing with the question of the strength and stability of a State or form of government. The first sentence of this chapter is: 'Of all the causes of sedition and change of Republics, the most powerful are the excessive wealth of a few subjects and the poverty of most people' (Bodin 1576 [1579], 488). After the celebrated sentence quoted above, Bodin adds:

> [A] vast number of citizens ... always prevents sedition and factions from happening: all the more so when many are in the middle between the rich and the poor, the good and the bad, the wise and the fool: and there is nothing more dangerous than when the subjects are divided into two groups without a middle, which happens in Republics where there are too few citizens. (Bodin 1576 [1579], 491)

The purpose that Bodin had in mind — political stability, a very topical theme during the troubled times of the Wars of Religion in France — was subsequently forgotten and the celebrated sentence was transformed into a motto ('il n'est de richesse que d'hommes', that is, there are no riches other than men). It has long been asserted that the 'number of people' was a sign of the power of a realm, a source of men for armies and a basis for taxation. The number of inhabitants was also seen as the beneficent source of economic activities, and, referring to Bodin's phrase, it was commonly thought that 'one should never be afraid of too many subjects, too many citizens'. Antoine de Montchrestien, in his *Traicté de l'œconomie politique* (1615), expressed this opinion well. The same idea can be found in Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*: 'the more men there are in any state, there commerce flourishes the more' (Montesquieu 1721 [1964]: 123). Diderot later expressed the same opinion in the entry 'Hommes' of the *Encyclopédie*: 'Men have value through their number; the more a society is populous, the more it is powerful in time of peace, the more it is frightful in time of war. A monarch should thus be seriously be concerned with the multiplication of his subjects' (Diderot 1765 [1995], 47). After an eclipse during the first decades of the nineteenth century, and contrary to Malthusian ideas, this approach became increasingly popular again after the 1850s.

1.2 Population and agriculture

The link with agriculture was of course established and authors easily recognised that the size of the population depends on the amount of available means of subsistence. A well-known echo of this concern can be found in Richard Cantillon's *Essai sur la nature du commerce en général*. Writing in the late 1720s or early 1730s, and comparing men with animals, he stressed that 'men multiply like mice in a barn if they have unlimited means of subsistence' (Cantillon 1755 [1931], 83): 'the multiplication of animals has no other bounds than the greater or less means allotted for their subsistence. It is not to be doubted that if all land were devoted to the simple sustenance of man the race would increase up to the number that the land would support' (Cantillon 1755 [1931], 67). In a more elliptic way, we again find the same idea in Montesquieu's *De l'esprit des lois*: 'Wherever a place is found in which two persons can live commodiously, there they enter into marriage. Nature has a sufficient propensity to it, when unrestrained by the difficulty of subsistence. A rising people increase and multiply extremely ... The contrary ... is the case when a nation is formed' (Monstesquieu 1748 [1964], 689).

All this became common knowledge. But the link with agriculture was not merely stated as evidence: it was also refined, taking into account several factors influencing agriculture and consequently the quantity of food produced. A first obvious factor lies in climate and natural events, which cause the succession of good or bad years. But other important factors are also active, which can have a deep impact on agricultural supply: the use that is made of land, for example. Land is never entirely used for the production of food: an important part of it is covered with woods and forests, gardens and parks, or devoted to the growing and feeding of animals — all elements that Cantillon mentioned, insisting on the role of the landowners (Cantillon 1755 [1931], 81).

Montesquieu developed similar ideas (Montesquieu 1748 [1964], Book XXIII, Chapters 14 and 15), insisting on two points. First, the different agricultural activities do not possess the same influence on employment and population — the various kinds of agricultural products are not equivalent as regards the number of people employed, and countries cultivating rice, for instance, such as Japan (Montesquieu 1720-55 [1964], 1053), can sustain more people than those cultivating corn (Montesquieu 1748 [1964], 690). Second, the structure of landed property also plays a role. A country divided into properties of approx-

imately the same size can develop a large population, while an unequal structure of landed property cannot, unless manufactures are developed in order to induce landlords to produce more to finance their 'superfluities' (Montesquieu 1748 [1964], 690). This theme of the structure of landed property would be discussed again in the Malthus debates.

It should be noted, however, that this stress placed on agriculture and food was not considered as a threat and did not create any kind of pessimistic forecast for the long run. Moreover, it was precisely in this positive context that the image of the 'nature's mighty feast' was used in France. Hecht (1984, 78, n. 13 and 14) gives two examples of this literature, extracted from Étienne-Gabriel Morelly (1755, 23): 'The world is a table sufficiently laden [with food] for all the guests', and Louis-Gabriel Du Buat-Nançay (1773, I, 187): 'The King of this universe ... prepared a magnificent show, ... an immense feast, ... which increases as the number of guests grows. ... He ordered the first guests and their successors ... to bring their fellow men to this great theatre, to this inexhaustible banquet, as many as they could exist'. Prospects of overpopulation were thus not on the agenda. What was topical, instead, was the opposite: the fear of depopulation.

1.3 The fear of depopulation

The most important authors of the period shared the widespread but erroneous belief that for a long time, the population had been steadily decreasing in France — and sometimes not only in France but in Europe as a whole. It was Quesnay's opinion, for example, that France had lost one-third of its population in a century: he noted that, in his days, the population was estimated to be 16 million people (1757-58 [2005], 260-1), whereas it was supposed to have been 24 million one century before (1757-58 [2005], 259). But the most detailed and eloquent pages are to be found in the *Lettres persanes* (1721 [1964], Letters 112 to 122) and *De l'esprit des lois* (1748 [1964], Book XXIII) of Montesquieu, who conferred his authority to the subject and ensured its widespread circulation. 'Thou hast perhaps not considered a thing which is a continual subject of wonder to me' Montesquieu wrote. 'How comes the world to be so thinly peopled, in comparison to what it was formerly? How hath nature lost the prodigious fruitfulness of the first ages?' His answer depicts the situation in a most dramatic way.

> According to a calculation, as exact as can be made in matters of this nature, I find there is hardly upon the earth the tenth part of the people that there was in ancient times. And what is very astonishing, is, that it becomes every day less populous: and, if this continues, in ten ages it will be no other than a desert. This ... is the most terrible catastrophe that ever happened in the world. (Montesquieu 1721 [1964], 121)

The real concern was therefore depopulation, a fear which may seem strange to the modern reader, who knows that, although the birth rate started to decrease in France during the eighteenth century and this diminution remained a structural feature of French society, the population had never been so abundant. However, it should be remembered that, under the *Ancien Régime*, the exact size of the population was unknown and estimates were in any case strategic information, a secret of State. The question was thus that of the causes of depopulation. The most obvious factors were the continuous wars, and major political events such as the 1685 Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. These are precisely the elements favoured by Quesnay (Quesnay 1757-58 [2005], 259-60). Another factor lies in the way of life, the preferences and tastes of the people, especially the wealthy classes. Montesquieu insists (see for example 1748 [1964], 687) that this also plays a part in the attitude of people towards family. But among the most powerful factors are the nature of the political regime and the religion prevailing in it.

(1) The nature of the political regime is a paramount variable. When the constitution of a State respects the liberty and the property of the citizens, this creates a strong incentive for people to better their condition and develop economic activities. In such circumstances, they are not afraid to have children. In despotic States, however, where ownership is uncertain and all is subject to arbitrary decisions, the opposite is true. This is, Montesquieu stresses, one of the most powerful reasons for poverty and depopulation, because its origin is permanent and, unlike storms, earthquakes or wars, it depresses people on a long-term basis (Montesquieu 1721 [1964], 127). The size of political sovereignties also influences that of the population. During the Middle Ages, the different sovereignties were small, local wars were frequent, and for a lord the only means to keep his sovereignty and to protect it against aggression was to favour a high level of population. But the merging of these sovereignties and the establishment of large States destroyed this kind of concern, thus provoking a decrease in the number of inhabitants (Montesquieu 1748 [1964], 696).

(2) The role of religion is also material, and this argument was to re-emerge some decades later in the Malthus debates. According to Montesquieu — but this was a widespread belief — the Catholic Church was in part responsible for the depopulation of Europe. In *Lettres persanes*, for example, Letters 114 to 119 exemplify at length the role of religion with, as far as the Catholic Church was concerned, an accent on the prohibition of divorce, the forced celibacy of the priests, the huge mismanaged properties of the Church, and the institution of convents and monasteries. 'I might venture to say, that, in the present state of Europe, it is not possible the Catholic religion should subsist there five hundred years' (Montesquieu 1721 [1964], 124). The contrast between Protestant and Catholic countries is striking: 'Trade gives life to everything among the ones, but monachism carries death everywhere among the others' (1721 [1964], 124).

The gloomy prospect of the depopulation of France vanished after the French Revolution but was to return to the agenda from the 1850s onward. Some eighteenth-century authors, however, already disagreed with the prevailing opinion[3] and some of them tried to measure the French population more accurately.

1.4 Population, wealth and power

While the importance of the population size for a State was a common wisdom during the French Enlightenment, an important question remained pending: how could authors assert that a huge population could be maintained without provoking poverty for a great number of people? In other words, why does an important population mean wealth and power?

This common belief started to be seriously undermined at that time. The new, free-trade-oriented political economy of Boisguilbert, Quesnay and Turgot held a different view. Montesquieu himself had a significant doubt: to his assertion that 'the more men there are in any state, there commerce flourishes the more', he added: 'I may also as easily prove, that the more commerce flourishes, the more the number of people increases: these two things mutually assist and favour each other' (Montesquieu 1721 [1964], 123). This is precisely

[3] Voltaire, Guillaume-Thomas Raynal, François Jean de Chastellux, Jean-Joseph Expilly, Louis Messance or Jean-Baptiste Moheau (Hecht 1977, 54-55).

what the free-trade authors were to stress. What is important is the well-being of the population, whatever its size: the aim of a policy must be, all things being equal, the greatest attainable global income, and the population would adjust itself to this state of affairs.[4] 'If, of two kingdoms, the first were more populous and the second had, in proportion, a greater income, which one would be the more powerful?' Quesnay asks. His answer is unambiguous: the first 'would be less powerful and less wealthy' than the second (Quesnay 1758 [2005], 383). Hence the task of the government: 'the government should be more concerned with the increase of wealth than with the growth of population' because 'it is the wealth obtained by the labour of men which must regulate in a suitable way the state of the population' (1758 [2005], 384): a kind of optimal size of population emerges by itself. These statements were later repeated in Quesnay's 'Maximes générales du gouvernement économique d'un royaume agricole' — especially in maxim XXVI (Quesnay 1767 [2005], 571) and in the long explanatory note 18 appended to it (1767 [2005], 593-5). There Quesnay also challenges the view that an abundant population is necessary in case of war for the defence of the country. An efficient defence lies instead in the wealth of the country:

> Important armies are not enough to form a strong defence; the soldier must be well paid in order to be well disciplined, well exercised, strong, happy and brave. War on the land and on the sea needs other means than the strength of men, and requires other and more considerable expenses than those of the subsistence of soldiers. It is thus much less the number of men than wealth which sustains the war. (Quesnay 1767 [2005], 594)

It is thus essential to understand the coherence of the populationist view, not only on population in the strict sense of the term, but also because this approach leads to a specific explanation of economic crises which was to form an interesting element in the reception of Malthus's political economy.

Even if their writings sometimes give an opposite impression, most of the so-called populationists were conscious that the existence of a sizeable population was not enough to enrich the country, and that there was no automatic causal link with the levels of economic activity and employment. People, they

[4] The mechanism(s) of regulation are not fundamentally different in the different approaches.

admitted, could be afraid of too large a population and fear that a great number of people would remain unemployed: but such a situation, if it occurs, is only the result of bad policy. A numerous population is not a problem, provided the government creates a favourable enough environment for activities.

> This discourse could sound like a paradox: but it is not. Looking at France, so full of men, one could think that it is overwhelmed with them ... But it is only because of a lack of order, and, since the way to employ themis unknown or overlooked, its greatest good is turned into its greatest evil. (Montchrestien 1615 [1999], 60)

A good economic policy is thus necessary:[5] but of what does it consist? Authors may not agree on such or such an aspect of the measures to be taken, but overall, they agree on four points: (i) the main aim of the policy is to provoke the greatest possible population; (ii) productivity in agriculture is fundamental in this respect; (iii) manufactures are also essential in this context because they can absorb the fraction of the population that is not needed in agriculture; (iv) foreign trade is no less essential, and forms the top of the economic pyramid: its structure must be such as to export domestic manufactures (the more labour in their production, the better) and import agricultural products to maintain a growing population. This is the reason why the government cannot leave foreign trade totally free and must keep a close eye on it.

This approach is well stated by Ferdinando Galiani in his 1770 *Dialogues sur le commerce des blés*. Foreign trade in manufactures, he stresses, 'increases with the number of hands' in a country, while that of agricultural products 'decreases with that number' because the growing population must eat and land is limited. Because 'the aim of all good government is to increase the population', the task of economic policy is therefore 'to increase the number of manufactures which grows in proportion to the number of men and which tends, so to speak, to infinity'. In this perspective, a reduction in the export of agricultural products, and even its end, must be considered positively: thanks to the trade in manufactured products, it is always possible to have a growing population, beyond the level allowed by the limited agricultural capacity of the country.

[5] This is also true for the free trade authors, but the policy proposed by the latter is different, and the size of the population is not an aim.

> One can even reach the point where this trade ends, when the population will consume the entire product of the land: then agriculture will provide people with their subsistence, but only manufactures will bring money and wealth to the State. One can even go beyond this limit, and force the population to such a considerable level as to be obliged to go to under-populated countries and, with the product of manufactures, buy the food necessary for the excess of people that should be fed. Then the art of government would have realised its masterpiece, since the masterpiece in art is to force Nature and oblige her to make a miracle such as that of having, on limited land, more human beings than her forces and her means can feed. (Galiani 1770, 138-9)

1.5 Causes of instability

Some authors, however, felt that this model based on manufactures could not work as smoothly as expected, and, in the end, suffer from instability compared to a more traditional economy based on agriculture.

A serious problem can arise when a country cannot trade enough with other countries and thus cannot maintain a growing population: the solution, in this case, like in the ancient Greek *polis*, is the emigration of citizens to found a colony abroad. If this is not possible, or if, in the long run, the entire world is in a state of full cultivation of land and cannot trade with another planet, *then the physical law of Nature will regulate the number of citizens through starvation and death.* Towards the end of the century, all this is stated with an extreme clarity by Herrenschwand in his fascinating *De l'économie politique moderne* (Herrenschwand 1786).

A second problem is linked to technical progress in manufactures. What should one do with the invention of machines, which increase productivity and reduce the demand for labour? Most authors seem to think that this is not a welcome process. Montesquieu, for example, stressed the 'pernicious' effects of inventions on employment (Montesquieu 1748 [1964]: 690). And Pierre-Édouard Lemontey, towards the end of the Revolution, noted that while the labour liberated by the invention of machines can be employed elsewhere — some people must build the machines — the overall result would nevertheless be negative.

> What is to become of the countless hands that the skill of a me-

> chanic put out of work? ... The greatest number will remain idle. In vain could one imagine that a greater mass of products, a strong trade, low prices unobtainable by competitors, could create wealth, work and welfare in a nation; this theory, so plausible in theory, so full of promise, is painfully disproved by experience. (Lemontey 1801, 167)

But the greatest and most dangerous source of instability for a market economy based on manufactures comes from the heart of the model itself: it is likely to behave in an unpredictable way and to generate unemployment. Montesquieu, in the middle of the century, and Herrenschwand, three decades later, expressed these concerns. Basically, unlike the ordinary demand for agriculture, the demand for manufactured products is erratic, especially if it comes from abroad, because it is highly subject to changing fashions for luxury goods or political events like wars. Demand for such or such a kind of manufacture can thus be ruined all of a sudden, and thousands of workers put out of work — Herrenschwand travelled in Great Britain and was struck by the troubles caused by the fall in demand for English commodities due to the independence of the American colonies. And this is all the more damaging for these workers because, unlike what happens in agriculture, they cannot find food whenever they have no money left — a cultivator who cannot sell his corn can eat it, a craftsman does not have this possibility with his products. Herrenschwand's *De l'économie politique moderne* is a striking and systematic development of this idea. In the new economic system based on manufactures — 'the most reckless system of political economy that humankind has imagined for its conservation' (Herrenschwand 1786, 72) — the author stressed, 'half of the nation is left, for its existence, in an entirely precarious situation, without any appropriate subsistence, without any certainty of getting it by means of its labour, eating one day and starving the next day' (1786: 72-3). This line of thought pervaded many writings during the nineteenth century and was to play a significant role in the reception of Malthus.[6]

[6] During the French Revolution, lectures on 'political economy and legislation' were planned in the 'écoles centrales' established by a decree of the Convention Nationale on 7 Ventôse an III (25 February 1795). It seems that many professors recommended Herrenschwand's book (together with those of Adam Smith and James Steuart), which was reprinted the same year.

1.6 Against all pessimism: 'the indefinite perfectibility of the human race'

Towards the end of the century, the original voice of Condorcet on population struck his contemporaries, and Malthus in particular.[7] In the tenth epoch — 'Future progress of mankind' — of his celebrated *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* posthumously published in 1794 (Condorcet 1794a),[8] Condorcet, after having insisted on all the past and forthcoming progress in sciences and techniques and their positive effects on humankind, raised the question of the limitation of population size by the availability of means of existence and its dramatic consequences:

> ... amidst this improvement in industry and happiness, where the wants and faculties of men will continually become better proportioned, ... and of consequence in each generation the number of individuals be greatly increased ... it may ... be demanded, whether these principles of improvement and increase may not, by their continual operation, ultimately lead to degeneracy and destruction? Whether the number of inhabitants in the universe at length exceeding the means of existence, there will not result a continual decay of happiness and population, and a progress towards barbarism, or at least a sort of oscillation between good and evil? (Condorcet 1794b [1795], 344-5)

Condorcet rejected this gloomy perspective. Supposing, however, that in the future a limit due to the means of existence existed, 'nothing alarming' would result, he wrote, 'either to the happiness of the human race, or its indefinite perfectibility' (1794b [1795], 346).

> [I]f we consider, that prior to this period the progress of reason will have walked hand in hand with that of the sciences; that the absurd prejudices of superstition will have ceased to infuse into morality a harshness that corrupts and degrades, instead of purifying and exalting it; that men will then know, that the duties they may be under relative to propagation will consist not in the question of giving *existence* to a greater number of beings, but *happiness*;

[7] For a possible dialogue between Condorcet and Malthus, see Winch (1996). On Condorcet, population and eugenics see Béjin (1988a).

[8] A translation was published in Great Britain in 1795, and in the United States in 1796.

> will have for their object, the general welfare of the human species; of the society in which they live; of the family to which they are attached; and not the puerile idea of encumbering the earth with useless and wretched mortals. Accordingly, there might then be a limit to the possible mass of provision, and of consequence to the greatest possible population, without that premature destruction, so contrary to nature and to social prosperity, of a portion of the beings who may have received life, being the result of those limits. (1794b [1795], 346-7)

The accent is put on the improvement of the human race and its corollary, the increasing power of reason. 'The organic perfectibility or deterioration of the classes of the vegetable, or species of the animal kingdom, may be regarded as one of the general laws of nature. This law extends itself to the human race' (1794 [1795], 367). A greater quality of men enables control of their quantity. How? Essentially through instruction and education — the process is cumulative, and improvements, intellectual and moral included, are passed down through generations (1794b [1795], 367-71) — and in general all means that could allow human beings to master their destiny, including contraception: hence the emphasis on the need to get rid of the 'absurd prejudices of superstition'.[9]

Shortly after its publication, the *Esquisse* was violently attacked in France and Condorcet's ideas incredibly distorted — he was even accused of predicting the immortality of men on earth. However, during the nineteenth century, Condorcet was an important figure for the liberals and the republicans, and the *Esquisse* was a kind of Gospel for many associationists and socialists: his message on population was taken up in different ways by the latter and subsequently by the neo-Malthusians and remained in the background of the controversies over Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*.

