

**Engaging with Malthus: Joseph J. Spengler and Economic Demography**

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## **Abstract**

This research paper analyzes the development of Joseph J. Spengler's interpretation of Thomas Robert Malthus's work through its three stages, first the stage of quantitative analysis, second, the analysis of early American and French thinkers using Malthus as a critical lens, and third, Spengler's "Restatement and Reappraisal" of Malthusian theory.

## **Introduction**

As a writer and thinker, Joseph J. Spengler exerted tremendous influence on the field of economics. His unique ability to pursue cross-disciplinary research with a historical perspective set a standard in the field. Interested in a vast array of subjects, he was adept enough to have published works on a wide range of these. A close reading of his curriculum vitae reveals the variety of his interests. One of the most relevant developments within Spengler's writing on Economics, Demography and the history of Economics, concerns the work of Thomas Robert Malthus.

Spengler referred to Malthus throughout writing; and Malthus is the individual thinker about whom Spengler published the most. His scholarly output was both numerous and in relation to Malthus, continuous. As Malthus was the subject of much of Spengler's writing over his career, Spengler endlessly wrestled with the interpretation of Malthusian thought.<sup>1</sup>

This paper will focus on the early stages of Spengler's relationship to Malthus. Specifically, it will show how Spengler's first broad definition of Malthusian thought, published in 1945, came to be. We will trace Malthusian references in his writing beginning with his doctoral thesis in 1930 through to their conclusion in his own paper of 1945.

### **Spengler and Malthus: Three Stages of Interpretation**

The development of Spengler's relationship to Malthus occurred in three progressive stages. First, Spengler's early works, from his doctoral thesis at Ohio State University titled "The Comparative Fertility of the Native and the Foreign-Born Women

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<sup>1</sup>Allen C. Kelley, Joseph J. Spengler (November 19, 1902 – January 2, 1991). Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, Vol. 136, No. 1, 1992, pp. 143-147

in Part of the United States”, through similar titles for Arizona State University, the Brookings Institute and early on in his Duke career display his ability to digest and analyze masses of quantitative data.

The second stage of Spengler’s writing in relation to Malthus involves his analysis of both American and European demographers and other early thinkers using Malthus as a critical lens. Spengler was increasingly confident in his reading of Malthus, and had the ability to use that framework as a base set of principles to critique and interpret other thinkers. As will be discussed, Spengler examined specifically early French predecessors and followers of Malthus, both Malthusian and anti-Malthusian. Spengler applied the same method to early American thinkers, providing a revealing perspective and thorough comparison between those on both sides of the Malthusian argument. He also detailed the contrast between the development of American and European thought in regard to what was developing in England.

Through the 1930s and into the 1940s, Spengler gained greater confidence in his own reading of Malthus and also greater renown as an academic. He was finally able, in the third stage, to move away from using Malthus as a lens, and the work of previous thinkers as support, and to define independently his stance on Malthus. The culmination of this third stage came in Spengler’s “Malthus’s Total Population Theory: A Restatement and Reappraisal”, a 1945 publication that, in two extensive sections of the Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, fully reveals Spengler’s personal interpretation of Malthus’s 1798 “Essay on the Principle of Population”. In order to fully grasp Spengler’s work it is thus important to put his primary field of demographic and population study into a broader context.

## **Malthus and the Development of Population Theory**

The starting point is the publication of “An Essay on the Principle of Population, As It Affects the Future Improvement of Society” by Thomas R Malthus in the summer of 1789. Called by Keynes the “first of the Cambridge economists”<sup>2</sup>, Malthus taught there from 1793 until 1804, and used that post as the launching ground for the revisions of his first essay, and also the further development of his theories. His principles of population eventually became one of the cornerstones of classical economics.<sup>3</sup>

Malthus’ claimed that his initial theory arose out of the study of his predecessors, including David Hume (“Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations”, 1752), Robert Wallace (“The Numbers of Man in Ancient and Modern Times”, 1753), and Adam Smith (“An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations” 1776), while in the preface to his essay, he attributes its origin to a “conversation with a friend” (commonly believed to be his father). He also labels it as a direct response to the publication of the English social philosopher William Godwin’s piece “Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness” in 1793.<sup>4</sup>

