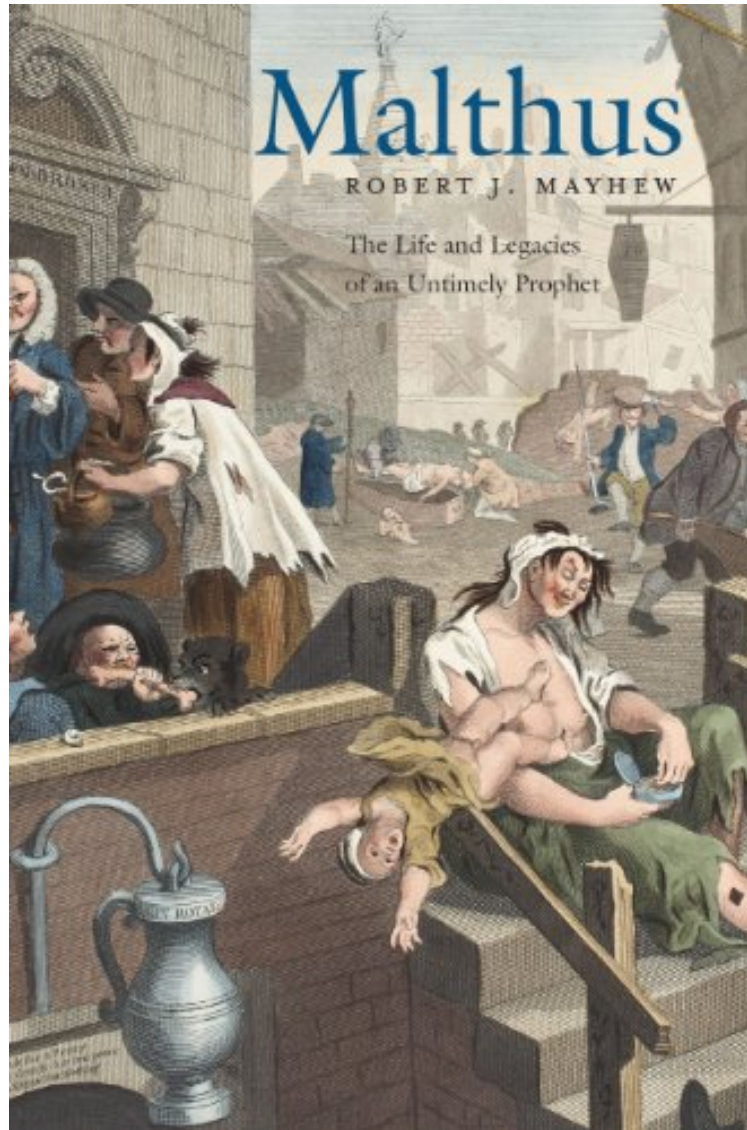


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Malthus

Robert J. Mayhew

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Robert J. Mayhew : Malthus before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Malthus:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. The continuing impact of Thomas MalthusBy Ronald H. ClarkToday, we occasionally see references to Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) and his famous prediction that population would grow much faster than the resources available to support it. Malthus supported his prediction with an extensive analysis in his "An Essay on the Principle of Population" (1803). However, as this excellent book informs us, Malthus is more than just a footnote to history. Concern about the growth of population, and related concepts like

life expectancy, fertility, and mortality rates, antedated Malthus' birth. On the one hand, Europeans felt that growing population indicated economic health; but was it growing or declining? Moreover, it was assumed that the physical environment could support greater population. Some thinkers, such as Godwin, felt a golden future would lie ahead. When Malthus not only challenged these rosy predictions, but supported his position with mathematical analysis, his book attracted immediate attention. Malthus, a talented mathematician, based his analysis on empirical rather than theological truth. His dismal prediction, he argued, was beyond government power to mitigate. He also took aim at the Poor Laws which he argued did far more harm than good. These controversial theories were widely challenged, particularly by the British Romantics (particularly Wordsworth and Coleridge and the Lake Poets) who saw a bountiful future in contrast to that of Malthus. Particularly his criticism of the Poor Laws set these folks off against Malthus. The author credits Malthus with the creation of environmental economics in particular and modern economics in general. Malthus continued to seek empirical support for his theories after he published his book (often updated), through extensive travel, reading, and the accumulation of economic and census data. The author traces Malthus' influence after his 1834 death through the Victorians. He discusses Carlyle, Ruskin, Herbert Spencer, and Thomas Huxley among others. I found it most interesting that Malthus made a real impact in the 20th century of all things. Some writers traced the interest in Eugenics, the spread of contraceptives, and the decline in population all to Malthus. Both H.G. Wells and Keynes advocated his ideas. The themes of overpopulation and resource depletion attracted writers like C.P. Snow, Bertrand Russell, Sartre, Buckminster Fuller, and Julian and Aldous Huxley. At mid-century, Ehrlich and his "Population Bomb," the Green Revolution, carbon footprints, and Spaceship Earth were all traceable to Malthus' ideas. The final chapter on "Malthus Today" demonstrates his continued relevance particularly in connection with our concerns about environment, water supplies, and migration. This is a pretty concentrated volume--heavy on analysis and ideas. It is a remarkable thorough and thoughtful analysis of a number of important intellectual ideas and public intellectuals. It has ample endnotes but no bibliography. The author's ability to demonstrate Malthus' relevance even till today makes this an extremely interesting book--but one that is best read in small pieces at a time. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. a deeper look By glasfritz to me it read like a textbook clarifying and enlarging a the argument of humans/food/needs/supplies 2 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Valuable context -- too literary By Sam J. Leven This is history as experienced by -- and driven by -- economists. Not terribly analytical [but provides sufficient notes to guide rigorous study]. Best insights: exurban Britain's semi-medieval, brutal world -- the inevitability of dynamics -- and the path to Keynes.