[9] Some ideas are more developed in a manuscript now known as 'Fragment 10' (Condorcet 2004, 921-37).

2 The editions of Malthus in the French language

COMPARED TO WHAT HAPPENED in other non-English-speaking countries, the number of publications and editions of Malthus in the French language is outstanding. This success is largely due to the various editions of the *Essay on the Principle of Population*.

2.1 A success story: the editions of the *Essay on the Principle of Population* in the French language

The history of the French editions of Malthus's writings started in 1805 with the *Essay*. Before that date, this work does not seem to have been known in France, probably because the first edition was published in 1798, during the Directoire, when the troubles caused by the 1789 Revolution were still important. Bonaparte's putsch took place in 1799, the political regime of the Consulat followed, with Bonaparte as the First Consul, and ended with the proclamation of the Empire in 1804. During all this time, France was fighting its enemies in Europe, and especially Great Britain.[10] This was certainly not an ideal period for the circulation of books and ideas, even if an important figure like Condorcet was attacked by Malthus. An indication that the first edition of the *Essay* was not known is indirectly given by Jean-Baptiste Say — at that time a member of the group of the Idéologues and well aware of the movement of ideas in Europe — in one of his lectures at Athénée 20 years later. Speaking of Malthus's principle of population, he stressed that he had himself established the point, at the same time as Malthus, in the first edition of his *Traité d'économie politique*: 'I myself stated (in the first edition of my *Political economy* which was published almost at the same time as Malthus's book, and before I could know it) the main truths at which he arrives' (Say 1819, 155). The first edition of Say's Traité was published in 1803: obviously, Say refers here to the second edition, 1803, of Malthus's *Essay*, and was not aware of the first. He asserted this point again in the subsequent editions of his *Traité* and in his *Cours complet d'économie politique pratique* (Say 1828-29 [1852], II, 135n).

[10] Except for a brief period after the Treaty of Amiens (March 1802 - May 1803).

The Genevan connection

As a matter of fact, our story does not start in France proper, but in Switzerland, in a place which had longstanding connections with Great Britain. All began in Geneva[11] — since 1798, it is true, annexed to France, and the administrative centre of the new French department of Léman —, the site of publication of an important periodical, *Bibliothèque Britannique*, by a group of intellectuals gathered around the Pictet brothers: Marc-Auguste Pictet and Charles Pictet de Rochemont, scientists and philosophers. In 1796, during the post-Thermidorian period, they founded *Bibliothèque Britannique — Bibliothèque Universelle* from 1816 onward — with a clear intellectual programme referring to the Scottish philosophy as an antidote to what they considered the foolish and dangerous ideas of the time.

> There is a science, the principles of which we particularly wish to propagate: the books of the English and Scottish moralists contain its precious lessons. No one, better than these philosophers, ever knew how to develop and cultivate this instinct of justice and guide this passionate and blind desire of happiness to which all the secret workings of the human heart tend. The moral doctrine of these writers is luminous and pure ... Never the mistakes of a wrong philosophy and the evils that are overwhelming mankind ever made this antidote more necessary. (*Bibliothèque Britannique*, 1796, no. 1, 6-7)

Among the Pictet brothers' collaborators were Pierre Prévost — also a scientist and philosopher and a prominent member of the late eighteenth-century 'Republic of Letters'[12] — and, later, his son Guillaume. They had

[11] Napoleon did not trust Geneva, which was for him a 'town where people know far too much English'. Sismondi himself described Geneva as 'an English town on the Continent, an advanced post for political and religious enlightenment' (Sismondi 1814, 4), 'a town where people think and feel in English but speak and write in French' (Sismondi 1814, 7).

[12] Pierre Prévost taught philosophy at the Prussian Academy of Sciences in Berlin, and then literature, philosophy and physics in Geneva. He was also a correspondent of Dugald Stewart (who dedicated his 1810 *Philosophical Essays* to him) and a member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh since 1796. He visited Britain three times in 1773-74, 1817 and 1824 — Zinke (1942, 174, and 189 n. 44) notes that he is listed as having been a visitor at the Political Economy Club in London. He was also a corresponding member of the Paris Institut National. On Prévost, see for example the contemporary homage by Antoine Élisée Cherbuliez (Cherbuliez 1839). See also Etchegaray et al. (2012a, 2012b) and Kitami (2018).

The Pictet family and Prévost were part of the British-French-Swiss network around the

family[13] and intellectual links with Britain and were personally acquainted with a number of English writers — Ricardo visited them during his 1822 travels on the Continent, and Pierre Prévost became personally acquainted with Malthus in 1818, after having been his translator.[14] The series 'Littérature' of the *Bibliothèque*, directed by Pierre Prévost from 1803 onward, contained translations of excerpts of English books[15] and even of entire papers — some of them, for example, originally published in the *Edinburgh Review*. Charles Pictet also published separately, in 1803, a French translation of Henry Thornton's 1802 *Enquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Paper Credit of Great Britain*. Pierre Prévost published Adam Smith's *Essais philosophiques* in 1797, which included Smith's biography by Dugald Stewart; in 1804, a work on food shortage by Benjamin Bell and, later, works by Dugald Stewart[16] or Hugh Blair.[17] Guillaume Prévost translated into French Jane Marcet's *Conversations sur l'économie politique* (1817), her *Conversations sur la philosophie naturelle* (1820), and J.R. McCulloch's *Discours sur l'origine, les progrès, les objets particuliers, et l'importance de l'économie politique* (1825). It is interesting to note how quickly these translations were published after the publication of the works in Britain. M.-A. Pictet and P. Prévost also introduced Jean-Charles Léonard Simonde de Sismondi and Antoine Élisée Cherbuliez, their fellow citizens, to political economy, informing them of the English and Scot-

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Delessert family (a French Protestant family of Genevan origin), which included Daniel Malthus, Robert Thomas Malthus's father (MacDonald 2017). This network played a role in the international diffusion of the *Essay* on population. Prévost's translation is dedicated to Benjamin Delessert, and this dedication was maintained in the official editions, including the first publication in Guillaumin's *Collection des principaux économistes* in 1845 — it was deleted in the 1852 edition.

[13] Pierre Prévost was the brother-in-law of Jane Marcet, herself of Swiss origin.

[14] Malthus wrote to Prévost, on 13 October 1815: 'I have not yet the honour of a personal acquaintance with you; but I feel as if I knew you from the obligations you have conferred upon me with regard to my work on Population; and your friend and brother-in-law, Dr. Marcet has strongly encouraged me to write to you on this occasion' (the presence in Geneva of Malthus's brother) (in Zinke 1942, 175). Malthus met Prévost in 1818, on the occasion of the latter's visit to London.

[15] Prévost published a translation of excerpts from the first edition of David Ricardo's *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* in *Bibliothèque Universelle*. The first translated excerpts were published in the same year, 1817, as the original English edition. On the reception of Ricardo in the French language and the role of the Pictet group, see Béraud and Faccarello (2014).

[16] For example *Éléments de la philosophie de l'esprit humain*, Geneva: Paschoud, 1808.

[17] *Cours de rhétorique et de Belles lettres*, Genève: Manget and Cherbuliez, 1808.

tish authors in the field — Pellegrino Rossi, who also played an important role in the French debates, lived and taught for a time in Geneva and was acquainted with all of them.

1805. Large excerpts from the second English edition

It was in this context that, in 1805, Pierre Prévost published in *Bibliothèque Britannique* an exceptionally long series of excerpts from Malthus's *Essay*, in 11 instalments — approximately 330 printed pages — based on the second English edition of the *Essay*, 1803 (see Malthus 1805). At the beginning of the first excerpt, he noted: 'The first edition of this *Essay* was published in 1798 and had, it seems, great success' (in Malthus 1805, first excerpt, 166), implicitly suggesting that it was little known, if at all, on the Continent. He added, however, that the changes made by Malthus in the second edition were so numerous that the *Essay* became in fact a new book (which Malthus stressed in his preface), deserving to be known by the French public.

The translated excerpts of the 1803 edition are: (1) Book I, Chapter I. — (2) Chapters II and III (with cuts) and some passages from Chapters IV and V. — (3) Chapter VI. — (4) Book II, Chapter IV, and a brief excerpt from Chapter VI. — (5) Chapter VII. — (6) Chapter VIII (with cuts). — (7) Chapters IX and X (with cuts). — (8) Excerpts from Chapter X, and from Book III, Chapters IV and XI. — (9) Book IV, Chapters I, II and III (with cuts, except for Chapter II). — (10) Chapters IV, V and IX (with cuts in Chapters V and IX). — (11) Excerpts from Chapters X and XI. Chapter XII.

It should be noted that, at the end of the tenth instalment (in Malthus 1805, 10th instalment, 293-4), Prévost particularly emphasised the famous passage on 'nature's mighty feast', which was to be deleted by Malthus in the subsequent editions of the *Essay*: Prévost translated it in full, presenting it as an allegory directed against the English Poor Laws. This is one of the rare places where French readers, who did not have access to the English text, could find these sentences at the origin of the scandal which was to shake part of the French public: they were to be quoted again and again through the century, more or less faithfully, and they lay at the heart of most controversies. At the beginning of our period, another place[18] where they could be found in French

[18] Frédéric Bastiat wrote that Sismondi reproduced the passage. 'M. de Sismondi (one

was William Godwin's *Of Population. An Inquiry Concerning the Power of Increase in the Numbers of Mankind, being an Answer to Mr. Malthus's Essay on that Subject* (1820), of which a French translation was published in 1821 — the celebrated passage is reproduced in Book VI, Chapter 5, 'Of the Doctrines of the Essay on Population as They Affect the Condition of the Rich' (Godwin 1821, II, 374). Jérôme-Adolphe Blanqui quoted Malthus's 'inhumane' sentences in his *Histoire de l'économie politique en Europe depuis les Anciens jusqu'à nos jours* (Blanqui 1837, II, 153).

After the publication of these large excerpts, Prévost published a long paper in the subsequent issue of *Bibliothèque britannique* (Prévost 1806), in which he criticises those authors like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Mirabeau, who asserted that the size of the population is a sign of a good government, and praises those who recognised the fundamental influence of the means of subsistence on population size: Germain Garnier, Jean-Baptiste Say and especially James Steuart, whose *Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy* he quotes abundantly. The second half of the paper is devoted to the defence of Malthus's ideas. It is a plea for reason and prudence against passions, but also, already, a warning against possible misinterpretations of Malthus's recommendations — Prévost refers to a paper published, under the pseudonym of Philanthropus, in the *Medical and Physical Journal* of April 1804, in which the author proposes to stop vaccinating people and fighting against smallpox epidemics, because this disease has the positive effect of reducing the population. The problem of distinguishing Malthus's ideas from those of his alleged disciples was to be raised again and again. As C.-G. Terray Morel de Vindé stated two decades later, Malthus's followers 'form a kind of sect': 'exaggerating and distorting [Malthus's system], they made it really pernicious' (Vindé 1829, 2).

1809. A more comprehensive text from the fourth English edition

Four years later, in 1809, Prévost published a more comprehensive version of the *Essay* in Paris and Geneva, in three volumes, with the publisher Jean-

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of the men who, with the best intentions, committed the greatest evil) reproduced this unfortunate sentence. All the socialists immediately picked it up and this was enough in their eyes to judge, condemn and execute Malthus' (Bastiat 1850: 499). I could not find the text alluded to here.

Jacques Paschoud, this time based on the fourth English edition of 1807 (Malthus 1809).[19] The translation, however, was still incomplete. Important cuts were made in Book III, 'Of the different systems of expedients which have been proposed or have prevailed in society, as they affect the evils arising from the principle of population': (1) some chapters were abridged and merged into a single chapter — this is the case of Malthus's Chapters I-III, merged into a new Chapter I, 'Des systèmes d'égalité', and of Malthus's Chapters V-VI on the Poor Laws, merged into the new Chapter III, 'Les lois sur les pauvres'; (2) some chapters, considered by Prévost as a 'digression' from the main subject of the book, were omitted, namely Malthus's Chapters VIII-X ('Of the Definitions of Wealth. Agricultural and Commercial Systems', 'Different Effects of the Agricultural and Commercial Systems', and 'Of Bounties on the Exportation of Corn').

Prévost also added two texts to his translation: (1) 'Avertissement du traducteur' at the beginning of the first volume (Prévost 1809a) and (2) 'Quelques réflexions du traducteur' at the end of the third (Prévost 1809b). In the first, he explained how he translated Malthus's phrases 'check', 'preventive check', 'positive check', 'moral restraint', 'misery' and 'principle' — translations which were later to play a role in controversies.

In his justification for an abridged edition, Prévost stressed that Malthus himself permitted him to do so. 'The author of this work encouraged me to translate it', he wrote. 'The excerpts that I published in *Bibliothèque britannique*, showed him that I grasped his thought correctly. Consequently, he even authorised me to make any change that I thought was necessary.' He continued: 'I did not take undue advantage of this permission' (in Malthus 1809, I, vii). Prévost quotes a letter that Malthus sent him from Bath, dated 12 July 1807: 'I see that you have so entirely seized the spirit of the work, that I may safely trust you to make those alterations and retrenchments, which you may think necessary for the object which we both have in view' (Malthus 1809, I, vii, note).

The cuts made by Prévost were not always innocuous. One point concerns the pages where Malthus criticises Condorcet (Book III, Chapter 1 'On Systems of Equality. Wallace, Condorcet'). As already noted, Condorcet was credited with the absurd idea that progress will lead to the future immortality of men

[19] Malthus sent a copy of this edition to J.-B. Say (Kitami 1999).

on earth. Malthus, however, did not repeat this nonsense and his critique of the *Esquisse* is rather moderate. But Prévost was seemingly hostile to Condorcet, probably seeing the *Esquisse* as one example of 'the mistakes of a wrong philosophy' against which *Bibliothèque britannique* was fighting. He did not translate Malthus's developments on Condorcet's idea of 'the organic perfectibility of man', as he explained in a note (in Malthus 1809, II, 275-6, note). The cut starts after Malthus's sentence: 'The last question which M. Condorcet proposes for examination is, the organic perfectibility of man' (1809, 275) and ends just before this other passage: 'It will not be necessary, I think, in order more completely to show the improbability of any approach in man towards immortality on earth, to urge the very great additional weight, that an increase in the duration of life would give to the argument of population' (1809, 276) — with the result that, for the French reader, Malthus seems to endorse the distorted interpretation of Condorcet's text.[20]

1817. The intervention of Dupont de Nemours

Because of the cuts made by the translator, and in spite of Malthus's letter, this 1809 edition was criticised by the last physiocrat, Pierre-Samuel Dupont de Nemours, in his 1817 book on Malthus, *Examen du livre de M. Malthus sur le principe de population.* Dupont did not seem worried by the changes made in Chapters I-III and V-VI of Book III, but only by Prévost's pure and simple omission of Chapters VIII-X of this same Book. This is the reason why he translated the missing chapters[21] — 'Traduction littérale des quatre chapitres qui ne se trouvent pas dans l'édition française de l'*Essai sur le principe de*

[20] For more developments on these points, see Faccarello (1989).

[21] There is some confusion here as regards the different editions of Malthus's *Essay.* Dupont is referring to an edition published in 1809 in the United States, in Georgetown, Washington, with Roger Chew Weightman — Dupont was living in the United States at that time and died there in 1817. This edition is presented by the publisher as the 'First American, from the third London edition', which is curious since the fourth edition was published in London in 1807. Dupont asserts that he found some differences from the third English edition in the American text. He signals the differences in notes and translates the passages of this edition, allegedly omitted in the American book. The most striking examples are the beginning of Chapter VII (Dupont 1817, 43n-44n), VIII (Dupont 1817, 54n, 60n), and the entire Chapter X where, Dupont notes, the changes are so numerous that it is impossible to list them (Dupont 1817, 84n). Upon close examination, it turns out that what Dupont considers as the third English edition is in fact the second. His versions of Chapters VII-IX are therefore those of the second edition, not the third.

population' (in Dupont de Nemours 1817, 39-113) —, appending some notes, and curiously including Chapter VII, which is in fact to be found in Prévost's translation.

Why, he asked, did Prévost choose to omit them? At the end of his translation, in a short text titled 'Anecdote' (Dupont 1817, 114-15), he suggested an explanation. Prévost, he wrote, was Genevan, and at the time of his 1809 edition of Malthus's *Essay*, Geneva was the centre of the French department of Léman. According to Dupont, Prévost had simply feared Napoleon's police because of the content of these chapters. But this was all the more curious, Dupont went on, because the deleted texts were those where Malthus criticised Great Britain's economic policy — and this could have pleased the Emperor.

> But he remarked that the hate of this Prince towards the English nation led him only to envy its apparent successes and imitate its conduct; he imagined that the critique of the grounds upon which this conduct was based could shock the monarch, who was adopting them, and this led him by himself to make a deletion that was neither demanded nor ordered of him. (Dupont 1817, 114)

1823. The first complete translation, from the fifth English edition

The first complete translation of Malthus's *Essay*, by Pierre Prévost and his son Guillaume, was eventually published in Geneva and Paris in 1823, in four volumes, by the same publisher Paschoud (Malthus 1823).[22] It was presented as the second French edition, and based on the fifth English edition of 1817. To this edition, Pierre and Guillaume Prévost (1) added a new 'Avertissement des traducteurs' (Prévost and Prévost, 1823a), where the explanation of the translation of certain terms and phrases was retained (ix-xii), with the addition of the word 'rent' (Prévost and Prévost, 1823a, xii, note); (2) they also added a note, 'Note A', to Malthus's Appendix (Malthus 1823, 256-60), on Lord Selkirk's book to which Malthus referred; (3) they kept the former 'Quelques réflexions du traducteur', by Pierre Prévost, now called 'Quelques réflexions du premier traducteur' (Malthus 1823, IV, 261-96); (4) and they added 'Note finale des traducteurs (1823)' (Prévost and Prévost, 1823b).

[22] This edition is sometimes referred to as published in 1824 (see for example Molinari 1889, xlvii, and 1892, 215).

Other publications of the 1823 translation

This translation was also published in 1830 by Abraham Cherbuliez in Geneva (Malthus 1830). In spite of the mention 'Third French and much enlarged edition', it is just a reprint of the 1823 edition. The same edition was reprinted in 1836, again by Abraham Cherbuliez in Geneva (Malthus 1836).[23] Finally, as was to be expected (at that time, Belgium was an active centre for pirate editions), the same translation of the *Essay* was published in Brussels in 1841, in two volumes (Malthus 1841). It was presented as a 'new, revised and corrected edition, with the addition of ethnographic and political data on the population of the globe according to MM. Balbi and d'Omalius d'Halloy', but it is not different to the preceding editions, except for some marginal changes: (1) while the 'Avertissement des traducteurs', by P. and G. Prévost, and 'Note A', were retained, this was not the case for 'Quelques réflexions du premier traducteur' and 'Note finale des traducteurs'; (2) two series of tables are added at the end of the work: 'Tableaux de la population du globe. Statistique ethnographique ou divisions du genre humain en races, rameaux, familles et nations' (Malthus 1841, II, 429-34) and 'Statistique politique, ou Tableaux de la population des principaux États de la terre' (Malthus 1841, II, 435-45).