The central thesis of Malthus’ work is that “It is an obvious truth, which has been taken notice of by many writers that population must always be kept down to the level of the means of subsistence...”<sup>5</sup> It is within this vein, and within the context of the new American Nation and a post-French Revolution way of thinking that Malthus presented his theory. Malthus assumed the existence of two basic laws; “First, that food is

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<sup>2</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *Essays in Biography* (London, 1933)

<sup>3</sup> Harvey Leibenstein, *A Theory of Economic-Demographic Development* (Princeton University Press, 1954)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (London, 1798). A total of seven revised editions were issued between 1803 and 1834. the edition used for reference for this paper is the 1993 Oxford University Press version with editing and an introduction by Geoffrey Gilbert.

necessary to the existence of man. Secondly, that the passion between the sexes is necessary and will remain nearly in its present state.”<sup>6</sup> In his view, these were fixed, unchanging laws of nature, which was in stark contrast with what had previously been hypothesized by Godwin. What Malthus sought to explain was the natural inequality that these two laws created. He aimed to predict and understand how the power of population and the power of the earth’s bounty and production would interact as man and society developed.

To do this, Malthus presented two different rates of growth for both food supply and population. Using the American Colonies as an example, Malthus predicted that if the population remained unchecked, it would in theory go on doubling itself every twenty-five years. For a numerical example, he provided (1, 2, 4, 8, etc.), and labeled it accordingly as a geometric rate of growth or ratio. The food supply, he predicted would grow at a different rate. For the same period of time, he stated that the food supply at best could be increased by a quantity of subsistence equal to that of which it was presently producing. This rate or ratio he explained is arithmetic, (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.). In more general terms, he concluded that the population would quickly become too large relative to its available resources, and this would then produce a number of harsh societal problems, most notably, the poor would be “reduced to severe distress”.

Malthus contended that the birth rate would stay at a relatively consistent level, hovering around the biological limit, or close to it, and that the defining control and check on the population would be the rate of death, which in his view would increase in order to make up for the lack in resources. This aspect of his argument would later become a huge point of contention as theories on population dynamics developed.

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<sup>6</sup> *Essay*

## I

### **The First Stage of Malthus and Spengler**

Both as an undergraduate and as a graduate student at Ohio State University, Spengler studied the works of Malthus. Within the Economics Department at there, he was the advisee of Albert B. Wolfe, a demographer, who himself (like most in his field at the time) subscribed to the doctrines of Malthus.<sup>7</sup>

Early on, Spengler was intrigued by the early writings of Dr. Jesse Chickering, an author, demographer and political economist whose works included, a "Statistical View of the Population of Massachusetts from 1765 to 1840", published in 1846, "Emigration into the United States", published in 1848, and "Reports on the Census of Boston", published in 1851. These three works examined a phenomenon that Chickering observed, namely that the foreign born women of Boston were bearing a larger a larger number of children than native born women. Following this argument, Spengler dedicated a large portion of his early career to examining the fecundity of both the native and foreign born populations both in New England and also in other rapidly growing regions of the country. In seeking to test and explain the predictions and observations of Chickering, Spengler expanded the scope of his work in both time and geographic region. This is reflected in papers including but not limited to "The Comparative Fertility of the Native and the Foreign-Born Women in Parts of the United States" (his doctoral thesis), published in 1930, and also in that same year "Has the Native Population of New England Been Dying Out?" followed by "The Decline in the Birth-Rate of the Foreign Born" in 1931.

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<sup>7</sup> Royall Brandis. "Spengler, Joseph John"; <http://www.anb.org/articles/14/14-01077.html>; American National Biography Online Feb. 2000. Copyright © 2000 American Council of Learned Societies. Published by Oxford University Press.

