

The GrEco Project

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Grenville's Economics

Lord William Wyndham Grenville

Notes on Malthus's *Essay on the  
Principle Population*

[1806]

Transcription: Christophe Depoortère

[Notes on Malthus's *Essay on the Principle Population*]<sup>1</sup>

[f. 65r] That population is necessarily limited by the means of subsistence is an obvious and universal truth. M<sup>r</sup> Malthus' first chapter however places in a strong & new light the general tendency of population to increase with much greater rapidity than subsistence.<sup>2</sup> [f. 65v] The reason is obvious. In animal life, the animals produced are capable in themselves of infinite reproduction. In the vegetable world tho' the seeds of plants possess the like power of infinite reproduction yet they require for that purpose the agency of the Earth which is not reproduced, but remains [f. 66r] the same in quantity tho' capable of being improved in quality. And as the degree of this possible improvement is various & uncertain it is evident that the assigning to the increase of subsistence an arithmetical ratio in opposition to the geometrical increase of population in given periods is [f. 66v] a supposition purely fanciful. Still however it is true that population has a tendency to increase with much greater rapidity than subsistence, & must always be limited by it.

M<sup>r</sup> Malthus then proceeds to consider the general checks to population, & the mode of their operation. He divides [f. 67r] these into<sup>3</sup> preventive & positive<sup>4</sup> checks. Under the former head he places what he terms moral restraint—under the latter various causes which he refers to the general heads of vice & misery.

This division of the subject is not logical. This term of moral restraint & of prudential restraint are frequently [f. 67v] confounded with each other notwithstanding the distinction which he labours to establish between them. Nor is it possible so to separate them.

The natural way of considering the subject seems to be this. Let there be supposed a given number of persons of both sexes whose ages are also given. And [f. 68r] let it be supposed that such a population

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<sup>1</sup> MS in British Library Add. MS. 69145 ff. 65-69. Watermark 1806.

<sup>2</sup> "But" is deleted.

<sup>3</sup> "positive &" is deleted.

<sup>4</sup> "& positive" is inserted.

would if <sup>5</sup> its reproduction continued to operate uniformly to its utmost possible extent<sup>6</sup> double itself in any given number of year.

The question then is what the cause are which may operate to make the number of persons actually in existence at the end of the given period less than the double of [f. 68v] what it was at the beginning.

Now these causes must be of one or all of these descriptions

1. The Death of some of the persons existing at the first period
2. The Death of some of those subsequently produced, or
3. The production of a smaller number than that which the supposition has assumed <sup>7</sup>.

[f. 69r] War, famine, disease, the hardship of savage life, and the vices of incident to the various stages of society operate in all these ways to prevent the increase of population, they destroy the individuals actually existing, and prevent the natural course of [f. 69v] reproduction.

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<sup>5</sup> “unchecked by any ext[?] cause by no” is deleted.

<sup>6</sup> “its reproduction continued to operate uniformly to its utmost possible extent” is inserted.

<sup>7</sup> “as possible and it does not” is deleted.