Readers had to wait until 1845 to see a new French edition of the *Essay*, in one volume, as Volume VII of the celebrated *Collection des principaux économistes* published by Gilbert-Urbain Guillaumin (Malthus 1845). The translation was still that of Pierre and Guillaume Prévost, but some elements were reorganised and others were added:

(1) The content of the 1823 'Avertissement des traducteurs', where Pierre and Guillaume explained some of the vocabulary used by Malthus, was dispatched into footnotes to the text.

(2) The 1809 'Réflexions du premier traducteur' (Pierre Prévost) and 1823 'Notes finales' (Pierre and Guillaume Prévost) were retained under the respective titles of 'Réflexions du premier traducteur sur le principe de population' (Malthus 1845, 633-47) and 'Note des traducteurs (1823), sur les ouvrages de Place et de Seybert, sur l'immigration, et sur le progrès de la population

[23] It is to be noted that, a few years later, Joseph Garnier mentioned another 1836 edition, published in Paris by Treuttel and Würtz (Garnier in Malthus 1845, viii, note) — I could not find any other reference to this edition, nor any copy of it.

américaine. — Extrait d'une lettre de Malthus à propos des écrits de Barton' (Malthus 1845, 648-54).

(3) Joseph Garnier added a 'Préface à cette nouvelle édition' (Malthus 1845, vii-viii), a 'Note de l'éditeur sur la population des États-Unis d'Amérique. — Nouveaux recensements. — Immigration' (Malthus 1845, 655-9), and a 'Note de l'éditeur sur la loi des pauvres. — Réforme de 1834' (Malthus 1845, 660-2).

(4) Malthus's Appendix is presented as Book V of the work, entitled 'Livre V. Appendice contenant la réfutation des principales objections et le résumé de cet ouvrage', and split into three chapters: 'Chapitre I. La doctrine enseignée dans cet ouvrage ne contredit pas les lois de la nature; mais elle tend à obtenir une population saine et vigoureuse, et un accroissement qui n'entraîne pas le vice et le malheur', 'Chapitre II. Du droit des pauvres à être nourris. Réfutation de A. Young. Digression sur l'esclavage', and 'Chapitre III. Réfutation des théories de MM. Grahame et Weyland. Déclaration de Malthus'.

(5) The book includes a 'Notice sur la vie et les travaux de Malthus', by Charles Comte (Malthus 1845, ix-xxx). This is the reprint of a paper — 'Notice sur la vie et les travaux de M. Thomas-Robert Malthus' — read by Comte at the Académie Royale des Sciences Morales et Politiques, on 28 December 1836 (Comte died in 1837) and originally published in *Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences Morales et Politiques de l'Institut de France* (Comte 1839).

(6) It also includes an 'Introduction' by Pellegrino Rossi (Malthus 1845, xxxi-lx), concomitantly published the same year in *Journal des Économistes* (Rossi 1845).

This edition was reprinted seven years later, in 1852, with some changes (Malthus 1852). Some of Garnier's notes were updated, and so were some statistics on the population of America. An 'Avant-propos' by Garnier was added (Malthus 1852, vii-xvi) as well as a note on Proudhon: 'Observation sur une critique de M. Proudhon, au sujet de la contrainte morale' (Malthus 1852, 662-4).

The 1852 edition marked the end of the publications of the full text of the *Essay* in French during the nineteenth century.[24] After that date, abridged

[24] In the twentieth century, the Guillaumin edition was reprinted twice in 1966 and 1992: first in fac-simile (Malthus 1966), and then in a new presentation, in two volumes, without the texts by Comte, Rossi and Garnier (Malthus 1992). Finally, the first, 1798, English

editions of the work were published. During the nineteenth century, the only abridged edition of Malthus's book was edited by the Belgian Gustave de Molinari in 1889 (Malthus 1889) and published by Guillaumin with an introduction by the editor (Molinari 1889). It was reprinted in 1907 by Félix Alcan (Malthus 1907a). The same year, a new choice of excerpts, by Paul Mabille, was published in Dijon by Groffier (Malthus 1907b).[25]

2.2 The translations of the *Principles of Political Economy* and *Definitions in Political Economy*

French translation from the first English edition, 1820

The history of the translation of other works by Malthus is a lot shorter. After the success of the *Essay*, attention was of course focused on its author. While French readers owed the French editions of the *Essay* to a Swiss citizen, the first translation of Malthus's *Principles of Political Economy* was by a Portuguese intellectual exile: Francisco Solano Constâncio. His translation of the first, 1820 edition, *Principes d'économie politique, considérés sous le rapport de leur application pratique*, was published in Paris in 1820 by J.-P. Aillaud (Malthus 1820). Constâncio was active at that time in Paris as a diplomatic agent. Between 1818 and 1822, he collaborated on a journal in Portuguese, *Anais das Ciências das Artes e das Letras por huma Sociedade de Portuguezes Residentes em Paris* (Annals of Science, Arts and Letters) published by A. Bobée and was interested in political economy, especially in the controversy between Malthus and Say about the possibility of general gluts (Cardoso 1999, 2009). In 1819, still in Paris, his French translation of Ricardo's *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* was published by

edition of the *Essay* had to await 1980 to be translated in French (Malthus 1980).

[25] In 1933, a translation of the first chapter of the *Essay* was edited by Paul Gemähling in a book of readings (Malthus 1933), and in 1963 Pierre Theil edited a book of excerpts allegedly taken from the second, 1803, English edition (Malthus 1963). Presented as a new translation, this was in fact essentially a modernised translation based on the Prévost edition of 1809. This last book formed the basis of an even more abridged edition the following year (Malthus 1964). Another selection of texts, by Jérôme Picon, was published in 2010 (Malthus 2010b). Finally, a reprint of the Molinari edition of 1889 was published in 2012 by Hachette BNF.

Aillaud.[26] With the same publisher, he also published the French version of William Godwin's refutation of Malthus's *Essay* (Godwin 1821).

Constâncio also planned to translate, for Aillaud, the fifth edition of the *Essay* on population, but Malthus was reluctant because he was satisfied with his collaboration with Prévost. Malthus also had doubts about the quality of Constâncio's translation of his *Principles*: 'If you write again, pray tell me what you think of Mr. Constâncio's translation of the last work', he wrote to Prévost on 27 March 1821. 'He has certainly not always given my meaning' (in Zinke 1942, 180). In the same letter, he told Prévost his answer to Aillaud:

> I thought a translator ought in the main to agree with his author and that as it appeared from some of the notes to Mr. Constâncio's translation, that he differed from me entirely on the principles of population, he was certainly not exactly the person whom I should have selected as a translator. ... I need not say how much I should prefer you as my translator to Mr. Constâncio or indeed to anybody that I know. (Malthus to Prévost, 27 March 1821, in Zinke 1942, 179-180)

New translation, from the second, 1836, English edition

As in the case of Constâncio's translation of Ricardo's *Principles*, the quality of the translation was unfortunately questionable. Admittedly, in a letter to Prévost dated 26 April 1821, Malthus reported Sismondi's positive opinion: 'Mr. Simonde who is just come to England for a short time told me the other day that he thought Constancio's translation of my last work a good one' (in Zinke 1942, 182). But Sismondi's judgement must have been rather hasty, because, in many places, the French text is inexact.[27] This is the reason why a new translation, by Maurice Monjean, was published in 1846, as Volume VIII of the *Collection des Principaux Économistes*. This book (Malthus 1846), based on the second, 1836, English edition, also contained the translation of

[26] On this translation, see Béraud and Faccarello (2014).

[27] Here is an example taken at random. When Malthus writes on p. 146n of the English edition: 'But this is begging the whole of the question. The price cannot be given', Constâncio translates: 'Mais c'est là une supposition entièrement gratuite, car le prix ne peut pas s'établir d'une manière absolue' (in Malthus 1820, I, 193n), that is: 'But this is an entirely spurious assumption, because the price cannot establish itself in an absolute way'.

Malthus's 1827 *Definitions in Political Economy* by Alcide Fonteyraud.[28] It includes an 'Avis de l'éditeur' and an 'Introduction' by Monjean (Monjean 1846a, 1846b), and some explanatory notes, also by Monjean, with some unpublished remarks by Jean-Baptiste Say.[29] The appended translation of Malthus's *Definitions* (Malthus 1846, 409-535) also has an introduction by Monjean (Monjean 1846c).

[28] One year later, Fonteyraud edited the Œuvres complètes of David Ricardo, in the same *Collection des Principaux Économistes* (Vol. XIII), revising Constâncio's translation of the *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*. However, Fonteyraud's work here is questionable and the French public still had to wait more than a century to obtain a correct translation of Ricardo's *Principles* (Béraud and Faccarello 2014).

[29] The 1846 translation of the *Principles* was republished in 1969, and the whole Guillaumin book in 2010 (see Malthus 1969, 2010a).

3 The reception of the *Principles of Political Economy* and *Definitions in Political Economy*

During the first years of the Restoration, after the fall of the Empire, when it was again possible to publish books of political economy, the name of Malthus was thus already famous in French-speaking countries because of the success of his *Essay*. But now that people and publications could again circulate freely in Europe, intellectual exchanges between Switzerland (with Prévost, Sismondi, Rossi, Cherbuliez), France (especially with Say),[30] Great Britain and, later, Belgium multiplied on many subjects of political economy, from the definition of wealth, the nature of value and the determination of prices, to the problems raised by the introduction of machines, the possibility of 'general gluts', employment and poverty. Malthus also became a notable figure on these topics, and a possible alternative to Ricardo and Say. However, even during the 1820s, discussions over Malthus's *Principles* remained limited compared to the controversies surrounding his *Essay*. In Tanneguy Duchâtel's important series of papers (eight articles in nine instalments) on the state of political economy in France, for example, published in *Le Globe* (Duchâtel 1825), four papers are devoted to Malthus but nothing is said of his *Principles* except for some allusions to his (and Sismondi's) opposition to Say's law of markets, and to the different fertility of pieces of land — but without reference to the theory of rent.

3.1 The first reactions

In this context, it is striking to see that the French translation of the first edition of Malthus's *Principles* was published the same year as the original work. Moreover, Say also published his *Lettres à M. Malthus sur différents sujets d'économie politique, notamment sur les causes de la stagnation générale du*

[30] After the end of the imperial censorship, Say was able to publish revised editions of his 1803 *Traité d'économie politique* in 1814, 1817, 1819 and 1826. A sixth edition was published posthumously in 1841 by his son Horace. Many changes were introduced in the different editions: they can be clearly seen thanks to the publication of the variorum edition (Say 1803-41 [2006]). On the history of these editions, see Steiner (2006).

commerce in 1820, and before the publication of this translation.[31] Say's book was immediately translated into English and published in London in 1821 as *Letters to Mr Malthus, on Several Subjects of Political Economy, and on the Cause of the Stagnation of Commerce*,[32] which also included his *Catechism of Political Economy*. The discussions were stimulated by the publication, in 1819, of the French translation of the first edition of Ricardo's *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, as well as Sismondi's *Nouveaux Principes d'économie politique* (Sismondi 1819, 1827). They were fuelled by Sismondi's defence of his book against a critical review in the *Edinburgh Review* (Sismondi 1820), his celebrated article, in *Revue encyclopédique*, 'Sur la balance des consommations avec les productions' (Sismondi 1824),[33] Say's critique of that article (Say 1824), and finally by some remarks and critical notes introduced by Constâncio in his translation of Malthus's *Principles*.

Say's exchanges with Malthus

In his 1820 book, which consists of five 'Letters', Say points out the main subjects of disagreement with Malthus — on many points, he also criticised Sismondi, some ideas of whom he associated with Malthus's opinions. Not surprisingly, the main developments concern his doctrine that 'products can only be purchased with products' — 'it is production which opens a market to production' — with additional comments on the definition of productive services, the existence of immaterial products, the role of needs, utility and supply and demand in the determination of prices, and the distinction between productive and unproductive consumption and labour (Letter I). Say also endeavours to prove (Letter II) that in optimal conditions — perfect free trade — general gluts cannot happen, and that the 'popular idea' that a group of unproduc-

[31] It is from this period that Say's references to Malthus increase, first in the fifth edition of *Traité*, then in *Cours complet* (Steiner 1999).

[32] A German translation was also published in 1821 in *Malthus und Say über die Ursachen der jetzigen Handelsstockung, aus dem Englischen und Französichen, mit einem Anhange von D. Karl Heinrich Rau*, Hamburg: Perthes & Besser. The book includes excerpts from Chapter VII of Malthus's *Principles* and Say's *Letters*.

[33] This text was later included by Sismondi, as an appendix, in the second edition, 1827, of his *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique* (Sismondi 1827, II, 408-58); and, in 1837, as the first essay in his *Études sur l'économie politique*, with the title 'Balance des consommations avec les productions' (Sismondi 1837, I, 49-113). For the 1837 publication, the text was revised.

tive consumers is necessary to absorb the entire production is erroneous and even contradictory to the principle of population.[34] He then accepts (Letter III) that natural and artificial elements can cause important problems to the economy: the fertility of land, of course, but above all State interactions with markets, through taxation for example, with damaging results for producers and consumers. However, he argued, these obstacles could be removed, at least in the second case, and, in the end, they do not harm the law of markets. He devotes Letter IV to the question of the introduction of machines, on which he writes that he did not find any clear and complete developments in Malthus's *Principles*: he notes that Malthus is favourable to such introductions whenever the fall in the price of the produce more than proportionally increases the market — criticising, along the way, some of Sismondi's assertions — and shows how, with his theory, these introductions increase the real income of the consumers, do not damage employment and are thus positive in all possible cases. He then finally deals (Letter V) with wealth, its definition, its material or immaterial aspects, and its difference from value.

Some years later, in 1827, on the occasion of the publication of *Definitions in Political Economy* (of which Malthus sent him a copy), some letters were exchanged between Say and Malthus,[35] where the main themes of discontent are again discussed. Say also published a short review of *Definitions* (Say 1827) in *Revue encyclopédique*, where, as in his letters, he denies having infringed Malthus's four conditions for an unambiguous use of new or old vocabulary in the development of the science, and stresses that he himself tried hard to fix the vocabulary in the 'Épitomé des principes fondamentaux de l'économie politique' — a kind of dictionary of the main terms used in political economy — appended to his *Traité d'économie politique* from the second, 1814, edition

[34] '... can it be necessary for me to prove to the justly celebrated author of the *Essay on Population*, that whatever is produced will find consumers ... After having written three justly admired volumes, to prove that population always rises to the level of the means of subsistence, can you possibly have admitted the supposition *of a great augmentation of produce, with a stationary number of consumers, and wants diminished by parsimony?* (355). Either the author of the *Essay on Population* or the author of *Principles of Political Economy* must be in the wrong. But every thing convinces us that it is not the former who is mistaken' (Say 1820 [1821], 30). In the French text, Say does not write 'means of subsistence' but 'means of existence' (on this last phrase, see below).

[35] Three of them, rather long and detailed, are to be found in the posthumous *Mélanges et correspondance d'économie politique* (Say 1833) where they were published by Charles Comte, Say's son-in-law. In the book, they immediately follow the republication of the *Lettres à M. Malthus*.

onward. In all these writings, however, the positions of the protagonists remained firm and uncompromising on both sides. As Malthus wrote to Prévost as early as 1821, 'With regard to the substance of my last work, and my difference with Mr. Say, the more I have since reflected on the questions between us, the more reasons I have seen ... for adhering to my opinions' (in Zinke 1942, 180). Fortunately, however, the clarifications and examples put forth during these exchanges are sometimes useful to better understand some of the points at stake.

One of them is worth noting. In his polemical writings against Sismondi and Malthus, Say felt obliged to present his so-called law of markets in a rather new, more acceptable way — but which, in the end, proved destructive for his theory. The main proposition was still that products are exchanged for products, and that the income generated by production — the sum of the remuneration of all productive services — was sufficient to buy this same production. But what is a 'product'? In his 1824 paper against Sismondi (Say 1824),[36] Say stated that a commodity is a 'product' if and only if its price is sufficient to remunerate the productive services at their market price: if it is insufficient, the commodity does not deserve the name of 'product'. 'And if the venal value of the product pays the production costs, what kind of glut is there to be feared because this production secures those who deal with it the profits and the wages that they are entitled to expect?' (Say 1824, 28n). The argument is stated again in Say's letter to Malthus dated July 1827.

> You want me to grant the name of products to commodities, which can satisfy some needs and have a certain value, although this value is insufficient to reimburse the totality of their production costs. But ... production is complete only if all the services necessary to it are paid by the value of the product. When one spends six francs in works and money, and only produces a value of five francs, it is evident that the only produce is a utility worth five francs; if it costs more to be produced, there is a deficit of *utility* and value, and it is to this *deficit* that I deny the name of product. I believe I am entitled to say that all what is *really produced* finds a market; that all what does not find a market was an expense made rashly without producing anything; and my law of markets is kept intact. (Say to Malthus, July 1827, in Say 1833, 309-10)

[36] The title of Say's paper is the same as Sismondi's (Sismondi 1824).

This definition was, during the same period, incorporated into the revised 'Épitomé' of the fifth edition, 1826, of the *Traité* — not in the entry 'Produit' but in 'Production, Produire'.[37] However it is obvious that, in this perspective, the 'loi des débouchés' becomes almost a truism, as Malthus remarked.

> I am very happy to find that you think some limitations must be admitted in your doctrine 'Des Débouchés' ... I have never been able to agree to your doctrine ... as it was originally stated. It is true indeed that the whole question is changed if you say that what is produced from land, labour and capital is not a product unless the sale of it fairly repays all the [services] concerned in producing it at their ordinary rates. It is obvious that of products of this kind there [cannot] possibly be an oversupply; because ... the terms of the proposition imply that there is an effectual demand for what is produced. But it is contrary to common usage, and even to your own definition of product, namely 'l'utilité créée constitue le produit', to say, that when from oversupply things fall below the costs of production, 'ils ne méritent pas le nom de produits'. It must be allowed that with regard to those who were accustomed to purchase them, they satisfy the same wants as before, while by falling in price they satisfy the wants of some other persons; and they have unquestionably a value, though not such as to give the ordinary profits to the producers. Being therefore the result of human industry, and possessing both utility and value, I do not see how we can deny to them the name of products; and of such products, you yourself say that too much may be produced. (Malthus to Say, 1827, in Say 1833, 298-9)[38]

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[37] The text of the *Traité* itself remained unchanged, however, especially the celebrated chapter 'Des débouchés'. When Say's thought is modified on some (important) point, it is symptomatic that it is to be found in the 'Épitomé' appended to the *Traité*, but not in the *Traité* proper. This is the case, for example, for the notion of the productivity of the State (see Faccarello 2010, 738-41). The new definition of 'product' appears instead in *Cours complet* (1828-29 [1852], I, 345-6), not in the chapter on 'débouchés' but in the following one, 'Des bornes de la production'.

[38] The letter was published by Comte in a French translation. The original is kept in the Bibliothèque nationale de France: I quote from a transcription of it kindly passed on to me by Jean-Pierre Potier. In Say (1833), Comte inserted this letter before Say's letter quoted above, dated July 1827. If the order is exact, this means that Say had previously stated his point to Malthus in a previous letter, which has perhaps been lost.