Spengler held a fellowship at the Institute of Economics in Washington in 1928 at which time he began to synthesize the data that would later become his thesis, which was the first complete study to be made of the available published state birth records prior to 1900. Accordingly, his work made available for the first time the trends in comparative fertility of native and foreign-born women. Spengler's thesis served not only to substantiate and dispel a large number of preconceived notions<sup>8</sup>, but also brought to light various issues and facets of the birth rate issue that had not yet been discussed. Contrary to the common opinion at the time, Spengler showed that native fertility was not decreasing, but in fact, in New England, had increased over the time period studied. Conversely, foreign fertility had steadily declined and was approaching a level at about equal to that of the native born. He explained this by indicating that "a much larger percentage of the foreign-born women of child-bearing age are living in the married state"<sup>9</sup> In addition to this, Spengler cited the tendency of the foreign born to move toward the practices of birth control practiced by their native born counterparts. His conclusions were precise and convincing. For the reader, Spengler's thesis lends early insight into his ability to analyze trends in data and also demonstrates his keen mode of interpretation.

Like his thesis and related works, "The Decline in Birth-Rate of the Foreign Born" is largely a quantitative analysis, but in breaking from the earlier papers, it shows a greater degree of theoretical analysis. In this paper, Spengler was writing independently of his Brookings Institute supervisor Dr. Robert R. Kuczynski, under a fellowship at the

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<sup>8</sup> Many demographers at the time were both confused and somewhat scared about the what they feared were decreasing trends in the birth-rate.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph J. Spengler. *The Comparative Fertility of Native and Foreign Born Women in Parts of the United States*. The Ohio State University. 1930 pp.155

University of Arizona, and thus was able to move beyond simple explanation. Spengler's analysis moved away from the tables, numbers, and Census data and delved deeper into theory.

For the first time, "From the data we have presented and analyzed, we may draw several more philosophical conclusions"<sup>10</sup>. Spengler initiates a theoretical conversation, bringing to light not only his conclusions about the topic of the paper (the foreign born birth rate is in fact converging with that of the native born), but also extends it to Oswald Spengler's discussion in "Decline of Western Civilizations" of the development of civilizations through population growth. Spengler suggests that the decline in fecundity should be interpreted as the birth-rate reaching a natural limit writing "if the limit of the decline in fertility has been reached then America will shortly have achieved a stationary population, possibly the only means of escape from the Malthusian devil of overpopulation"<sup>11</sup>.

In this paper, specifically in this conclusion, we become aware of Spengler's movement away from strictly empirical analysis. By the way he interprets the census data it is clear that he maintains a singular understanding of Malthus and other relevant thinkers, and is prepared to step beyond empirical arguments into theoretical analysis of these thinkers in demography and political economics with Malthus as the central figure.

## **II**

### **The Second Stage: Spengler Through Malthus**

With the shift toward critical theoretical analysis initiated, Spengler moved into the second stage of his writing. The bulk of Spengler's work during this period involves

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<sup>10</sup> Joseph J. Spengler, The Decline in Birth-Rate of the Foreign Born. The Scientific Monthly. Vol. 32, No. 1 (Jan., 1931), pp. 56.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. 59

the examination of earlier writers on political economy through his Malthusian lens. It is in this stage that Spengler demonstrates a strong command of Malthus, so much so that he is able to critique others by using it.

In August and October of 1933, Spengler published, in the Journal of Political Economy, a two part paper titled “Population Doctrines in the United States”. In it, he evaluated the reaction of American writers on political economy to the population doctrines of Malthus. Generally, Spengler found that their reaction was largely unfavorable until after the middle of the nineteenth century, and attributed this to the underdeveloped state of the political economy in the United States. Spengler notes “the lack of interest in political economy, prevalent in the first quarter of the last century, is attributable in part to the underdeveloped economic state of America and her institutions of learning”<sup>12</sup>. In addition, he notes that there existed a widespread dislike of British doctrine. While keeping in mind that at this point in history, undeveloped land was abundant, it makes sense that the incentive to examine the Malthusian thesis would be minimal. The prevailing idea at the time was to accept the belief that the efficacy of democratic institutions through cumulative progress would improve the overall conditions of the political economy in the United States.