Though Robert Malthus has never disappeared, he has been perpetually misunderstood. Robert Mayhew offers at once a major reassessment of Malthus's ideas and an intellectual history of the origins of modern debates about demography, resources, and the environment, giving historical depth to our current planetary concerns.

Robert J. Mayhew explains complex economic ideas with clarity and shows that even though Malthus and his Essay are still remarkably well-known, his work is often an (unread) reference point. Mayhew underscores how Malthus's ideas are perpetually modern, and remarkably so. (Alison Bashford, author of *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth*) A stylish, well-written, exuberant, and cleverly conceived book. Malthus is a thoughtful and skillful achievement. (Donald Winch, author of *Wealth and Life: Essays on the Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain*) Though critics saw Malthus as contemptuous of the poor and entrenched in his beliefs, Mayhew reveals him as a humane observer and insightful commentator, preoccupied with poverty and intent on reviewing his own earlier utterances, including his contentious 1803 claim that the poor deserved no place at life's table. By his death in 1834, Malthus was an authoritative voice on population and economy, but his reputation--and notoriety--lived on in new versions of Malthusianism, including some, such as the advocacy of artificial contraception, he would never have endorsed. Indeed, Malthus was adopted as a bogeyman in post-1950s U.S. debates about "overpopulation," environment and security. Mayhew pushes beyond the stereotypes of Malthus to recover the historical reality... This is a compelling read. (David Arnold BBC History Magazine 2014-06-01) It is the wide range of techniques [the book] interweaves to recreate the unique fabric of Malthus' intellectual life--including comparative biography, comparative literature and the study of contemporary journals--that make this a singularly rich portrait. [Mayhew] is surely right that an attention to the complexities of Malthus' ideas and legacies will better equip us to deal with our present environmental challenges than will simplistic, self-edifying binaries. (Niall Ó Flaherty Times Higher Education 2014-05-22) [A] fine book. Mayhew describes the continuously contested legacy of what it meant to be a Malthusian, to commend or condemn Malthusianism in the two centuries after the Essay [on the Principle of Population] was published. But his book is also inevitably about us--as we too are obliged to think about our numbers, about nature and its resources, and about policies for living in a finite world. (Steven Shapin London of Books 2014-05-22) Mayhew treats his subject sympathetically, but the book admirably exposes the complete Malthus, warts and all. Nor is any quarter spared for critics, from the Romantics to Freud, all of whom twist Malthus to suit their agenda. Mayhew's signal contribution is to remind us that the population debate has been contentious for much of the period since Malthus' original Essay of 1798. The book also helps

us to understand the dangers of both pro- and anti-Malthusianism. (Eric Kaufmann Literary 2014-06-01) In our era of global warming, mass urbanization, nuclear contamination, rampant pollution, deforestation, strip mining, and fracking, Malthus's very attention to the dangers of unchecked population growth can seem nothing less than prescient. Malthusian thought has found itself applied to dizzyingly opposite policies and politics. You'll find it ingrained in worldviews ranging in label from radical to reactionary. Mayhew's book, then, compels us not only to reread Malthus and consider the background and the arguable moderation of his reasoning but also to consider, more broadly, the complicated and fickle ways by which ideas, once they enter the public domain, become fodder for politically charged disputes. (Sandra J. Peart Chronicle of Higher Education 2014-06-09) In his admirably rounded *Malthus: The Life and Legacies of an Untimely Prophet* Mayhew draws our attention to the actual writings of this pioneer of demography and political economy, and to his historical context, especially the revolutionary enthusiasm which Malthus was concerned to dampen. Though Malthus did not go so far as to interpret our planet as an ecosystem with limited supplies of clean air and water, Mayhew makes a convincing claim for him as a founder of what is now called environmental economics... [For] Mayhew, it is the questions Malthus asked which are still important. (Jonathan Benthall Times Literary Supplement 2014-06-13) Loathed by Karl Marx and admired by Charles Darwin, Enlightenment scholar Thomas Malthus still polarizes, notes historian Robert Mayhew. The flashpoint was Malthus's 1798 *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, which posits that although humans are prodigal, nature and resources are limited. Mayhew traces that theory through revolutionary and reactionary traditions, arguing that it remains pertinent in an era of economic downturn and shrinking resources, with predictions of 10 billion humans by 2050. (Barbara Kiser Nature 2014-07-31) Robert Mayhew helpfully dusts off Malthus and recounts his influence up to the present day, explaining why, with his one big idea, he became such an influential figure in European and North American intellectual history. Mayhew tries to rescue Malthus's reputation by saying that many of his readers used him without really understanding him. (Alister Chapman Books Culture 2015-01-01) Robert Mayhew's account of the intellectual life and legacy of Thomas Malthus (1766–1834) is a fascinating, erudite and readable interdisciplinary, indeed, multidisciplinary intellectual history. Mayhew is very good not just at contextualizing Malthus but in breaking down the binary divide separating Malthus and his enemies; in the process, teasing out from Malthus's work (and how we have understood him) so much that is of value then and now. (Matthew Hughes English Historical 2015-10-01) About the Author Robert J. Mayhew is Professor of Historical Geography and Intellectual History at the University of Bristol.