Sismondi, Constâncio and Dupont

For Sismondi, the publication of Malthus's *Principles* was welcome. Despite the differences in their respective approaches, they both highlighted the possibility of 'general gluts' of commodities, and he found in the author of the *Principles* a prestigious ally in his fight against Say and Ricardo. In his 1824 article in *Revue encyclopédique*,[39] he presented the European theoretical landscape in political economy in a clear-cut manner. The fundamental question on which economists disagree, he wrote, is that of the link between production and consumption. Ricardo and Say believe that an economist should only deal with the production of wealth, because it creates the appropriate consumption. Malthus and he, Sismondi, think that consumption is not the necessary consequence of production: the needs and desires of men are admittedly endless, but they cannot be satisfied without the possession of money, that is, an appropriate income, and here lies the real problem.

> Finally, they [Malthus and Sismondi] asserted that the non-ambiguous sign of the prosperity of a society was not the growing production of wealth, but the increasing demand for labour or the increasing supply of the wage which is its reward. Messrs Ricardo and Say have not denied that a growing demand for labour is a symptom of prosperity; but they asserted that it unavoidably results from the increase in production. Messrs Malthus and Sismondi deny this: they think that these two increases result from independent causes, which sometimes can be opposed to each other. In their opinion, markets are overcrowded when the demand for labour did not precede and determine production: then an additional production becomes a cause of ruin, not of enjoyment. (Sismondi 1824, 265)

While the main economists sided with Say and Ricardo, Sismondi concluded, almost all the businessmen behave in fact according to the principles of Malthus and himself: in every sector of production, demand and the state of the market dictate their behaviour: 'it is demand [débit] that, in their eyes,

[39] In the revised 1837 republication of this text, Malthus is quoted a bit ironically, but still with praise: 'However another economist, with a great power of meditation, M. Malthus, — who would perhaps have enabled science to advance more quickly, had he not led his adversaries into the depths of metaphysics, and too much applied the calculations of the exact sciences to the moral forces — had already foreseen the necessity of maintaining an approximately exact balance between production and consumption' (Sismondi 1837, I, 63).

is the cause of their prosperity or suffering; it is on demand that they wish to adjust their efforts to produce, even though they cannot always be successful' (Sismondi 1824, 265-6).

Finally, in 1820, in his controversy with the reviewer of the *Edinburgh Review*, Sismondi stressed another positive point developed by Malthus: that the behavioural assumption put forth by liberal political economy might be erroneous and that it misses an important point in the description of social life. Political economy praises work, and considers rest negatively. But 'not all work is an advantage, and not all rest is a loss'. Take two nations, one being 'much less well dressed' and fed than the other. The former can perfectly well be more advanced ('supérieure') 'if it has virtuously employed' the labour time withdrawn from production (1820, 125).

> Even if it has only employed it to get rest and pleasure, as wealth does not have any other purpose than to procure pleasure and rest, it is not certain that this nation has not been happier ... M. Malthus, in the excellent book he just published on the principles of political economy, already remarked, p. 358, that 'another fundamental error into which the writer above-mentioned and their followers appear to have fallen is, the not taking into consideration the influence of so general and important a principle in human nature, as indolence or the love of ease'. (Sismondi 1820, 126)[40]

The approach of the translator of Malthus's *Principles*, Constâncio, was sympathetic to Sismondi and critical of Malthus. In his foreword to the French edition, he states that he intended to fight some of Malthus's opinions expressed in Chapter VII of the *Principles*,[41] 'On the immediate causes of the progress of wealth', to which he appended long comments in footnotes.

> M. Malthus made assertions contrary to all facts, which are not supported by any sound reasoning ... M. Malthus did not deal with the real roots of the very serious and perhaps fatal evils, of

[40] Sismondi slightly changed the beginning of the quotation and wrote: 'que c'est une erreur fondamentale de ce raisonnement de n'avoir pas pris en considération' etc. (1820, 126). In his letters to Malthus, Say denied that taking into account indolence was a problem for his theory.

[41] A very long final chapter, indeed, which form the quasi entirety (pp. 13-319) of the second volume of the French 1820 edition.

> which England is affected. As he only considered secondary causes, it is not surprising that he only proposed totally insufficient — and even, I dare say, frivolous — means to remedy the incredible distress of England. (Constâncio 1820, ii)

The panegyrists of England's economic system, Constâncio stresses, should have a closer look at the price to pay for its success and its huge accumulation of riches: an immense inequality in property and incomes, the destitution of the working classes, and the dangers of a revolution. In these conditions, they should indeed say, with Malthus, '*perish such riches!*' (Constâncio 1820, iv).[42]

The distress of the great majority of the people did not come from a problem of fertility of the soil and absolute lack of subsistence but from excessive inequalities in property and wealth, and especially landed property. In contrast, Constâncio referred to Malthus's developments on the dangers presented in England by a possible abolition of the right of primogeniture, and in France by the law imposing the equal division of property between heirs, both male and female, on the death of the owners. For Malthus, there was a long-term economic danger: the fragmentation ad absurdum of landed properties, leading to a fall in the efficiency of agricultural production, and, in the end, the destitution of a population, whose properties are too small to sustain families. There was also a political threat: while this situation of fragmented land property was supposed to lead to a democratic regime, it was more likely that, in these circumstances, a minority of merchants and manufacturers would be the only rich and powerful people, favouring their own personal interests to the detriment of those of the country; or it would even more probably lead to a military dictatorship. Constâncio, in a series of notes (in Malthus 1820, II, 158-69) denied all these dreadful consequences. In part referring to Sismondi's developments in *Nouveaux principes* based on historical examples of the more or less equal division of estates, he stated that the equal sharing of land among the heirs actually increases competition and improves the sit-

[42] Malthus in fact refers here to the advantages a country draws from a fertile land, thus avoiding a competition through low wages: 'Another most desirable benefit belonging to a fertile soil is, that states so endowed are not obliged to pay much attention to that most distressing and disheartening of all cries to every man of humanity — the cry of master manufacturers and merchants for low wages, to enable them to find a market for their exports. If a country can only be rich by running a successful race for low wages, I should be disposed to say at once, perish such riches!' (*Principles of Political Economy*, 1820, English edition, pp. 235-6). As Constâncio admits, he is using Malthus's phrase in an enlarged context.

uation of most people: cultivators wisely adapt their behaviour to the new situation and regulate their family size. Excessive fragmentation is not to be feared, except in some exceptional and abnormal cases. And in any case, the existence of a rich aristocracy is not necessary. As for the perspective of a military dictatorship, it is also not to be feared either.

> A great number of modest fortunes never was, and never will be, in favour of any despotism, and still less of a military despotism, the essential elements of which are great fortunes ... and a nation formed of proletarians. A nation of small owners, attached to the land and to their properties, was never ... disposed to grant everything to the government, nor to pay for important permanent armies; and nobody would hate military life more ... than the hard-working cultivator attached to his property, to his family, to the laws and to the fatherland. (Constâncio, in Malthus 1820, II, 162n)

But Constâncio also pointed out another important cause of the disastrous situation in England, a cause which explains, he said, why this country, after a long period of conflicts and the return to peace, was so quickly thrown from a state of insolent prosperity to that of profound difficulties. This was certainly not a problem of subsistence, he noted, and while the many reasons given by Malthus to explain the post-war depression were not wrong, they did not point to the main cause: the growth model followed by Great Britain, based on industry and foreign trade, and thus on very unstable segments of demand. Thus we return to Herrenschwand. The great inequality of incomes forces industry to move towards the production of luxuries and to foreign markets: 'there is an excessive proportion of workers employed in manufactures, with respect to the number who work in agriculture' (in Malthus 1820, 288n). These levers for growth are eminently unstable: they depend on fashion at home and abroad, on political events and wars, and this is one of the main causes of regular economic troubles.

> Any nation, organised in such a way as to support an excessive proportion of its inhabitants by employing them in those industries, of which the consumption [of their products] depends on very precarious circumstances — as are all those that depend on foreign demand — will be continuously subject to the vicissitudes of prosperity and distress. (Constâncio, in Malthus 1820, II, 257n)

It is finally interesting to note that this kind of analysis is also to be found in Dupont de Nemours. Of course, Dupont could not have known the *Principles*. But, as stated above, he reproached Prévost for not having translated some chapters of Malthus's *Essay* because they were critical of Great Britain's economic policy. In his opinion, this criticism was valid. Of course, Dupont knew the insistence of Malthus on the principle of population to explain the destitution of the working classes, and the means proposed as a remedy — in the first place 'moral restraint' — but he discarded this explanation. He saw in the chapters omitted by Prévost the germ of the true explanation of England's 'extreme distress' after the war, and insisted on it: again a variant of Herrenschwand's insights. This explanation is 'the *wrong direction* given to industry and commerce'. 'England directed the capitals, the spirit and the talents of its nation towards manufactures of luxuries, the products of which are sold, either abroad — this is the main objective — or to the rich who live in big cities or in castles within the country' (Dupont 1817, 19-20). Prosperity obtained in this way can only be short-lived. 'The fancies and frivolity of the rich', contrary to what is commonly asserted, are not beneficial to the poor, 'but, instead, their plague': they introduce a basic instability in the distribution of labour and capital because they 'change constantly, just as the fashions they generate', in an unpredictable way.

> Fashion changed: the *trades* which were *good* now became *bad*. After every change in fashion, workers cannot ... immediately learn a new trade, nor get new tools that they may not even know. Neither can entrepreneurs quickly enter a new industry, change the disposition of the buildings, obtain new machines or new material, or manage equally well new workers in different trades. Most of them had storehouses full of — now worthless — commodities. (Dupont 1817, 21)

Many people are put out of work, many entrepreneurs go bankrupt. The difficulties are increased because a great part of this production is exported, and the changes in fashion are compounded by 'the hazard of wars, and those of the seas' (Dupont 1817, 24). This is a state of things, Dupont noted, that 'M. Malthus perfectly admitted. To the powerful description of all the dangers thereof, he devoted in his book the four beautiful chapters deleted in the French edition' (Dupont 1817, 25). It is thus ironic to see the same development positively attributed to Malthus by Dupont, while addressed as a criticism of Malthus by Constâncio.

3.2 Subsequent judgements

After these first exchanges, the reactions to Malthus's *Principles* were rather sketchy and did not raise any particular controversies. In fact, almost nothing was said of the *Definitions* — except Say's very short review of the book — or of other, non-translated, pamphlets by Malthus. Neither Jérôme Adolphe Blanqui (1837) nor Jean-Paul Alban de Villeneuve-Bargemont (1841) analysed or quoted them in their respective histories of political economy, where only the *Essay* on population is considered. Of the various French currents of thought — in a nutshell, the Doctrinaires and the liberals of the so-called Paris school, and the critics of liberal political economy, be they associationists, socialists or Catholics — the main reactions came from the liberal camp.

Doctrinaires and liberals

They first reacted to the nature of the 1820 book and stressed that the *Principles* were not properly a treatise on political economy but just a collection of essays on some specific points. This opinion was largely shared by the profession.[43] The *Principles*, Comte wrote, 'was not a complete and methodical statement of the phenomena of that science' (1839 [1845], xxxvii). Molinari's judgement was similar. 'The other works by Malthus are far from having the same importance as the *Essay on the Principle of Population*. The *Principles* is not ... a treatise of political economy. It is a series of dissertations, without visible link between them, on some fundamental notions' (Molinari 1889, xxvi-xxvii). This did not mean that the *Principles* was a book of no merit, but that it presented many shortcomings. All in all, judgements were mixed, with the prevalence of a negative flavour.

The first recognised merit refers to Malthus's method. French liberals appreciated his developments aimed at practical purposes, in line with Smith's approach and in reaction against the abstract theoretical trend taken by political economy with Ricardo. Monjean affirmed that Malthus's 'dissidences' with

[43] One rare opposite opinion was that of Monjean. 'More practical than Ricardo's treatise, more methodical than that of Adam Smith, more critical than that of J.-B. Say, less absolute than that of Turgot, Malthus's *Principles* are a complete statement of the doctrines of political economy proper ... This book does not present, as had been wrongly stated, a series of purely critical studies without any link to each other, but a regular whole of the organic laws of the science of wealth' (1846b, xiv).

respect to Say and Ricardo, and sometimes Smith and Sismondi, are explained by his 'usual concern': 'practice' (Monjean 1846, xv). Nevertheless, he had no disdain for theories, and he knew that the world is governed by general laws. 'But he thought that, in most questions, what is in principle rigorously true is far from always being totally applicable in reality, and that, in the imperfect states of societies, one should to some extent forego truth in favour of order and prudence' (Monjean 1846b, xvii-xviii).

A second merit was Malthus's caution in his research of the causes of economic phenomena. As Comte put it, he did not believe that there was in every case a unique cause explaining them. Monjean agreed: for Malthus, 'this faculty of generalising degenerated into misuse under the pen of most of economists ... The wish to relate all partial facts back to one single and general fact ... [is] one of the most serious obstacles to the advancement of science' (Monjean 1846b, xi). Some decades later, Molinari repeated this judgment: 'Malthus criticised his contradictors, and above all Ricardo, for an excessive tendency to simplify and generalise, for attributing to one single cause what is the product of several' (Molinari 1889, xxxi).

As a consequence, a third merit was seen in the fact that, for Malthus, the principles of political economy do not have to be considered in an absolute way, and their application has limits. He was convinced, Comte wrote, 'that, in political economy, principles are true only if they are contained in certain limits; he saw that the main difficulties of the science lie in the frequent combination of complicated causes ... and in the necessity to impose limits or make exceptions to a great number of important propositions' (Comte, (1839 [1845], xxvii).

Not a very thrilling merit, if at all, because the same authors who appreciated this approach also stressed that it led Malthus to progress slowly and painfully in his reasoning, his developments often being 'timid' and confused.

> While Ricardo developed the most extravagant reasoning, the most excessive theories, the great merit [of Malthus's *Principles*] ... is to have brought back political economy to strict observations and data of experience. But the flaw of the *Principles* ... is the opposite of that of Ricardo's writings ... To an extreme boldness, he answers with an extreme timidity. (Puynode 1868, 262)

Molinari agreed: if Malthus was right in assigning complex causes to eco-

nomic phenomena, he wrote, 'he was less successful in the research and analysis of these causes' and 'ascribed a character of permanence to accidental facts and deducted from them conclusions opposed to the best proved theories of the science' (Molinari 1889, xxxii).

Finally, a fourth merit was granted to Malthus: his theory of rent[44] was sometimes appreciated (most of the time in Ricardian clothes), but not uncritically. Gustave du Puynode, for example, praised the chapter on rent as 'one of the most beautiful essays in political economy', although not always totally exact.

> Besides, how not to be led astray every time that the way traced by the celebrated author of the *Wealth of Nations* is abandoned, who correctly saw rent as the necessary effect of the monopoly of the landowners, and taught that each cultivated piece of land produces a rent? Malthus, on the contrary, endeavours above all to show that the possession of land is not a monopoly. He is so convinced thereof that the assertions of Buchanan, Ricardo, Say, and Sismondi did not bring him to a more correct understanding of the facts. (Puynode 1868, 327)

But the formulation of the theory of rent was a merit only for those who knew and understood it. They were few in number, and some authors, on the contrary, had an instinctive repulsion for it, if only because it was supposed to favour socialism: if rent is understood as a monopoly income — in spite of Malthus's contrary assertions — it questions the legitimacy of the landowner's ownership, and, beyond that, the legitimacy of private property (see for example Hippolyte Passy 1853, 518). Some decades later, the same problem was still topical (Courcelle-Seneuil 1892, 711).

Some other points were instead thought to be pure and simple errors, the most important being of course the alleged possibility of a general overproduction of commodities and the necessity, for the economy, of a class of unproductive consumers — in sum, Malthus was guilty of rejecting Say's law of markets .

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[44] 'Rent' was a word difficult to translate in French, owing to the received vocabulary at this time. It was first rendered by 'fermage', which however had a slightly different meaning, and then only by 'rente'. On this point, see Béraud and Faccarello (2014).

> This is to deny one of the most important economic truths, and to fail to understand the nature of exchanges and the origin of industrial crises. It is ... this mistake, which led him to write ... this sentence that no economist would certainly repeat nowadays, though Sismondi reproduced it: 'the specific use of a body of unproductive consumers is to give encouragement to wealth by maintaining such a balance between produce and consumption as will give the greatest exchangeable value to the results of the national industry' [pp 412-13 of the 1836 English second edition of the *Principles*]. This unfortunate opinion finally led him to praise the heaviest taxes, for the impediments they create to production. (Puynode 1868, 326-7)

Malthus's economic policy was also criticised, because of its restrictions to laissez-faire. These restrictions, moreover, were depicted as contradictory to the liberal approach adopted by Malthus himself in his *Essay* on population (see for example Puynode 1868, 325).

Finally, Malthus's developments on primogeniture and political regimes, and his criticism of the situation in France in this respect, attracted some negative comments after those already advanced by Constâncio in 1820. Molinari returned to the subject again in 1889 and expressed his disagreement: Malthus's justification of the existence of an aristocracy and the institution of primogeniture is just a consequence of the alleged necessity of a class of unproductive consumers (Molinari 1889, xxxv), and his analysis of the long-term danger, both economic and political, of the law imposing an equal division of properties in France is greatly exaggerated (Molinari 1889, xxxviii).

Catholics, associationists, socialists

On the side of the critics of liberal political economy as supported by the *Journal des économistes* and the Société d'Économie Politique, Malthus's political economy proper also attracted much less attention than the *Essay* on population. Opinions were sometimes superficial, and quite clear-cut. Most of the associationist and socialist authors regarded Malthus, because of his opinions on population, as the symbol of 'the English school', or liberal and utilitarian political economy, and did not go into the details of his other theories. In the Saint-Simonian *Doctrine de Saint-Simon. Première année*, for example, it is stated that

> ... the works of the English economists are ... far removed from any conception of the social order. Malthus and Ricardo, in their profound investigation on rent [fermage], reached, it is true, an important result: *that the difference of quality between pieces of land ... allowed to use, without any inconvenience, part of the social product for something other than the maintenance of the cultivators*; but they drew the conclusion ... that this available part of the products was, and *should be* used for feeding *idle* noble landowners. In a word they legitimised ... the political organisation, in which part of the population live at the expense of the other. (Bazard et al. 1830, 223)

The case is a bit different, however, as regards the 'charitable or Christian school' — that is, the Catholics trying to promote a 'Christian political economy' — who generally could not stand the 'Protestant', 'sensationist' or 'materialist' Malthus, especially as regards his *Essay* on population. But his *Principles* were sometimes better accepted. For example a conservative author like Jean-Paul Alban de Villeneuve-Bargemont, the author of the celebrated *Économie politique chrétienne ou Recherche sur la nature et les causes du paupérisme en France et en Europe et sur les moyens de le soulager et de le prévenir* (1834), instead referred to Malthus to explain economic crises, because of his rejection of Say's law, and enrolled him, with Sismondi, in the battalion of the critics of the capitalist or 'English system': 'The writings of Malthus and of Messrs de Sismondi, Droz and Rubichon showed that, while the manufacturing system in England could enrich the nation, that is, the industrial entrepreneurs, it was at the expense of the wealth, health, morality and happiness of the working classes' (Villeneuve-Bargemont 1834, I, 15).