American writers and critics of Malthus at the time were far removed from the environment in which Malthus’s theories were developed. Spengler cites this as one of

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph J. Spengler, Population Doctrines in the United States. The Journal of Political Economy. Vol 41, No. 4 (Aug. 1933), p.433-434. Spengler goes on here to note the specific number of University courses offered on the subject, implying that in fact that state of the political economy in the United States, and thus its perceived importance would in turn dictate the amount of attention paid to the subject by institutes of higher learning. He also notes, having researched journal and periodicals from the time period, that the subject was glaringly absent there also. Citing E.L. Godkin, Spengler comments that the lack of interest may be attributable to the continuous nation-wide struggle over the issue of slavery, or perhaps the importance that the “underdeveloped” government placed on the study of budding constitutional law. His conclusion on this topic suggests that the material prosperity of the United States enjoyed at the time distracted academics from problems to which the science of economics could be applied

the reasons they may have read and interpreted Malthus incorrectly. “The criticisms directed at Malthus are to be explained, therefore, chiefly by the American writers’ ignorance of his views...American critics, in short, having failed to grasp the logic of the *Essay*, sought to refute not Malthus’s thesis but rather a straw doctrine born of their failure to comprehend Malthusianism.”<sup>13</sup> Spengler’s confidence in his personal reading of Malthus is directly apparent in his style of writing.

With this preface, Spengler isolates three early American critics of Malthus; George Tucker, Daniel Raymond, and Alexander Hill Everett<sup>14</sup>. Tucker favored a view that shied away from Malthus’s classification of “misery” as strictly the product of the wretchedness of man. He instead formulated a theory that population would in fact grow, but only to a limit, and on route to this limit would foster the growth of literature and the arts, greater cultural efficiency and greater military security. Tucker also wrote that the increase in population would lead to increased industry and with that an increase in the division of labor which would in turn lend itself to reducing the relative amount of unproductive labor<sup>15</sup>. Increased development of civilization would, in Tucker’s view, naturally diminish the procreative powers of man.<sup>16</sup> Tucker’s prediction for the near future involved America’s population growth becoming reliant on British imports until Americans developed the industry to produce them domestically, at which point Britain

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.435

<sup>14</sup> Spengler would later devote a large portion of his research in this era to dissecting and thoroughly refuting the arguments of A.H. Everett. In 1936, Spengler would return to the topic of Everett and examine him in greater detail; this will be discussed further in later sections of the paper.

<sup>15</sup> Spengler primarily cites Tucker’s 1822 publication “Essays on Various Subjects of Taste, Morals, and National Policy”.

<sup>16</sup> Although Tucker was willing to admit to the presence of “vice”, he writes it off as acting only as a delay on marriage, maintaining his faith that men will naturally defer marriage until they are confident that they will be able to maintain, with a family, the lifestyle in which they have come accustomed to living. It is also important to note that while Spengler labels Tucker as a critic of Malthus, Tucker is not entirely satisfied with Godwin either. This leaves Spengler to ultimately label him as one defining the truth about the political economy somewhere “between Malthus and Godwin”. Important here also is the eventual shift in Tucker’s views. This is addressed by Spengler extensively in the second part of his paper.

would lose the American market<sup>17</sup> and their population would consequently “decline in opulence and strength”<sup>18</sup>.

Spengler subjected the writings of Raymond to the same scale of criticism. In 1820, Raymond forwarded in his “Thoughts on Political Economy”, the idea that although Malthus’s theories seemed plausible, he had produced simply a rationalization to relieve the “well-to-do of responsibility for the succor of the indigent”<sup>19</sup>. Thus, Raymond blamed unreasonable institutions and an unfair distribution of resources for the poverty associated with population growth. The natural laws of God, coupled with the seemingly limitless bounty of the earth, would prevent an expanding population from reducing itself to a subsistence level. Raymond subscribed not to the arithmetic and geometric explanation of Malthus, but rather, in Spengler’s opinion, to a set of much more idealistic standards.

Alexander Hill Everett rejected Malthus on two grounds; first, as numbers increase, the resulting division of labor promotes advancement in skills and methods that in turn lead to a more productive and more than proportionate increase in output. Second, Everett maintained, like many others, that the productive capacity of a given area where a population lived was not determinant of the size of a capacity population. With the increasing returns as provided by innovation and the development manufacturing, a population would in theory always have a large enough surplus of manufactured goods available to exchange for food products. In this situation, real wages would rise with the

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<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the writing of Benjamin Franklin as will be discussed later.

<sup>18</sup> George Tucker. *Essays on Various Subjects of Taste, Morals and National Policy*. Georgetown Press, (1822). pp.6. As quoted by Spengler.