The reference to Malthus, however, is rather superficial. Like most critics of free-market economics, Villeneuve-Bargemont only sees in Malthus's *Principles* the idea that markets are not self-regulating, that free competition does not lead to an optimal equilibrium, and that crises were likely to occur regularly, while neglecting or rejecting what Malthus said of the necessity of a class of unproductive consumers. This is a characteristic feature of the reception of the *Principles* by non-liberal French authors:[45] instability and crises are explained in a different way, advancing variants of the Herrenschwand ap-

[45] But by some political liberals too: we can even find a variant of the Herreschwand model in the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville.

proach.[46] For Villeneuve-Bargemont, the 'fatal doctrine' of the economists 'helped to direct capital ... and the greedy and selfish passions, towards manufacturing and, through the latter, towards limitless production' (1836, 88), thus stressing the responsibility of a growth model based, to the detriment of agriculture, on the development of machines, industry and commerce and on the 'continuous excitement of the needs' (1836, 89) necessary to absorb the ever-growing production. Hence the negative consequences: an incredible inequality in the distribution of income, pauperism and the emergence of a new feudalism, more oppressive than the previous one: the feudalism of money and industry — Frédéric Ozanam was to speak of a new form of slavery (Ozanam 1839-1840 [1859], 514-15) and, like the Saint-Simonians, of the 'exploitation of man by man'.

Later in the century, some points of doctrine were to attract more attention: the theory of rent, for example, alluded to by the Belgian Charles Périn, one of the fathers of Social Catholicism. Malthus's theory of rent, he wrote cursorily in *Les doctrines économiques depuis un siècle*, expressed 'views, which are certainly not the last nor the true word of science, but which helped to bring out the positive and decisive elements of the question' because, in fact, 'it is in the writings of Ricardo that this theory ... is stated with the greatest force and clarity' (Périn 1880, 66). He also questioned Malthus's views on the productive powers of the land. 'Nobody can assign a precise limit to the improvements of the land and of the working processes, with the help of which a given piece of land feeds an ever-growing population with an equal expense of labour from each producer', he wrote in *De la richesse dans les sociétés chrétiennes* (1861 [1868], I, 475). The role of technical progress was of course to be stressed by many economists during the controversies over the *Essay* on population.

[46] Villeneuve criticised a book Herrenschwand published in 1796, *Traité d'économie politique et morale de l'espèce humaine*. He did, however, acknowledge that the book was full of 'luminous and strong thoughts' and that the author was 'a man of genius' (Villeneuve-Bargemont 1834, I, 45, n.1).

4 The reception of the *Essay on the Principle of Population*

COMPARED with the lukewarm and discreet reception of the *Principles*, that of the *Essay on the Principle of Population* was thunderous. On the subjects of population and pauperism, Malthus's book imposed itself as an unavoidable reference. Moreover, the debates did not take place in isolation: French authors generally knew the British controversies on the theme. Reviews of English works were published, in *Revue encyclopédique* or in *Journal des économistes* for example,[47] and reports and discussions about foreign publications took place at the Académie des sciences morales et politiques and at the Société d'économie politique, the contents of which were also published.[48] British books were also translated: for example, Godwin's 1820 *Of Population* was published in French in 1821, Alexander H. Everett's 1823 *New Ideas on Population, with Remarks on the Theories of Malthus and Godwin* in 1826 — and one British author, Charles Loudon, also published directly in French (Loudon 1842).

Finally, it is interesting to recall that the content of the first edition of the *Essay* was not known in France at the beginning of our period, and authors all refer to the second and subsequent editions. Later, they considered the 1798 edition as a simple, 'conservative pamphlet' against the idea of progress of Condorcet and Godwin, in striking contrast to the scientific character of the subsequent versions (Molinari 1892, 213), and they asserted that the real Malthus only emerged in 1803 — the 1798 book being only 'a prelude' to the subject (Garnier 1853b: 382).

4.1 The topicality of the *Essay*: a sign of dramatic changes in economy and society

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, dramatic changes in the economic and social environment provoked a reversal of public opinion as regards pop-

[47] Say, for example, published a review of Francis Place's 1822 *Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population* (Say 1822).

[48] And sometimes more than once: Villermé's report on Thomas Doubleday's *The True Law of Population* was published three times (Villermé 1843).

ulation. The eighteenth-century fear of depopulation suddenly turned into its opposite, a gloomy prospect of overpopulation. However, two decades of wars had had very visible and negative effects: historians estimate that the population of France would have been 5 to 10 per cent greater in 1815, had the wars of the Revolution and the Empire not taken place. How, then, could there be such a dramatic reversal of public opinion? In quantitative terms, the national income was, in 1815, approximately equal to that of 1789: but, qualitatively, France had witnessed important changes and modernisation. During the late 1810s and the 1820s, economists and public opinion realised that they had entered a new economic era. With the development of the industrial revolution and the first economic crises, they had to admit that a new world had emerged, pari passu with a new word: 'paupérisme',[49] which expressed a dismal reality. Many people, who were physically able to work, were periodically jobless; moreover, a great number of those who were working could not earn a wage sufficient to maintain themselves and their families or to allow them to live in a decent way. Before, poverty was diffuse and partially hidden: with the new economy, it became heavily concentrated in certain categories of the population, and in certain places: it was massive, obvious and visible, and this was in a striking contrast to the simultaneous huge increase in production and wealth. Hence the sudden impression of overpopulation. Villeneuve-Bargemont depicted the new phenomenon well, as it struck him and his contemporaries:

> destitution, under the sad and harsh new word of *paupérisme*, overruns entire classes of the population, ... [and] has a tendency to expand progressively, following the very increase of industrial production; ... it is no longer an accident, but the forced condition of a great part of the members of the society. (Villeneuve-Bargemont, 1834, I, 28)

To understand the situation, an urgent need for data was felt. There had been some progress in statistics during the Empire, but this was insufficient, and the collection and classification of data had to be developed. The Académie des sciences morales et politiques of the Institut de France, for example, wanted to know 'with the greatest exactitude the physical and moral condition of the

[49] The word 'paupérisme', borrowed from the English 'pauperism', started to be widely used in French in the 1820s.

working classes'. A report by one of its members, the physician and social scientist Louis-René Villermé — *Tableau de l'état physique et moral des ouvriers employés dans les manufactures de coton, de laine et de soie* (1840) — written at its request, illustrates the new state of mind well. At the same time, the discourse of political economy was severely questioned: where was the Eden promised by Quesnay, Turgot and Smith? Not only had free trade and the development of industry failed to better the condition of the majority of the population, they worsened it. Something was wrong in the economic system itself, which political economy could not explain. On this point also, Villeneuve-Bargemont expressed well a widespread opinion when he reported that 'his faith in the theories of political economy' (1834, I: 10) had been shaken and that this science was powerless to remedy the situation:

> ... it is to such a science ... that humanity, religious charity and politics had the right to ask for the complete relief of the suffering classes of the population. But one is obliged to recognize that the results do not meet the promises; ... we are led to think that science overestimated itself; that it taught the art of the production of wealth rather than that of distributing it with equity and that, instead of relieving destitution, it has probably contributed to its propagation. (1834 I, 30)

However, during the second half of the century, and while the problem of pauperism remained unsolved, the opinion of most economists and politicians changed radically once again: the prospect of the depopulation of France returned to the agenda. This was due, in part, to the progress in statistics: the first general censuses of the population, in the 1850s, showed that the French population was significantly lower than generally thought. This raised the question of the possible depopulation of France and of its comparative weakness — its decline — in Europe because there was a higher rate of population growth in Great Britain, Prussia and the other German states. The controversies started quite early, during the Second Republic (see for example Claude-Marie Raudot, 1850 and 1851,[50] and the critical response by A. Motheré in 1850). This was an important concern during the Second Empire (1852-1870) — with the rise of the continental power of Prussia and competition with Great Britain (including the colonial question) — and all the more

[50] The 1850 book had four progressively enlarged editions the same year.

so during the Third Republic, when France had lost the war against Germany in 1871 and had to accept the annexation of the province of Alsace and the department of Moselle by the newly proclaimed German Empire. France had subsequently to deal with a deep and persistent longing for revenge over its neighbour and, in this perspective, the need for a powerful army based on an abundant population. This was a significant return to Bodin's motto as understood by his followers, and a blow to the Quesnaysian view, which had prevailed for decades among economists. 'The population of France increases very slowly, and this is all the more worrying because our rivals, all around us, are growing more speedily. Our relative influence is continuously declining, and this decline will lead to a real decay in half a century' (Cheysson 1883, 456).

This unstable context explains in part the reception of the translations of Malthus's *Essay* on population. The first two, in 1803 and 1809, were published in politically hectic contexts, in which the size of the population was an important factor of power owing to the incessant wars. During this period, reactions were few, probably because of imperial censorship. After the second Restoration in 1815, opinions changed as the industrial revolution showed its effects, and the many editions of the full version of the *Essay* (1823 to 1852) testify to the topicality of the subject of overpopulation. A significant sign of this change of focus can be found by comparing the first and subsequent editions of the main works of Say and Sismondi, and of the main liberal political philosopher of the time, Benjamin Constant. In 1803 Say published the first edition of his *Traité d'économie politique* and Sismondi his treatise *De la richesse commerciale, ou Principes d'économie politique appliqués à la législation du commerce.* In both books, reflections on population are marginal (Say)[51] or almost nonexistent (Sismondi). At about the same time (1806), Constant was completing his great political treatise, *Principes de politique*, with an approach to population that remained in the spirit of the eighteenth century — his references are Montesquieu and Mirabeau. But all changed in the 1810s. From 1814 on, in Say's new editions of the *Traité* and in his *Cours complet d'économie politique pratique* (1828-29), the space devoted to

[51] Two short chapters — 'De la production dans ses rapports avec la population' and 'De la production dans ses rapports avec la distribution des habitants' — conclude Part I of the *Traité*, 'De la production des richesses'. From the second edition on, the substance of these chapters was included in a longer text — 'De la population dans ses rapports avec l'économie politique' — concluding Part II of the *Traité*, 'De la distribution des richesses'.

population significantly increased to occupy a whole section of the *Cours complet* (Part VI: 'Du nombre et de la condition des hommes', which contains 13 chapters). And in Sismondi's *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique* (1819), the subtitle of which is *De la richesse dans ses rapports avec la population*, an entire book is devoted to the question (Book VII, 'De la population', which includes nine chapters). As for Constant, his *Commentaire sur l'ouvrage de Filangieri* (Constant 1822-24) includes five chapters on population, in which the author adopts and comments on Malthus's approach, while rejecting his remedies.

During the Second Empire and the Third Republic, the topicality of the *Essay* faded because of the threat of depopulation: hence the publication of only a few books of excerpts. For social, political and moral reasons, however, the controversies over Malthus's work did not fade away. The social question was more than ever on the agenda, and, faced with social unrest and international problems of rivalry between nations, the political parties and moral authorities were obliged to take the size of the population and the attitude towards family seriously. Some existing currents of thought gained momentum (natalism) and others emerged (social Darwinism, neo-Malthusianism and eugenics). Controversies raged until the cataclysm of the First World War.

4.2 The wheat and the chaff. Liberal economists and Malthus's true legacy

The main liberal economists (the Doctrinaires included), who for the most part were critical of Malthus's *Principles*, committed themselves to the defence of the *Essay* for decades.[52] This does not mean that they had no reservations: the various discussions at the Société d'économie politique show that positions were not static and that, as time went by, more members became critical of the *Essay* at the turn of the 1850s and questioned its relevance for the changing economic, social and political situation of France.[53] But the most important

[52] Symptomatically, in December 1852, the *Journal des économistes* reported that Horace Say, the president of the Société d'économie politique, had announced a forthcoming discussion on the theme: to what extent is it possible to be an economist without being a Malthusian?

[53] For an interesting example of this evolution within the liberal camp, see Breton and Klotz (2006) and the firm position of Jules Dupuit in this context. See also, for example,

economists still thought that Malthus's main message was essential and well documented.[54] This message, however, had to be restated again and again, against recurrent misunderstandings and falsifications coming from all corners, and beyond the simple view of Malthus's doctrine as uniquely characterised by the two ratios.

Fighting rumours, gossip and scandals

Malthus, Garnier remarked, 'is a curious example of the popular aberrations, of which many publicistes and some economists are responsible'.

> Not only is Malthus not known, not only is his true thought ignored, but what has eventually been created in public opinion is a Malthus who did not exist, a fantastic Malthus, to whom the strangest propositions have been attributed and at whom gratuitous reproaches or vehement imprecations were levelled. (Garnier 1853b, 383)

Some falsifications of Malthus's thought were particularly widespread. The celebrated 'checks' were often presented as a call to practice contraception and interpreted as an incitement to indecency and an infringement of morality. In this perspective, some writers did not hesitate to use scare tactics, referring to two foreign authors, Marcus and Weinhold, to show to what extreme and frightful consequences Malthus's ideas could lead. The German Carl August Weinhold, a State councillor and physician of the King of Prussia, wrote on population (Weinhold 1827, 1828), and, in his 1827 book on overpopulation in Central Europe, he was supposed to propose castration as a means to solve the problem, or, as Garnier euphemistically wrote, he 'indicated the means employed by the Church to obtain certain voices, and by the Turks to give faithful guardians to the virtue of their wives' (in Malthus 1845, xvi, note). In Great Britain, Marcus (whose name, which sounds like 'Malthus', is a pseudonym),[55]

Fontenay (1863).

[54] See for example Comte 1839), Rossi (1845), Cochut (1846), Garnier (1846, 1852a, 1852b, 1853a, 1853b, 1857), Puynode (1849, 1854-1855, 1860, 1868), Molinari (1849, 1855 [1863], 1885, 1889, 1892), Cherbuliez (1850, 1852, 1853a, 1853b), Dupuit (1859, 1860, 1865), Passy (1866, 1868a, 1868b, 1891, 1894).

[55] Marcus's real identity is still unknown today. According to Rambaud (1899 [1909],

in some pamphlets against the Poor Laws (Marcus 1838a, 1838b, 1839) — one of which had the significant title *Book of Murder!* — accused the promoters of the new Poor Law of plotting the 'painless extinction' (that is, asphyxia) of half of all newborn babies, which was then taken to be Marcus's own proposal.

These statements were all the more plausible because they were in the spirit of the times, with the development of utilitarian thought. Say, for example, was not exempt of this perspective of a 'painless extinction', though in a context unrelated to Malthus (whom he does not credit with such ideas). In an unpublished note of his manuscript *Politique pratique* he compared the costs of raising children at home (the case of most children) or in charitable institutions (the case of foundlings), taking into account the effect on their physical, affective and mental health. This approach, stressing the 'quality' of human beings, clearly foreshadowed what would later be called eugenics. His conclusion sounds frightful:

> As a result, men are less expensively brought up in [families] than in hospitals ... Moreover, and without being too unfair, those brought up in hospitals are not worth those who are brought up at their parents' expenses, in terms of qualities and talents. Besides, if we consider that they have little opportunity of being wealthy when they leave hospital, because of their state of destitution, and that they experience little happiness during the first 20 years of their lives, we are obliged to admit that, if it were permitted by our mores as it is in China, it would be both an action of economy and humanity to make them fall into an eternal slumber — had we the possibility to do this without making them suffer and before they acquire the awareness of their own existence and the repugnance for accepting its end. (Say n.d., 500-501)[56]

In these circumstances, no wonder that most people were frightened by these 'checks' and nauseated by the alleged proposals of the alleged disciples of Malthus. No wonder also that public opprobrium was heaped on the latter and his genuine followers.

Some significant examples of this kind of negative prejudice illustrate this

303-304) Rossi knew the identity of Marcus — a supposed celebrated English author — but never disclosed it.

[56] Say simply adds: 'This last idea cannot yet be expressed owing to the present state of our prejudices'.

aspect of the reception of Malthus well. When the Académie des sciences morales et politiques of the Institut de France, which had been suppressed by Bonaparte in 1803, was re-established in 1832 after the July Revolution, the members had to elect foreign corresponding members. The name of Malthus was suggested. In a letter to Adolphe Quetelet, Louis-René Villermé, who was in favour of this candidacy, confessed that Malthus's election[57] was very uncertain because of his bad reputation:

> I do not know whether Malthus ... will be elected. You cannot imagine all the prejudices which exist against him: he is [supposed to be] a man who preaches depopulation and unbridled libertinage, a man who wishes half of the new-born children to be thrown into rivers, etc. (12 May 1833, in Lécuyer 1984, 354)

Two decades later, in 1856, Coquelin and Guillaumin's *Dictionnaire de l'économie politique* (1852-53) was condemned by Pope Pius IX and put on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* because it was 'infected by Malthusianism', as Gustave de Molinari (1889, ii) ironically put it. A decade later, in 1867-68, the Imperial Senate had to deal with a petition moved by the Clerical party and supported by eminent members of the Catholic Church and the Pope himself, stressing some facts that had allegedly taken place at the École de Médecine — the aim was to denounce the materialist and amoral spirit that was alleged to prevail in the universities and to fight against the monopoly of the State in higher education. One of the reported facts was a supposed eulogy of Malthus made by a professor, Paul Broca,[58] and especially this sentence: 'Everywhere ease is increasing, fatherly solicitude must also increase, according to which one pays careful attention to the number of one's children' (Sénat 1868, 27).[59] The Senate was in the end obliged to discuss the petition and the question was asked, whether a professor might speak of Malthus in his lectures without

[57] Malthus was finally elected on 25 May 1833 by a majority of one vote.

[58] As the novelist and celebrated critic Charles-Augustin de Sainte-Beuve, at that time a Senator, stressed, it is curious to notice that the incriminated professors were not Catholics: one was Protestant (Broca), another one Jewish (Sée) and a third was Orthodox (Axenfeld) (Sénat 1868, 109).

[59] When the debate in the Senate was over, Broca (himself a Senator after the fall of the Empire) published an article in *Cosmos, Revue encyclopédique hebdomadaire des progrès des sciences*, accurately specifying the facts and his opinion about population, and denouncing the political manipulation of his statements, 'pretending that I quoted Malthus, of whom I did not speak' (Broca 1868, 18).

being accused of immorality. Alexandre Quentin Bauchart tried to pacify and put an end to the debates. Speaking of 'this alleged praise of Malthus', he declared:

> Messieurs, I admit tolerance in opinions ... Malthus's contemporaries considered him to be a great philosopher and economist. I am ready to leave him this reputation. I think it is better, in a school of the State, to avoid praising Malthus. But if, carried away by his improvisation, a professor praises Malthus's doctrines, in truth, what kind of attack is this on public morality and social order? (Bauchart 1868, 143)

Faced with all this, the liberal economists, throughout the century, repeated again and again that Malthus was a real philanthropist, a friend of humankind, whose sole ambition was to better the situation of the lower classes. They exhorted people just to read Malthus, not the commentators, and to beware of erroneous translations like that of 'moral restraint' by 'contrainte morale' (moral constraint):[60] it conveyed the implicit idea of the use of force to make people have less children — prohibiting the poor from getting married for example.

> Do people know what is the disparaged 'contrainte morale'? Quite simply: chastity, immaculate celibacy, continence within marriage, in one word '*renoncement moral*': this is Malthus's phrase ... The barbarous and ridiculous phrase which replaced it [in the French translation], and at which people rage, is, in fact, just one of those numerous *treacheries* that we find in *translations*, according to an old Italian proverb. (Frédéric Passy 1866, 735)

Another object of scandal was of course the 1803 passage on 'nature's mighty feast', which seemed to reveal an insensible Malthus, indifferent to people's sufferings. The words he employed on that occasion — 'she tells him to be gone', etc. — shocked even some moderate authors, not only associationists and socialists.

Finally, it is interesting to note that a strange image of Malthus also came from his own supporters. Antoine-Élisée Cherbuliez, who was extremely active

[60] Molinari sometimes preferred to use the English phrase instead of a translation.

in Switzerland and France in the development of liberal political economy, was one of them. In a paper against the socialists' apparent philanthropy published in 1850 in *Journal des économistes*, he reported what happened once during a reception at Sismondi's country house near Geneva on the occasion of Malthus's visit to Switzerland. The guests were numerous, everybody wanting to see how unpleasant Malthus looked like.