<sup>19</sup> Spengler 1933. 437

increase in population and coupled with this increase would be a greater degree of morality lending itself to be a natural check on increasing population.<sup>20</sup>

With these three writers serving as the basis, Spengler goes on to critique the views of later anti-Malthusians in chronological order, from Henry C. Carey and his followers to S.N. Patten, J.B. Henry, C. Clark and F. A. Fetter, who Spengler calls the only group of “Malthus’s major American critics who rank as brilliant theorists”<sup>21</sup>.

Beyond the influence of Carey and into the period immediately before and after the Civil war, Spengler picks apart Francis Bowen, Francis Amasa Walker and J. M. Sturtevant.

Most notable of these was Sturtevant, who, while he accepted to the law of diminishing returns and the tendency of numbers to increase, rejected Malthusianism on the grounds of natural selection. He subscribed to the theory that wages depend on the ratio between the number of laborers without capital seeking employment, and the amount of capital dependent on them for production. In addition, he rejected the rent theory of Ricardo and also the theory of the sequence of land occupation as developed by Carey. Spengler rejects many of the assertions of Sturtevant based on his misunderstanding of Malthus and the erroneous influence on his work by Bowen and Carey, two writers which Spengler claims “understood neither Malthus nor economic theory”<sup>22</sup>.

A number of conclusions emerge from examining Spengler’s critique of anti-Malthusians approaching the twentieth century. First, for these writers, there was a clear shift away from the emphasis on the benevolence of God and nature. Second, Spengler

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<sup>20</sup> See Appendix A. for an analysis of Spengler’s 1936 work “Alexander Hill Everett: Early American Opponent of Malthus.

<sup>21</sup> Spengler 1933. 440 Spengler later credits Fetter as being the first American economist to write a book on population theory.

<sup>22</sup> Spengler 1933. 456

notes the decreasing emphasis on the development of improved methods in association with population growth and their role in increasing returns to scale. Spengler's third point indicates a much greater intensification of preventive checks in the later writers. Fourth and most poignant "none of those who criticized Malthus at length exhibits a grasp of the economics of Malthusianism"<sup>23</sup>. Spengler writes that the very nature of the criticisms advanced against Malthus, marred by logical inconsistency, reflects ignorance of both theoretical and economic reasoning.

Although the pro-Malthusian view did not prevail in American economic thinking until the years following the Civil War, there were a considerable number of earlier theories that can be read as anticipatory of Malthus. In keeping with a chronological development of Malthusian thought in America, it is appropriate now to address the 1935 Spengler work "Malthusianism In Late Eighteenth Century America" before returning to the second part of "Population Doctrines in the United States", which deals exclusively with the growth of pro-Malthusianism in nineteenth century America.

Writers in both America and Europe came to the conclusion before this period that a population tends to, over time, proportion itself to subsistence. Of those in America, Spengler first cites Benjamin Franklin. Using the example of plants in nature, Franklin effectively developed the major Malthusian premise that population has the ability to, and will, grow to a limit based on subsistence. Franklin placed the utmost importance on food supply as a natural check to population. On the moral front, factors which he indicated as obstacles to marriage were loss of territory, loss of trade, loss of a food source, unjust and or poorly run institutions (including heavy taxes preventing industry), and lastly, the introduction of slaves. As for the factors which promote

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 463

marriage, Spengler deduced from Franklin's writing the following; laws which promote trade and also check the consumption of luxury items, privileges to the married, and the inculcation of habits of industry and frugality, an "industrious education" (Spengler 1935. 692). In keeping with his previous conclusions, Spengler here again makes the point that nearly all early Malthusians adhered strictly to the idea that within a developing society the relationship between the number of social classes and the birth rate would be negative. When a member of a lower class is on the cusp of moving up in social rank, they will be deterred from child birth in order to maintain their current status and the prospect of moving higher. A clear influence on Everett, Franklin indicated that American colonial development would foster population growth in Britain by American's growing demand for industry-produced goods.<sup>24</sup>

In his study of population growth, Franklin also addresses the concept of an increasing population's affect on expanding territory.<sup>25</sup> Franklin argued that the British acquisition of Canada from France would "greatly foster Britain's industrial and demographic growth and insure the colonists' remaining in the extractive industries".<sup>26</sup>

Spengler indicates that Franklins reasoning is as follows; with the colonists freed from the suspicion of a French attack, they could "uninterruptedly multiply...and thus provide

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<sup>24</sup> The motivation of Franklin to write his "Observations", published in 1755, from which Spengler deduced these conclusions, was to convince the British crown to not levy higher taxes on American industry. Franklins point here is that with the growth of the American population, the demand for British industrial goods will grow, and the danger of industry in the colonies threatening industry in Britain will remain miniscule. He assures the crown that the growth for demand in British goods will grow at least in proportion to the increasing American population. "a glorious market, wholly in the power of Britain, in which foreigners cannot interfere, which will increase, in a short time, even beyond her power of supplying, through her whole trade should be to her colonies" (as quoted from Franklin by Spengler".

<sup>25</sup> What was read earlier by Spengler as a negative aspect of thinkers in America is here portrayed in a positive light. Spengler blamed early anti-Malthusians of only addressing the issue of an increasing population when it confronted them. Here, in this situation, Franklin does just that, the issues of the time for the colonies being their relationship to the crown in terms of expanding industry, and also their propensity to expand their borders as population grew and development expanded.

<sup>26</sup> Franklin, as quoted by Spengler 1935. 695

a growing market for British manufactures”.<sup>27</sup> Franklin’s argument is convincing, and is brought together by a pre-Malthusian conclusion, that “when a population has increased to a point where all the means of subsistence are required by it, no further increase is possible”.<sup>28</sup>

The views of Franklin and Malthus, as read by Spengler, are similar. Spengler isolates a number of Franklin’s tenets that in theory, not application, can be seen as Malthusian. Both Franklin and Malthus stated that population tends to proportion itself to the level of subsistence and that presumably with an increase in the level of subsistence, an increase in population would occur to the same degree. Implied in this is that the level of subsistence would be of rather stationary scale, a limit which population would grow toward. Spengler concludes, “Thus, Franklin, in his population theory, wrote as one imbued with eighteenth century enlightenment and tinged with some mercantilism”.<sup>29</sup>

The father of Henry C. Carey (as mentioned), Mathew Carey published a number of works that Spengler analyzed and determined were “definitely inspired by Franklin’s writings on population”.<sup>30</sup> They dealt largely with the concept of a “population surplus” and emigration. Also of note is Spengler’s analysis of John Adams’ writings. “John Adams alone viewed man and nature much as did Malthus. For Adams believed that a large proportion of mankind is irrational and imprudent in respect to the preservation and acquisition of wealth”.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Spengler 1935 695

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 697

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. 698

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 699

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. 705

Spengler's analysis of pre-Malthusian thinkers and writers in eighteenth century America led him to believe that while a law of diminishing returns had not yet been formulated, Franklin in his writing had hinted at the concept when he "referred to the decreasing facility with which subsistence could be obtained."<sup>32</sup> He writes that population growth will ultimately provide a supply of low-level labor, and expansion of territory would tend to push the population toward a higher equilibrium level. Finally, Spengler makes the point that in contrast to numerous anti-Malthusian writers of the next century, theological interpretations of population growth are not present in these early pre-Malthusian writings.

The second part of Spengler's 1933 "Population Doctrines in the United States" then begins with a reference to Benjamin Franklin, before Spengler initiates his discussion of pro-Malthusianism in nineteenth century America. Of the pro-Malthusians in America following the publication of the *Essay*, the two most prominent proponents of Malthus were the professors Thomas R. Dew of William and Mary College and Thomas Cooper, a doctor, and president of South Carolina College.