> Finally the *Reverend Malthus and his family* are announced. His family! This was an unexpected novelty. Then, one saw a lovely young girl entering, and a second, and a third, a fourth... Well, they were no less than eleven! When the father of this whole family finally entered the room, a kind of benevolent hilarity had replaced, among the guests, the first hostile expectations. At the end of the evening, nobody could deny that Malthus was a man of compassion and of intelligence, and that his writings took their inspiration from the purest philanthropy. (Cherbuliez 1850, 135)

This passage shows well how Malthus's figure was controversial — he was awaited with hostility because of his nefarious reputation in public opinion. And it is also ironic to see that Cherbuliez found himself unintentionally at the origin of one of the rumours that plagued this reputation: the legend of Malthus's 11 daughters, used later by hostile authors to stress that Malthus did not respect his own precepts! The socialist Benoît Malon, for example, commented ironically:

> The severe Cherbuliez tried to touch us with the person and family of Malthus. He told us of his *eleven beautiful daughters* ... Was it not truly touching, to see this man who thought that population was a plague of humanity, who prohibited the poor from marrying, deigning himself to have so many children? (Malon 1876, 171)

Who then was the 'real' Malthus, and what was his message? Why was he so important a figure for the liberals? Our authors were certainly not uncritical: what then do they retain of the *Essay*? To answer these questions, it is necessary to distinguish two different aspects of the *Essay*: implicitly or explicitly, Malthus's principle of population was split into two propositions, one of which was considered as non-original and even flawed, while the other was considered to express a fundamental truth.

> In this theory, there are two distinct propositions of uneven value: the first is the tendency of the human species to grow faster than its means of subsistence ... the other is the necessity for men to regulate their reproduction themselves, instead of leaving it to nature to do so. (Molinari 1889, xxxix-xl)

Malthus's first proposition

For most economists, Malthus's first proposition simply states that the size of population is limited by the means of subsistence[61] and in their opinion, there was nothing really new in it. 'In what is obviously unquestionable', Dupont de Nemours wrote, 'M. Malthus's book is a long and curious commentary on this maxim of the French economists [the Physiocrats]: *the measure of subsistence is that of the population*' (Dupont 1817, 2). At the same period, in his Athénée lectures, Say noted that the so-called 'law of population' was known before Malthus[62] and insisted, as already noted, that he had himself established this point in the first edition of his *Traité*. Frédéric Bastiat also declared that 'it is surprising that Malthus was attributed the responsibility or honour of this law ... Almost all publicistes, since Aristotle, have proclaimed it, and often in the same terms' (Bastiat 1850, 503).[63]

The judgment of Pellegrino Rossi was no different: Malthus 'could say that he did not discover anything, that he illustrated the fundamental truth of his book with a great number of facts, that he rather proved this truth well but did not find it' (Rossi 1836-38, IV, 434). The novelty is the huge amount of evidence collected by Malthus to illustrate his ideas. Say admitted that Malthus 'is a master in the field ... because his book encompasses very extended historical research, many indications for implementation, and finds a solution to all the objections that have been or could be raised against his doctrine' (Say 1819, 155-6).

Moreover, only few authors used Malthus's principle in its original form.

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[61] The statement, especially from the 1850s onward, was contested by some authors (Breton and Klotz 2006).

[62] He refers there to Chastellux's 1772 *De la félicité publique*. In *Cours complet*, instead of Chastellux, he quotes James Steuart and Herrenschwand (Say 1828-29 [1852], II, 127). In *Traité*, the list is much longer (1803-41 [2006], 831-832) and includes Montesquieu.

[63] Bastiats's *Harmonies économiques* was published posthumously: the piece on population is believed to have been written in the first half of the 1840s.

The idea that population is growing faster than the means of subsistence and causes poverty, destitution and death was discarded by some of them, who thought that Malthus's statistical evidence was partial and unconvincing and that it was impossible that God had condemned the world to these scourges. This is the reaction, for example, of Louis Reybaud, then the already celebrated author of *Études sur les réformateurs contemporains* and the author of the general introduction to the first issue of the *Journal des économistes*: 'Without doubt, the Great Architect foresaw everything and did not doom the world to famine' (Reybaud 1842, 191; see also Bastiat 1850, 497 and 501). Most economists, however, simply pointed out that the phrases Malthus used to contrast the respective evolutions of subsistence and population, the arithmetic and geometric ratios — nothing more than a 'cliquetis mathématique' (mathematical clinking) according to Vindé (1829, 14) — were inexact and unfortunate, or just a metaphor to indicate tendencies. 'The exact terms used by Malthus for the two ratios do not matter', Rossi remarks. 'To justify his doctrines, it is enough that one of the ratios, the one which represents the propagation of our species, be more rapid than the other' (Rossi 1845, xxx). Later, Antoine Augustin Cournot, in his *Revue sommaire des doctrines économique*, noted that Malthus's statement is either a truism — a population that does not face any obstacle necessarily develops in a geometric ratio, like any compound interest — or an erroneous and deceiving statement because obstacles always exist. He gave a mathematical illustration, obviously not knowing the Quetelet and Verhulst approaches (below):

> The resistance to a further increment increases according to the increment that has already occurred, that is, the increment must always slow down till it becomes imperceptible and the system becomes more or less stationary. To give a mathematical example of this idea of a progressive slowdown in an increasing ratio, on can cite the logarithms. (Cournot 1877, 155)

Most authors, also, from Say to Walras, implicitly or explicitly pointed out that Malthus's assertions give the impression of a purely deterministic fate of the evolution of population, based on a kind of physiological and 'animalistic' conception of man — independently of any social context, as if man were not endowed with any brain or reason. These authors insisted on the role

of education, the level of income, the position in society,[64] etc.: the socio-economic factors must be taken into account. Among these factors one must also count the increasing efficiency of organisation in agriculture and technical progress, which enhance productivity. This is the reason why, F. Passy stated, the image of 'nature's mighty feast' should be corrected. Malthus noted that, in some parts of Oceania, a small number of savages were in fact starving on an immense territory. Now, some decades later, an abundant population of migrants can live well on this same land. This is because 'man makes land'.[65]

> Through their labour, their capital, ... the knowledge ... that they brought with them ... from their homeland, the newcomers gave the land of their new home the productivity it did not have. In short, for nature's mighty feast where people starve, they substituted the cuisine of society, which is not always perfect but puts more abundant food on the table. (F. Passy 1894, 9)

Other parts of Malthus's text were also criticised, first and foremost the idea of moral restraint. It is perhaps good to propose it, the argument went, but this advice is simply impossible to follow.

> Malthus's Utopia, the universal triumph of this pure and perfect virtue he calls *moral restraint* ... appears to be a dream. We do not believe in the stoicism of an entire people. The voluntary renunciation of marriage is not favourable to the mores, ... and marriage, above all when it is accompanied by destitution, is far from destroying immorality. (Duchâtel 1825, 555)

Finally, Comte (1839 [1845], xxxiv-xxxvi) implicitly noted that Malthus could be accused of incoherence. In the *Essay*, he ascribes the present situation of the poor to a unique cause. But in his *Principles*, does he not denounce this kind of approach unfortunately favoured by abstract theoretical political economy?

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[64] See for example Sismondi's celebrated Montmorency parable (Sismondi 1819, II, 271-3).

[65] A similar example can be found in Say's *Cours complet* (1828-29 [1852], II, 146-147).

Some reformulations

All these reasons explain why some authors tried to reformulate Malthus's first proposition, in order to give it a more acceptable form. On the one hand, attempts were made to provide a correct mathematical formula for the evolution of population. This was the task proposed by Adolphe Quetelet (1835) — a Belgian mathematician and social scientist and a friend of Malthus — and completed by his former student, Pierre-François Verhulst (1838, 1845, 1847). Malthus, they said, was not fundamentally wrong, but his mistake was to suppose an exponential law of evolution independent from the obstacles to population growth, which he listed separately. In fact, these obstacles must be integrated into the mathematical formulation from the outset: the result is Verhulst's 'logistic equation', which shows how, in given conditions, the population tends towards a stationary position.[66]

On the other hand, some economists stated, the movements and size of the population must not be dealt with in abstracto but, like any other economic phenomenon, explained with the tools of economic theory. The most significant attempts to do so were made by Say and Molinari.

As mentioned above, Say claimed to have developed his ideas on population at the same time as Malthus and in the same direction. In most of his writings[67] he insisted on the fact that in a country, the size of the population is limited by the level of production — by the available 'means of existence':[68] 'men can multiply infinitely, but their means of existence are limited' (1819, 157). With this phrase — already used by Condorcet in a similar context — he meant two related things. On the consumption side, the means of subsistence, that is, food, are said to be only one item among the means that a family considers necessary for its maintenance — the composition of the means of existence depends on the social class to which the family belongs, and includes

[66] On Quetelet and Verhulst see Schtickzelle (1981) and Delmas (2004, 2007).

[67] In the first place, in his 1819 lessons at Athénée (7th Lesson: 'De Malthus et de la population'), his *Traité* (first edition: Book I, Chapter 46; from the second edition onward: Book II, Chapter 11) and his *Cours complet* (Part VI).

[68] Say uses the phrase 'means of existence' from the second edition, 1814, of his *Traité* onward. At the same time, Antoine-Louis-Claude Destutt de Tracy uses it in the last part of his *Éléments d'idéologie* entitled *Traité de la volonté et de ses effets* (1815, I, Chapter 4) (published in the United States in 1817 with the title *A Treatise on Political Economy*, the translation being revised by Thomas Jefferson).

immaterial as well as material products. In this perspective, each family is normally limited in size by its income and the kind of needs it considers necessary to satisfy.[69]

> It is in proportion to the quantity of the means of existence, of which each class of the nation can dispose, that this class maintains itself, increases or decreases. When, in any class of the society, the means of existence increase, natural causes, which tend to progressively multiply people, multiply their number so as to absorb the means of this class; and when these means increase for most of the classes ... or for all classes, the population of the country increases. (1828-29 [1852], II, 128)

On the production side, the emphasis on 'existence' rather than 'subsistence' means that, while the production of a country is made of items of all denominations corresponding to the large variety of needs, these items can always be exchanged for food in markets, either domestic or foreign — the same applies to a family, all things being equal. Does this presentation mean that Say's approach is different from Malthus's principle of population[70] — an assertion that Say himself never made? There is no fundamental difference: for Malthus as well, the welfare of the various classes, including the lower classes, does not depend solely on means of subsistence,[71] and the fact remains that, for Say as for Malthus, the availability of food or lack thereof is the regulator in last resort of the size of population (1819, 162). 'One country cannot but have the number of people that it can feed' (1828-29 [1852], II, 150). Overpopulation — a growth of population greater than that of production — is indeed

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[69] On this point, and despite the criticisms Say levelled at Sismondi on some points — in particular on the celebrated example of the Montmorency lineage (Say 1828-29 [1852], II, 138-9) — their positions are basically the same. As Sismondi summed up in the preface of the second edition of his *Nouveaux principes d'économie politique*: 'M. Malthus ... gave only one limit to population: the quantity of subsistence that the earth can produce ... Had he considered income, he would have seen that it is the disproportion between the working population and its income, which is the cause of its sufferings' (Sismondi 1827, xiii).

[70] For some developments in this direction, see Fréry (2014).

[71] Garnier (1857, 14) notes that the criticisms levelled at Malthus, stressing the too narrow meaning of 'subsistence', miss their point: 'Malthus meant [by subsistence] all what is essential ... for living: food, clothes, housing, *cibaria et vestitus et habitatio* of the Roman jurisconsult. But it is clearer to say, with Destutt de Tracy, *means of existence*' — the reference to Destutt de Tracy, and not Say, is worth noting. Eleven years earlier, in a polemical exchange with Charles Dupont-White, Garnier had already stressed that there was no difference between Say and Malthus on this point (Garnier 1846, 313).

possible, owing to mistakes or the improvident behaviour of some people (especially in the lower classes) or a pro-natalist public policy: in such cases, a violent adjustment necessarily happens through mortality (see for example 1828-29 [1852], II, 131, 132-3). 'Mistakes' can also refer to erroneous choices of entrepreneurs — as the new definition of 'product' that Say proposed in his polemical exchanges with Sismondi and Malthus implies.

However, Say had to face two problems, which induced him to complete his presentation. In the first place, the principle of population had to be compatible with his 'law of markets'. Could overpopulation really happen in his theoretical framework? As Everett wrote to him: 'If an excess of *production* is impossible, it seems to follow ... that an excess of producers — that is — of *population*, must be equally so. Your discovery ... furnishes therefore an indirect refutation of the principles of Malthus' (Everett to Say, 18 February 1824, in Say 1833, 346). In the second place, the 'law of markets' also gave the impression that unlimited production was possible — as 'it is production which opens a market to production' — as well as, implicitly, an unlimited population. As a matter of fact, in the first edition of his *Traité*, and with a discourse strikingly similar to that of Galiani and Herrenschwand, Say stressed the fact that, while production of food was limited on a given territory, the production of manufactures was not, and that it was always possible to exchange manufactured products for agricultural products in international markets (1803-41 [2006], 836-842).

These questions were not really new, and echoes can be found in Say's lectures at Athénée, where he stated that 'it is impossible to believe that the population of a country can grow infinitely because its manufactured production can do so' (1819, 158). At that time, his solution lay in an emphasis on needs and the interaction of demand and supply in markets: whenever manufactured products are produced in excessive quantity compared to agricultural products, their relative prices fall and the real revenue of their producers decreases in terms of agricultural products, which puts a limit to this kind of production (1819, 159). From the fifth, 1826, edition of his *Traité* onward, the theoretical explanation is more precise. Say added some developments on 'limits to production', first at the end of the chapter on 'débouchés' in the *Traité* (1803-41 [2006], 261), then as a separate chapter in *Cours complet* (1828-29 [1852], I, 345-52). A product ceases to be produced when its cost of production exceeds its utility (estimated by its price). In this perspective, population will

stop growing when, owing to increasing costs, it is no longer possible to increase the production of agricultural products — or import them from abroad — because their utility will not cover their costs. There is therefore an economic limit to production and population.

Molinari also believed that changes in population size should be explained in terms of economic theory.

> The same law, which maintains the equilibrium between the different branches and the different agents of production ... also governs the movements of population. As in any other branch of human activity, one finds in the reproduction of the population the two phenomena of the costs of production and supply and demand, regulated by the law of quantities and prices. (Molinari 1855 [1863], I, 391-2)

For example, Malthus's first proposition is flawed because he insisted too much on the 'physiological motive' for reproduction, which is common to men and animals. He unfortunately disregarded the 'economic motive' proper to men, which is, in a nutshell, a utility/disutility calculation to have children:

> ... this necessary motive is that of interest, including at the same time the moral satisfaction of the feeling of fatherhood and the material profit that raising a family can bring. If the sacrifices implied by raising a family — which increase as men reach a superior position or civilisation — exceed the material or moral profit that they bring, the motive of interest will act as a brake to the physiological motive, and population ... will tend to decrease. (Molinari 1889, xli-xlii).

Malthus's second proposition

Now, what is Malthus's second proposition, favoured by prominent liberal economists and which, according to Molinari, expresses a fundamental truth? It is his insistence that public charity and institutions aimed at relieving destitution are counterproductive and exacerbate the evil of pauperism instead of putting an end to it. 'It would be sweet to think that society can relieve any undeserved misfortune. Some evils multiply whenever one tries to allevi-

ate them', Say stated rather cautiously (1803-41 [2006], 965).[72] Cherbuliez, in the entry 'Paupérisme' of the *Dictionnaire de l'économie politique*, defined 'Malthus's law' as stating 'the tendency of public charity to create more poverty than it can or ever will be able to relieve' (Cherbuliez 1853a, 339). Some authors, like Dupuit, even included private charity among the social evils. This, and its logical consequence — an ethics of personal responsibility — were the real economic and political significance of Malthus and the reason why he was considered so essential. As Molinari unambiguously put it, 'as barbarous' as Malthus's parable of 'nature's mighty feast' might seem, 'the fact remains that it is the expression of truth' (1849, 278):

> So what was there in his book to excite to the highest degree the noisy rage of some and to be adopted as a kind of Gospel by others? Above all, it contained (and this is perhaps its chief merit) a vigorous and strongly motivated claim in favour of individual responsibility ... This is the ultimate theory of *self-government.*[73] Man is free and master of his destiny, but he is by the same token responsible for his actions. If he does not fulfil all the obligations implied by self-government, if he does not put a brake on his passions and vices, he and the human beings who depend on him must endure the consequences of his careless and immoral behaviour. He has no right to pass off these consequences onto others. (Molinari 1885, x and xxvii-xxviii)

Molinari was convinced that when private property is respected and the economic laws of society are known and implemented, no overpopulation will happen (1849, 294), simply because entire freedom naturally improves the quality of men, and hence their sense of foresight and responsibility. Men improved plants and animals: they 'produce' sheep for example through selection and crossbreeding between races, possessing different qualities. The human races or classes are also endowed positively or negatively with different faculties like bravery, aptitude to fight, morality, intelligence, etc., but these faculties (or lack thereof) remain the same — or even degenerate — as long as races are insulated from each other (1849, 295). Let them communicate

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[72] This statement is introduced by Say in the fifth edition of his *Traité*, 1826. On this point, he seems more cautious than his disciples.

[73] 'Self-government' is written here in English and in italics in the original text. Molinari then uses the phrase 'gouvernement de soi-même'.

freely with each other, and human beings will act according to forces similar to gravitation, which governs the universe. 'The most energetic faculties will attract the weakest ... big forces attract small ones, and the result is an average closer to the ideal equilibrium in the human organisation' (1849, 296). But contrary to what happens for the improvement of animals, there is no need for the State or anybody else to intervene to improve human beings: freedom will act by itself. A harmonious equilibrium between men's faculties 'will tend to establish itself through the natural and spontaneous action of individual sympathies or affinities. And as the physical organisation depends on the harmony between physical, moral and intellectual faculties, the body is improved as well as the soul' (1849, 296). Hence a necessary fight against race or class prejudices and interests in order to favour the contact between the members of the different classes of society and unions, which will regenerate the human kind — a spontaneous eugenics in a perfectly free society.

4.3 They tell him to be gone. Opponents to liberal political economy

It would not be true, however, to state that liberal economists adopted a kind of blindly fatalistic attitude, blaming the attitude of lower classes entirely for their situation, disregarding the social and institutional contexts. The majority of them were in favour of reforms, whenever they implemented freedom and the sense of responsibility.

> [Malthus] could be reproached for having attributed to the propensity to reproduction an excessive role in the ills besetting humanity, and for having played down the importance and efficiency of economic and political reforms in the improvement of the condition of the greatest number; but to this reproach and to other similar ones, did he not himself answer, when he said: *It is probable, that having found the bow bent too much one way, I was induced to bend it too much the other, in order to make it straight*? (Molinari 1885, xxvii)

Most liberal economists admitted that the sufferings of the population also come from bad policies. It has been noted, for example, how in 1817 Dupont played down the role of demography and highlighted the wrong policies followed by Great Britain, which other countries tried to imitate. Domestic poli-

cies (taxation, for example, or impediments to free trade) were also blamed. Later in the century, Eugène Daire noted that because workers do not participate in the elaboration of laws, they consequently have no responsibility for the present situation: 'one must recognise that the evil, which results from any wrong legislation, is exclusively attributable to the selfishness or ignorance of those who made this legislation' (Daire 1847, 388).

Say even went further in his 1822 review of Place's *Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population*. Malthus, he stressed, wrongly ascribed almost all the sufferings afflicting mankind to the nature of man and things, instead of bad government and social institutions, and moreover presented the behaviour of the working classes in too bad a light (Say 1822, 523-4).

> Malthus always starts from the principle, that the destitution of the poor never entitles them to any assistance from the rich; but he nowhere examines the duties of the rich, which result from a property right that is not established and protected by nature, but by society alone — that is, the poor as well as the rich. (1822, 524)

The theme of the responsibility of society in the workers' distress, because of either wrong policies or wrong social organisation, was greatly stressed and developed — but in a radical direction — by the opponents to liberal political economy: that is, associationist and socialist authors first and foremost, but also some Catholic authors from the 'charitable school'. They sometimes referred to Malthus's *Principles of Political Economy* because of its emphasis on the absence of self-regulation in markets but rejected the *Essay* and considered Malthus as a symbol of inequality and capitalism.

Catholic perspectives

Even before the emergence, during the 1820s and 1830s, of attempts to found a Christian political economy as an alternative to Smith, Ricardo and Say, Catholic intellectuals had dealt with population, if only because Catholicism had been accused of being one cause of depopulation in France. Joseph de Maistre, a major conservative Catholic political philosopher, welcomed 'the beautiful work of M. Malthus' (Maistre 1814, ii) because it brought him arguments in favour of the idea, already stated by Quesnay, that a good policy should not favour the increase of the population. In his book *Du Pape*, he is

more explicit. Catholic celibacy and the ideas of the French 'économistes' were justified by the *Essay* — ironically, it is true, by 'a Protestant pen'. 'I refer to M. Malthus, whose profound book on the *Principle of Population* is one of those rare books after which everybody is exempted from dealing with the same subject' (1819, II, 502-3). Of the three means of reducing the number of marriages in a State — vice, violence and morals — only the last one is acceptable: 'in a State, there must be a moral principle, which continuously tends to limit the number of weddings' (1819, II, 504). But Maistre did not believe in the effectiveness of the 'moral restraint' because human nature is weak and cannot implement it alone:

> The Church (that is, the supreme Pontiff), with its law of the ecclesiastic celibacy, solved the problem with all the perfection that human things can have, because the *Catholic restraint* is not only *moral*, but *divine*, and because the Church bases it on such sublime grounds, ... on such terrible threats, that it is not in the power of the human mind to imagine anything similar or close to it. (1819, II, 504-5)

It is astonishing, Maistre goes on, that Malthus and his translator, Prévost, did not explicitly draw this obvious consequence from the principle of population: this is their 'Protestant restraint', caused by their prejudices.

Some years later, Villeneuve-Bargemont remarked that the sad reality of pauperism first developed in England, a country that he considered to be at the origin of all the sufferings in Europe under the industrial system. With the phrase 'English system', he referred both to the kind of social and economic development that the United Kingdom witnessed since the end of the eighteenth century, and to the fact that this development was encouraged by the 'English school' of political economy: 'Smith's school'. This theme was not new. Whereas Say and the liberal economists were inclined to praise England and English political economy, Sismondi had already presented England as an example of how a highly civilised country could go astray because of wrong doctrines: 'while focusing the attention of my readers on England, I wanted to show, in the crisis that she endures, both the cause of our present sufferings ... and the story of our own future if we continue on the basis of the principles that she followed' (Sismondi 1827, I, xvi).

The torch of criticism was picked up and radicalised by Villeneuve-Bargemont. We have already noted how he used the Herreschwand approach to explain the

economic distress of the country, and how he associated the names of Sismondi and of the Malthus of the *Principles* in the correct understanding of facts. This is the reason why, contrary to Maistre, he could not positively assess the *Essay*: 'the appalling destitution, the existence of which in England was indicated by Malthus, could more rationally be attributed to the industrial system than to an excess of population' (Villeneuve-Bargemont 1834, I, 9).

The *Essay*, he admitted, is a valuable work, and the new doctrines 'provoked a kind of revolution in most ideas generally received in political economy as regards population' (Villeneuve-Bargemont 1841, II, 276) but unfortunately Malthus 'pushed to great harshness his recommendation for foresight'. Some of his disciples even 'pushed even further the consequences he had drawn, and the inflexibility of his principles', and this is the negative side of his work. 'It is, however, all too true that Malthus's book helped to found this school of economists, who have adopted insensibility as a philanthropic principle, and become, so to speak, inhumane through wanting to preserve humanity from the mistakes of Christian charity' (Villeneuve-Bargemont 1841, II, 277-8). He added in a typical way, like Maistre:

> It is remarkable ... that this Protestant writer made, unintentionally, the most complete apology for the Catholic principle and the wise foresight that are at the origin of the monastic orders, which are in fact none other than the spirit of sacrifice ... and of prudence manifested in the abstinence from marriage. Catholicism, far from unwisely exciting the principle of population, endeavoured instead to curb and regulate it.[74] (Villeneuve-Bargemont 1841, II, 278)

Villeneuve also reacted against the fact that the Catholics were still attacked on the subject of population, this time because of the biblical precept: 'Grow and multiply'. But this precept, he stressed, was only stated for the early stages of humanity. Once societies are formed, a new law advises men to abstain from marriage as an advantageous attitude — and Villeneuve quotes Saint Paul in this respect (1841, II, 278).

All this implied an economic and above all a moral revolution. Villeneuve proposed two main complementary principles to reform the economic system.

[74] This included not only the celibacy of monks and nuns, but also of the priests, the cult of virginity, etc. (Villeneuve-Bargemont 1841, II, 278).

The first direction was strictly economic and consisted in re-directing the development of the country in a more 'natural' way, with agriculture as the pivotal sector — all other activities being subordinate to it — together with a change in final demand, a virtuous limitation of needs and a fair distribution of income with decent wages. The second was a necessary moral reform based on Catholicism and on the conviction that happiness and welfare require neither continuous material accumulation nor constantly changing needs — an important aspect of welfare being the spiritual development of humanity — and that they would be favoured by the practice of the first of all Christian virtues: charity. 'Uniting firmly the science of the material wealth with the science of the moral wealth' (1841, II, 83) was thus the solution, the 'French system'. Of course, this programme was felt to be largely utopian.[75] Nevertheless, some liberals were not insensible to this kind of discourse, opposed to that of Malthus. Blanqui, for example, a disciple of Say, after having presented Eugène Buret's book, *De la misère des classes laborieuses en Angleterre et en France* (Buret 1840), in 1841 at the Académie des sciences morales et politiques, declared:

> As for me ... if I had to choose between Malthus's political economy and this more human, more Christian political economy, of which M. de Villeneuve-Bargemont is the expression in France, I would prefer to be mistaken with the second than right with the first ... I would always prefer the one, that is more in line with the noble inclinations of the heart and the eternal precepts of humanity. (Blanqui 1841 [1893], 303)

'Malthus the Protestant', the 'married priest' (Coux 1836, 95), was also judged in a negative way by other Catholic writers. Charles de Coux, for example, a member of the Lamennais group at the beginning of the 1830s, then Professor of Political Economy at the newly founded Université Catholique of

[75] Some authors took an extreme position. The Catholic *Revue Européenne* published, for example, a long article by L. A. Binaut, entitled 'De la misère publique' (Binaut 1831), in which the only conceivable remedy to the problem of pauperism appears to be the practice of the highest theological virtue: Catholic celibacy. In the following issue of the journal, the editorial staff felt obliged to react and published an article, 'Appendice sur la misère publique', criticising quite explicitly this kind of position and stating that the evil was not so much in the total increase of the population as in the wrong distribution of it among sectors, and that one important element for a remedy was to let industry return to its natural limits given by the agricultural and non-commercial vocation of France.

Louvain and later one of the editors of *L'Ère nouvelle*, the journal of the first Christian democracy during the 1848 Revolution, wrote:

> Malthus's doctrine spread all the more easily as it pointed the finger at the people, who were suffering, as the real authors of their own destitution; and Malthus's followers believed they did all in their power in favour of the workers when they could tell them ... 'you would not be hungry, had you not been born'. (Coux 1832, 46)

The Belgian Charles Périn is an interesting case. He had trained in economics with Coux in Louvain,[76] and he published extensively in economics approximately at the same time as his fellow countryman Molinari. Moreover, his writings were among those at the origin of the social doctrine of the Church, publicly stated for the first time in Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891). His scepticism about the theory of rent has been noted above. He recognised the importance of the problems of population and pauperism but, like many contemporaries, he did not accept the sketchy way in which Malthus presented his principle of population and the fatality of a catastrophic outcome. He also contested the efficiency of the moral restraint. His judgement on 'the narrow doctrine of Malthus' (Périn 1861 [1868], I, 480) is moral. Malthus is only, in his eyes, an eminent member of the English school of political economy: he is a materialist, a sensationist and a utilitarian — all dreadful sins. Utility is for him the criterion to distinguish between good and evil, vice and virtue, and happiness proceeds from self-love (Périn 1880, 56).

> That Malthus is a sensationist, it is impossible to deny after a careful reading of his *Essay on the Principle of Population*. The utilitarian doctrine is there in its first principles and its more rigorous applications. The entire system of Malthus on population is nothing other than the theory of social progress from the point of view of sensationism. ... With such a doctrine, Malthus cannot understand anything of the progress through sacrifice. (Périn 1861 [1868], I, 497)

To be convinced of this, Périn stated, it is enough to look at Malthus's arguments in favour of moral restraint. Malthus speaks to the self-interest of

[76] His mentor was Charles de Coux, and he succeeded him at the chair of political economy in 1845 when Coux decided to return to Paris.

people, and this interest is the foundation of his morals. 'As a decisive motive to remain celibate, he invokes, on the one hand, the expected welfare that the bachelor will obtain through renouncing marriage, and, on the other hand, the fear of the difficulties generated by having a family' (Périn 1861 [1868], I, 498). Hence the harshness of some principles and policy recommendations, like the suppression of homes for foundlings. Malthus is right, Périn states, in proscribing blind alms and institutional charity, which maintain destitution instead of relieving it. 'But he makes the greatest mistake when, while admitting and recommending private charity, he lays down the principle of a restrictive charity, which is, in the end, the indirect negation of charity' (Périn 1880, 62). Restrictive charity, which consists in controlling even the least movements of personal charity in order to verify whether the beneficiary really deserves it, whether he or she is really not responsible for his or her destitution (including the number of children), is not clearly stated in the *Essay*, Périn admitted, but implicitly there (Périn 1861 [1868], II, 389-391), due to the hesitations of Malthus himself when he speaks of charity. All this is contrary to the teachings of the Church, to Christian morals and ethics. The authority of the Church alone can impose a genuine moral restraint: to obtain not material but spiritual advantages.

In the eyes of the liberal economists, however, the difference between Périn and Malthus was not so striking. 'The most curious thing', wrote Léonce de Lavergne, 'is that, while considering Malthus as a blasphemer, M. Périn ... concludes exactly like him. Religious ideas are for him more powerful for containing passions. Malthus never said the opposite' (Lavergne 1862, 435).

Jean-Joseph Thonissen, Périn's colleague at the Université Catholique de Louvain, developed another argument, far less aggressive towards Malthus. In a long paper published twice, first in *Bulletins de l'Académie royale des sciences, des lettres et des beaux-arts de Belgique* and then in *Revue Catholique* (Thonissen 1860), he tried to show how Malthus — a very respectable man, a philanthropist, whom the author carefully distinguishes from Malthus's radical followers — misunderstood the divine harmonious laws of the universe and was empirically wrong when dealing with facts. In a nutshell, and without going into the details of his logical and empirical developments, Thonissen's position is first and foremost, and like that of Reybaud (whom he quotes: 1860, 97-8), a call for theological coherence. It is simply unbelievable to think, he states, that God imagined well-ordered laws for the animal and vegetal kingdoms, generating a quantitative and harmonious equilibrium between species, and

abandoned instead the human race to the hazards of chaos and disequilibrium. Destitution and starvation cannot be the great regulators of its numbers. God did not order 'Grow, multiply and replenish the earth' for the misfortune of humankind, and if there is a tension between the reproductive power of human beings and their subsistence, this is precisely in order to force them to fulfil their mission.[77] Human beings do not obey their instinct mechanically, they are intelligent and rational, they learn how to control their passions. But they are also lazy whenever no incentive pushes them to act and progress. Because of the tension with subsistence, they fear poverty, are anxious about their future, and are induced to create, innovate, invent new techniques, colonise the world and thus realise God's commandment. For humankind taken as a whole, this tension is not disruptive, Thonissen insists. '*Men being endowed with such degree of fertility, this fertility was necessary, not in order to disturb but instead to maintain the harmony in the general plan of Creation*' (Thonissen 1860, 106 and 157). Land is short of men, and not men short of land (1860, 110). This is not to say that some classes of the population do not sometimes starve and die, but they are a minority and this happens in very special circumstances. Thanks to education, religion and morality, most citizens behave in a responsible way. In his 'scholarly and indigestible book' (1860, 119) Malthus was unduly pessimistic. 'Overstating the improvidence of the proletarians, disregarding the always powerful action of reason, [Malthus] only saw the gloomy aspect of the immense problem to which he attached his name' (1860, 158). The readers could also conclude that Malthus was a poor theologian: a Protestant.

Associationists and socialists

With the associationists of all denominations — some of them also claiming a Christian inspiration — the rejection of Malthus's principle of population is clear. With much greater strength, they insisted that the state of the population in France was the result of a bad organisation of society. Together with the help of science and progress, a change in this organisation was believed to solve the problem of pauperism. From the Saint-Simonians, Pierre Leroux,

[77] This line of thought was already expressed by Malthus in the first edition of his *Essay*. But it was disregarded thereafter, probably because this important aspect of his approach was less obvious in the second and subsequent editions of the *Essay*.

Constantin Pecqueur and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, to Jules Bazile (alias Jules Guesde) and Benoît Malon, a wealth of different positions on the subject were expressed, each time stating how this change should be effected and the new society organised.[78]

Progressively, however, doubts were raised towards the end of the period: was it really certain that a new society, after having improved the condition of the workers, would also change their habits towards family[79] — that is, is the propensity to have children a decreasing function of personal welfare? Or, after a period of improvement in the state of the lower classes, would not the principle of population bring society back to the former situation sooner or later? Those who answered positively to the second alternative were to be part of the neo-Malthusian movement. Oddly enough, Claude Henri de Saint-Simon, in one of the 1816-18 manuscripts for *L'Industrie*, had already raised the question, which was only to re-emerge some decades later. Would not an increase in population ultimately destroy 'the improvement of the condition of the last class of the people', according to Malthus's law? His answer was negative, but elliptic: 'this question ... is very easy to solve. ... We shall devote an entire chapter to this question' (Saint-Simon 2012, II, 1677). But the chapter was never written.

For the time being, let us concentrate on a few significant examples, which show how Malthus was seen by some of the major authors, be they associationists, socialists or communists, throughout the century: Leroux ('De la ploutocratie, ou Du gouvernement des riches', 1842, and *Malthus et les économistes, ou Y aura-t-il toujours des pauvres?*, 1846 [1849]),[80] Proudhon (*Système des contradictions économiques, ou Philosophie de la misère*, 1846, and *Les Malthusiens*, 1848), Malon (*La question sociale. Histoire critique de l'économie politique*, 1876, and *Le socialisme intégral*, 1890) and Guesde (*Essai de catéchisme socialiste*, 1878a).

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[78] Many authors probably did have an indirect knowledge of Malthus's ideas, through comments and quotes in the literature of the time. Leroux, for example, in his 1849 pamphlet (see below, footnote 80), never quotes Malthus directly and refers to Loudon's 1842 book.

[79] Preferably without using contraception: for decades, most associationist writers had been strongly against it.

[80] First published in instalments in *Revue Sociale, ou solution pacifique du problème du prolétariat*, 1846. The series was entitled 'De la recherche des biens matériels, ou De l'individualisme et du socialisme'. The 1849 pamphlet reproduces articles 2 to 5.

Proudhon was especially eloquent. 'The theory of Malthus', he wrote in his pamphlet *Les Malthusiens*, 'is the theory of political murder, of murder from motives of philanthropy and for love of God' (1848, 6). For him, Malthus symbolises liberal political economy, its harsh character and total lack of humanity. 'The condemnation of political economy was pronounced by Malthus' (1846, I, 24), he is 'the penal code of political economy' (1846, II, 443). Elaborating on the famous sentence 'She tells him to be gone', his 1848 pamphlet is an indictment of this liberal political economy. Economists are blasphemers, they 'establish as a providential dogma the theory of Malthus'. They are not mystifying people but are themselves mystified: 'the economists act in good faith and from the best intentions in the world. They would like nothing better than to make the human race happy; but they cannot conceive how, without some sort of an organisation of homicide, a balance between population and production can exist' (Proudhon 1848, 6-7).

What, then, was 'Malthus's fundamental mistake' (1846, I, 25)? It was to consider the present state of things as normal and eternal. 'Malthus's mistake, the radical vice of political economy, is ... to maintain that a transitory condition is a definitive state, that is, the distinction between patriciate and proletariat' (1846, I, 26). The term 'Malthusian' came to assume a wider meaning in the fight of the rich against the poor, the big against the small, capital against labour: it represented the implacable logic of free trade and competition.

> Large industrial establishments ruin small ones; that is the law of capital, that is Malthus. Wholesale trade gradually swallows the retail; again Malthus. Large estates encroach upon and consolidate the smallest possessions: still Malthus. Soon one half of the people will say to the other: The earth and its products are my property. Industry and its products are my property. Commerce and transportation are my property. The State is my property. You who possess neither reserve nor property, who hold no public offices and whose labour is useless to us, TAKE YOURSELVES AVAY! You have really no business on the earth; beneath the sunshine of the Republic there is not room for all. (Proudhon 1848, 11)

Pierre Leroux also used striking phrases and sentences, as for example the titles of Chapters 6 and 12, section II of *Malthus et les économistes*: 'Malthusians propose a yearly slaughter of the innocents in the families whose offspring

exceeds a number fixed by law' and 'Political economy orders to kill the children of the poor, the Gospel orders to save them' (1846 [1849], 104 and 140 respectively).[81] For him also, Malthus, in his 'book made of bronze', is the powerful symbol of the real nature of political economy and its seemingly 'invariable economic law, as strong as destiny' (1842, 61). Like Proudhon and many others, he quoted the (in)famous passage on 'nature's mighty feast' and noted — as Blanqui already had remarked some years before (Blanqui 1837, II, 153n) — that Malthus deleted it in vain: 'this thought being that of all his book, it was necessary to leave this sentence or to withdraw the book' (Leroux 1842, 62n). Yet Malthus had good intentions: posterity would praise him for having contributed to the discovery of truth — but a relative truth: Godwin showed that the principle of population is not a natural law, but that of a given and artificial social state. 'We are for Godwin, against Malthus. But we acknowledge that, with the present economic law, Malthus is right' (1842, 62). It was thus necessary to change this law.

For most socialists, however, Malthus had no merit at all. Benoît Malon — one of the most influential socialist figures of the second half of the century, in particular through *La Revue socialiste*[82] — also evoked Godwin and considered Malthus as one of 'the harsher representatives of orthodox political economy' having himself 'acknowledged the confiscatory action and the homicidal inclinations of the capitalist system of production' (Malon 1890, 77). Malthus is the 'Evangelist of the bourgeois world' (1890, 78). His only achievement in the *Essay* was to relieve the rich of their responsibility for the sufferings of the workers, and this is the reason why he had immediately been so highly applauded. With this qualification, however:

> To be fair, one must say, to the credit of political economy, that the multitude of economists that we have called the *French school* — to distinguish it from the relentless *English school* — and in which we find Sismondi, Adolphe Blanqui, Eugène Buret, Villermé, de Villeneuve-Bargemont, Droz, Michel Chevalier, etc., protested with dignity in the name of Reason and Humanity. (Malon 1890, 79)

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[81] The phrase: 'Malthus, le sombre protestant de la triste Angleterre' ('Malthus, the gloomy Protestant of dismal England'), often attributed to Pierre Leroux, was in fact coined by his brother Jules in his foreword to Pierre's 1849 pamphlet (1846 [1849], iii).

[82] See, for example, Bellet (2018). In France, the spread of Marx's ideas and Marxism was very slow.

While the judgements of Jules Guesde — who became one of the strongest spokesmen of the collectivist movement at the end of the century — remained unambiguously negative and also based on political reasons, they were more reasoned. Alarmed by the statistics showing a strong relative depopulation of France, Guesde, in the journal *L'Égalité* — which he founded with Paul Lafargue, Marx's son-in-law — refuted the idea that this situation was due to something inherent to the French race or to a potential lack of subsistence, and presented it instead as the consequence of 'the saintly virtue of saving', the individual ownership of land and a high degree of land subdivision, which together provoke a voluntary limitation of the birth rate (Guesde 1878b, 1880). In his *Essai de catéchisme socialiste* he insisted again that a possible insufficient production of food is not a fatality but, in a kind of Cantillon and Montesquieu tradition, the consequence of the private ownership of land, with many properties rendered unproductive by parks, gardens etc. and the existence of many 'unproductive' activities, that is, not devoted to agriculture. Referring to Malthus and his two ratios (Guesde 1878a, 18-20n), he showed that the degree of the decreasing productivity of land was largely over-estimated by Malthus, and not justified owing to better techniques of production and present and future progress in agronomy. In this perspective, he quoted the calculations of the Russian socialist Nikolay Chernyshevsky — which he reproduced in an appendix (1878a, 93-8) — showing that, even with a population doubling every 25 years, there would be no shortage of food with a (low) rate of technical progress of 9 per cent per century in agriculture (1878a, 19n). Guesde added that Malthus's estimate of the annual rate of growth of the population was also greatly over-estimated, and that anyway this rate was bound to diminish in the future thanks to the increased welfare of the population and the emancipation of women. Considering also the possible increase in the number of farmers, there was finally 'no doubt, not only about the possibility to multiply the means of subsistence as quickly as men, but also about the ease of multiplying it more quickly than men' (1878a, 20n). The real obstacle was the capitalist organisation of society.

5 A turning point: Malthus *fin de siècle*

DURING THE LAST DECADES of the nineteenth century and until the First World War — that is, after the establishment of the Thrird Republic — the intellectual landscape started to change significantly in France. Politically, the social question was more than ever on the agenda, and the various socialist, communist and anarchist movements developed, in relation with the First and Second International or not. Economic and political competition with Great Britain and the German Empire — in Europe and in the colonies — and the desire for revenge over Germany in order (at least) to get back the province of Alsace and the department of Moselle was exacerbated, and the relative depopulation became more pronounced. Under the pressure of these political factors some liberal and Malthusian economists evolved towards protectionist and anti-Malthusian positions.[83] The socialist movements claimed they were internationalists and pacifists but, as time went by, their adherents and followers were not insensitive to the general belligerent atmosphere. At the theoretical level, as regards the present inquiry, the traditional approaches were still lively but new currents of thought emerged, which shook them up and raised new and sometimes violent controversies — both between them and within each of them. In the intellectual *fin de siècle* context, two of them are particularly important for our purpose.

The first is the emergence of evolutionist, Darwinian approaches to social phenomena, which developed rather quickly during the last decades of the nineteenth century[84] — the economist and philosopher Clémence Royer translated Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* in 1862. A link between this new current of thought and Malthusianism was immediately noted. Molinari, for example, referring to Darwin's own words, insisted that *On the Origin of species* owed a lot to Malthus (Molinari 1889, xxv-xxvii). For Cournot, things were more complex: logically speaking, Darwinism was in his opinion the principle of Malthusianism.

> It is the supreme law that all living species (each of them having

[83] The case of Paul Leroy-Beaulieu is symptomatic in this respect (Tapinos 1999). For an overview of this period, see Béjin (1988b).

[84] On social Darwinism in France, see Bernardini (1997).

> within itself a principle of expansion, without which it would have disappeared a long time ago) limit each other and fight against each other in a permanent struggle for life — which is rightly much talked about since the English Darwin made it the principle of his system of natural philosophy. It is a fact that Malthus's fame preceded that of Darwin; but it is only a historical chance: normally Malthusianism should have come as a corollary of Darwinism. (Cournot 1877, 281)

For the anthropologist and demographer Arsène Dumont, instead, while Malthus's 'cliquetis mathématique' — he picked up Vindé's phrase — and its consequence, the struggle for life, definitely inspired Darwin, what is right in the latter is wrong in the former. It is not true, he stressed, that the principle of competition always prevails in society, because 'it is constantly limited by the opposite principle of coordination and association in effort, of solidarity in good and bad fortune' (Dumont 1890, 30). It is not true that, among human beings, the winner of the struggle for life is necessarily the fittest, because this is to disregard the use of reason and foresight and the institution of private property, which all make the size of population proportionate to the available subsistence. 'Two factors impede the action of the competition for life on humankind: on the one hand freedom and foresight, which cut the link between desire and fertility, on the other hand the inheritance of property, which cut the link between personal worth and success' (1890, 35). Malthus is thus wrong. Instead, Darwin, who applied Malthus's ideas to plants and animals, is perfectly right.

Social Darwinism was discussed, refuted, accepted or qualified in all corners and pervaded very different currents of thought. One significant example is that of the celebrated geographer and anarchist Élisée Reclus. With, in particular, his Russian friends Pyotr Kropotkine and Lev Mechnikov — themselves geographers and anarchists — he accepted Darwin's view of the struggle for life provided that it is complemented by the principle, also envisaged by Darwin, of cooperation or 'mutual aid'[85] — a theme considered by Dumont as well. This mutual aid is as general as the struggle for life. It is proved by science — the winners of struggles are not necessarily the strongest but those who practice mutual aid — and leads to the dismissal of Malthus's views

[85] See, for example, Mechnikov (1886); Reclus (1897, 1898a); Kropotkine (1902). On Reclus's approach, see Pelletier (2013) and Ferretti and Pelletier (2015).

on population and subsistence. This is what Reclus stated in *L'évolution, la revolution et l'idéal anarchique* (1898b) and *L'homme et la terre* (1905). He summed up his position in his correspondence, with a parodical biblical note:

> We want to extend this solidarity to all human beings, knowing in a positive way, thanks to geography and statistics, that the resources of the Earth are largely enough to feed all. This alleged law, that all the human beings must eat each other, is not proved by observation. It is on behalf of science that we can tell the learned Malthus that he is mistaken. Our daily work multiplies loaves, and all will be satisfied. (To Richard Heath, 1884, in Reclus 1911, 325)

The second theoretical novelty was the development of the neo-Malthusian current of thought in France some decades after it developed in Great Britain. It also formed the breeding ground for eugenics, at least negative eugenics as the problem of the size of families and hence of the population could not be separated from that of the intellectual and physical quality of their members — an increase in welfare allowing a better education and the elimination of alcoholism and diseases linked to poverty. The prophetic voice of Condorcet must of course be recalled here. One man was at the origin of the French movement: Paul Robin, a former member of the First International — he sat with Marx in the Council but, as a follower of Bakunin, left the organisation — who imported the ideas from England, where he spent some time in exile. An active propaganda followed, where Gabriel Giroud (alias Georges Hardy), his son-in-law, played an important role, together with various prominent figures of the anarchist movements. In putting the family and sexual issues and the place of women in society to the fore, the movement was on a full collision course with the mainstream policy and morality of the time. In this context, Malthus's *Essay* acted as the flagship of the new ideas, even if his proposals were seriously modified to include contraception and, for some propagandists, the right to abortion and, by education or by force, dissuading 'inferior', 'degenerated' people (that is, having some hereditary diseases) from having children. Some political considerations also, such as providing less 'canon fodder' to the national armies and the 'reserve army' of capital, do not of course have anything to do with Malthus's thought.

The neo-Malthusian Ligue pour la Régénération humaine that Robin founded in 1896 — the same year as the foundation of the populationist Alliance nationale contre la dépopulation — had a journal, *Régénération*, which became

Le Malthusien (1908-14) when the Ligue was dissolved in 1908, followed by *Le Néo-Malthusien* in 1916. *Génération consciente* (1908-14), directed by Eugène Humbert, also played an important role. Many books and pamphlets were published with Malthus in the title, like *Le néo-Matlhusianisme* (Robin 1905a), *Malthus et les néo-Malthusiens* (Robin 1905b), *La loi de Malthus* (Hardy 1909) or *Pour et contre Malthus* (Liptay 1911). A book by Fernand Pochon de Colnet (alias Fernand Kolney) had a very provocative title: *La grève des ventres*, that is, 'Wombs on strike' (Kolney 1908). Continuing controversies ensued, not only with economists and politicians of various tendencies, but also with the main figures of the left — socialists, communists and even some anarchists like Reclus — who, in addition to the questions of morality, thought that a numerous proletariat was necessary to the revolution and, in a nutshell, that the neo-Malthusians were deluding themselves when thinking that a reduction in the size of families would increase wages, destroy capitalist exploitation and provoke a non-violent revolution — see for example the various opinions of Descamps (1897), Oguse (1907), Naquet and Hardy (1910) and Hertz (1910).[86]

All these examples are only a part of the numerous multifaceted debates, which involved all currents of thought towards the end of the nineteenth century. Of course, the emergence of social Darwinism, neo-Malthusianism and eugenics and the turn they provoked in the controversies over Malthus's works deserve full study. But it was worthwhile, as a conclusion, to illustrate the changing intellectual landscape that developed at the end of our period, with the re-emergence of the name of Malthus in this context: a *fin de siècle* Malthus. The attempt made in the present chapter to depict the main reactions provoked by the works of Malthus in French-speaking countries certainly also deserves a more detailed and comprehensive study, since the literature is abundant and addresses so many different themes, which still have important echoes nowadays. But that is another story. For the time being, it is hoped that these pages might ultimately render a more accurate picture of some significant moments in French intellectual history, with Malthus at the centre of things.

[86] On these debates, see Armengaud (1966), Perrot (1984), Ronsin (1979, 1980), Drouard (1992). For more extended developments on neo-Malthusianism in France, see Hello (2016).

Appendix: Malthus in Fiction

THE ABUNDANCE of the primary literature dealing with Malthusian themes goes well beyond the specialised literature of books, pamphlets and periodicals directly dealing with economic, political or ethical matters. The controversies over the *Essay* impacted public opinion and found echoes among intellectuals and artists. Alexis de Tocqueville, for example, read Malthus and drew some inspiration from him. On the negative side, Jules Michelet, the major nineteenth century historian, also referred to Malthus in his posthumous book *Histoire du XIXe siècle* (1875). There, he compared the *Essay* with a literary work by Grainville,[87] *Le dernier homme*, posthumously published in 1805 — a long parable describing the last moments of the world after all has become sterile. While both works are described as 'the Gospels of despair' (1875, 258),[88] Grainville, Michelet asserted, is more positive because he eventually sees possible salvation through love.

> The substance of Malthus's book, its impious corollary, is that love is to be banished in this world; that, to go on in this world with a miserable life, *one should not love anymore*. On the contrary, the meaning of Grainville's poem ... is the sublime ... idea (as spiritualist as the other one is materialist and vulgar) that *love is the very life of the world*, its raison d'être. (1875, 105)

Malthus's book, Michelet insisted, is a call to celibacy, sterility, and death (1875, 113). To this he opposed the picture of a simple carpenter in Paris. 'Contrary to the ideas of Malthus, love and family made this man hardworking, more productive, and more inventive' (1875, 118).

The impact of the Malthusian controversies also found an interesting expression in the use of Malthus's name in works written by the most celebrated novelists of the time, from Stendhal to Zola. A few examples are in order here: they reflect Malthus's image in public opinion.

Henri Beyle, alias Stendhal, considered Malthus's *Essay* favourably. In March 1810, he read it 'with great pleasure' and, in 1814, he characterised it as

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[87] Jean-Baptiste François Xavier Cousin de Grainville, a former priest and Bernardin de Saint-Pierre's brother-in-law. Michelet gives an extended summary of *Le dernier homme* as an appendix to his book (Michelet 1875, 459-468).

[88] Malthus wrote 'the economics of despair' (Michelet 1875, 104).

'a fabulous work' ('un ouvrage de génie') (Stendhal 1814, 445). Alluding to the eighteenth-century controversies about the impact of monasteries on the size of the population, he simply added: 'Without entering in learned discussions and complex calculations, I would say, with Mr Malthus, that if monks ... were harmful to population, it is not because they did not directly participate in it, but because they were useless to production' (Stendhal 1814, 447).[89] Later, in his book *De l'amour*, he made another allusion to Malthus as an author worth reading (Stendhal 1822, II, 135). This is of course allusive. With the other giants of French nineteenth-century literature, instead, Malthus's name and ideas entered directly into literary critique and fiction, but in a negative way: in the meantime, the controversy over pauperism had arisen, and the different opinions had sharpened.

Honoré de Balzac did not like Malthus, especially because of his criticism of the Catholic institutions (convents and monasteries) for their almost automatic charitable attitude. In a review of a book by Adèle Daminois, *Le cloître au XIXe siècle*, he denounced the anti-religious flavour of some literary works making fun of or criticising the institutions of monasteries, and stressed instead their social and spiritual necessity for the exercise of charity, insisting as well on the individual charitable initiatives, which build up a positive and efficient bond of trust between people (Balzac 1836 [1872], 248-250). His last novel, *L'Envers de l'histoire contemporaine* (Balzac 1842-48) is a eulogy of Catholic charity. Malthus's 'checks' were also strongly disapproved. For Balzac, 'the book in which Malthus advocated sterility ['infécondité'] as one of the necessary means for life in Great Britain is not the least of the scandals created by a Protestantism taken to its most extreme consequences' (Balzac 1836 [1872], 249). In his epistolary novel, *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées* (Balzac 1841-42), he depicted in a negative way the Malthusian attitude of one of the protagonists.

But with Eugène Sue, references to Malthus became more openly political. The July Monarchy was close to its end: the social question was at the centre of debates, the various socialist movements were very active and the 1848 Revolution was imminent. In his novel, *Martin l'enfant trouvé, ou Les Mémoires*

[89] Stendhal could have read this in Say: 'The evil effects of monastic establishments upon population, have been severely and justly inveighed against; but the causes have been misunderstood. It is the idleness, not the celibacy, of the monastic orders, that ought to be censured' (1803-41 [2006], 835) [Prinsep's translation modified].

d'un valet de chambre (Sue 1846-47),[90] Sue depicts the attitude of an enriched merchant, Adolphe Duriveau, recently made a count, who is campaigning to be elected to the National Assembly. Duriveau is violently anti-socialist. He advocates a united front of the rich, and a merciless attitude against the poor and 'the demon of charity'. 'Not only is charity not the duty of the rich, but it is a stupid, dangerous, and detestable practice', he declares in an electoral meeting, and, to convince his interlocutors, he finds support from political economy, quoting Smith, Ricardo, Say and, above all 'saint Malthus':

> ... it is not I only who say this, gentlemen, but those mighty minds whose science and genius are admired universally throughout Europe ... These geniuses are my saints, and their writings my catechism ... I will tell you word for word what Malthus says — enlightened Saint Malthus! one of the most admirable political economists of modern times. Listen, gentlemen; thus saith Malthus; — '*A man born into an already occupied world*, — *if his family hath not the means of supporting him*, *or if society requires not his labour*, — THAT MAN HAS NO RIGHT TO DEMAND ANY NOURISHMENT, HOWEVER SMALL. HE IS REALLY ONE TOO MANY IN THE WORLD; AT THE GREAT TABLE OF NATURE THERE IS NO PLACE FOR HIM' ... Is it not clear, gentlemen ... that when nature, like a wise mother of police, commands want to rid her of this superfluous population, that I should not, by a silly and presumptuous charity, oppose her views? ... Read and meditate on Malthus, gentlemen; by such sound reading you will gain a consciousness of your rights ... Marcus, too, a disciple of Malthus and Adam Smith ... has been still more consistent; for he courageously proposed the extirpation of the children of the poor. (Sue 1846-47 [1847], 60)

Gustave Flaubert was more neutral, but his work testifies to the persistence of Malthus's bad reputation. In his *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, Flaubert reacted against preconceptions that people spontaneously express on various subjects, without really thinking on them. One of these preconceived ideas is that Malthus is 'infamous' (Flaubert 1913 [1952], 1017). He depicted such a reaction in his novel, *L'Éducation sentimentale* (Flaubert 1869). One of the protagonists, a socialist, declares that 'the workman, owing to the insufficiency of wages, was more unfortunate than the helot, the negro, and the

[90] Later republished as *Les misères des enfants trouvés*, Paris: A l'administration de librairie, rue Notre-Dame des Victoires, 1851.

pariah, especially if he has children', and asks: 'Ought he to get rid of them by asphyxia, as some English doctor, whose name I don't remember — a disciple of Malthus — advises? ... Are we to be forced to follow the advice of the infamous Malthus?' (Flaubert 1869 [1922], 174).

This dialogue, in the novel, takes place at the end of the July Monarchy. Some decades later, while the social question was still topical, overpopulation was no longer feared in France. Quite the contrary: the relative depopulation of France was heavily discussed. The 'Revanche' over Germany was on the agenda, and a large population was thought to be necessary to a powerful and victorious country. Émile Zola was strongly against Malthusian and neo-Malthusian ideas, and in favour of pronatalism (see for example Zola 1896). In 1899, in one of his last novels, *Fécondité*, written to support his opinion, an explicit reference to Malthus appears in the text, right at the beginning, on the occasion of a discussion between two protagonists, Alexandre Beauchêne, a Malthusian (unpleasant, of course), and the doctor Boutan. Beauchêne's ideas echo Duriveau's views in Sue's *Martin, l'enfant trouvé*.

> Beauchêne ... brought out all that he vaguely knew of Malthusianism, the geometrical increase of births, and the arithmetical increase of food-substances, the earth becoming so populous as to be reduced to a state of famine within two centuries. It was the poor's own fault, said he, if they led a life of starvation; they had only to limit themselves to as many children as they could provide for. The rich ... were by no means responsible for poverty ... In vain did the doctor urge that the Malthusian theories were shattered, that the calculations had been based on a possible, not a real, increase of population; in vain too did he prove that the present-day economic crisis, the evil distribution of wealth under the capitalist system, was the one hateful cause of poverty. (Zola 1899 [1900], 12)

Boutan took his revenge, shifting the conversation towards a more topical political subject: patriotism and the place of France among the European nations.

> 'Then, logically, this is the end of France, eh?' Boutan remarked maliciously. 'The number of births ever increases in Germany, Russia, and elsewhere, while it decreases in a terrible way among us. Numerically the rank we occupy in Europe is already very inferior

> to what it formerly was; and yet number means power more than ever nowadays. It has been calculated that an average of four children per family is necessary in order that population may increase and the strength of a nation be maintained. You have but one child; you are a bad patriot.' (Zola 1899 [1900], 12)

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