Dew expanded the definition of subsistence, and suggested that population should also be viewed as dependent on the amount of available capital. A believer in the system of diminishing returns, he held that returns at the intensive and extensive margins and the growth of both population and capital led to falling wages. On the subject of developing industry, Dew wrote that, as price is made up of both wages and profit, the advancement of capital and population in a nation will diminish the relative exchange value of industrial goods and therefore equip that nation for the development of industry and manufacturing.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. 706

Spengler's reading of Cooper suggests that he "accepted the doctrines of Malthus's *Essay* in entirety".<sup>33</sup> Cooper went beyond Dew and attempted to quantify the subsistence "the natural price of labor is adequate subsistence for a married couple and a child or two."<sup>34</sup> Cooper differed slightly in his interpretation of the diminishing returns principle. Cooper believed returns to be diminishing in areas of land, but constant in manufacturing, the demand for labor then, depends on the ratio of capital to population. Improved methods and tools would only provide for a temporary check on diminishing returns on land. A growing population, according to Cooper, pushes inferior lands into cultivation and thus tends to exhaust more lands to a greater degree more quickly.

The view of limited lands with diminishing returns was eventually adopted by George Tucker (originally discussed by Spengler within the framework of an anti-Malthusian).<sup>35</sup> Tucker, by examining the supply of arable and potentially arable land, deduced that the quantity and quality of the agricultural products making up a laborer's real wage would suffer to the same degree. Spengler writes that "Tucker stands out as an acute thinker in a period when acuteness was conspicuously rare."<sup>36</sup> Although Tucker did not receive widespread attention at the time, Spengler finds a link between his definitions, Malthusian ideals, and those of the individual he calls the "most prolific and probably the most influential writer on population"<sup>37</sup>, Francis Amasa Walker. Like Tucker and Cooper, Walker subscribed to a theory of diminishing returns by linking agriculture and the diminishing returns of the "extractive industries" to the earth itself.

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<sup>33</sup> Joseph J. Spengler, Population Doctrines in the United States. *The Journal of Political Economy*. Vol 41, No. 5 (Oct. 1933), p.642.

<sup>34</sup> as quoted in Spengler 1933. 642

<sup>35</sup>It is interesting that Spengler devoted so much time to the study of George Tucker, whose stance on Malthus eventually changed because, as pointed out by Kelley, this is what happened in Spengler's own career (though the other way around).

<sup>36</sup> Spengler 1933 653

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 654

He wrote “the raw materials of all manufactures, and the subject matter of all trade and transportation...(come) originally from the soil.”<sup>38</sup> Through this logic he demonstrated that diminishing resources of raw materials will lead to an increase in their price, and thus diminishing returns on the manufactured product of which they are apart of. In Walker, Spengler finds two strong Malthusian conclusions. First, that population has the ability to increase faster than the level of subsistence and second that the tendency of population to outstrip subsistence is not checked as a population slides into a stage of diminishing returns. In addition to this, Walker related the standard of living to both the supply and the mobility of labor, linking it positively to the wage level.

In Spengler’s analysis of these Malthusians, he finds a clear redefinition of one of the most important ideals. “Malthus’s proposition that population tends to press upon subsistence had become: population tends to press upon the standard of living.”<sup>39</sup> In addition, Spengler points out the overwhelming trend that in the nineteenth century, the majority of the analysis done on population was based solely on the quantitative aspects, and wages. The qualitative aspects of population growth were greatly ignored. As the writers in America came to grips with their English counterparts, they eased into a more widespread acceptance of Malthus, and as understood by Spengler, Malthusianism became the dominant doctrine for population analysis following the Civil War.

Spengler, in his examination of these early American thinkers, uses his knowledge of Malthus as leverage to interrogate the meaning of the passages, and through this is able to deconstruct their logic on the issues of population and political economy. His perspective is singular in that he never loses track of his Malthusian

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<sup>38</sup> As quoted by Spengler 1933 654

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 671

motives and is able to refute arguments as well as pull pieces of Malthus together out of more disparate works. As somewhat of a capstone to his work with American writers, and before his shift to examining French Malthusians in leading up to his book “French Predecessors of Malthus”, Spengler shifted his focus from writer’s theories to their predictions and the practice of population forecasting. In this light, we see Spengler attack the subject of increasing population from a different angle. The majority of the paper examines empirical data from which Spengler asks the question “Why did they predict the numbers that they did”, this all again with an eye to Malthus.

### **Spengler on Prediction**

“Population Prediction in Nineteenth Century America” was published in December of 1936 in the American Sociological Review, and is for Spengler, a new approach. In the United States, interest in studying population growth stemmed from writer’s attempts at proving, through data, that the country was destined for great numbers. In France, the other location of intense study, interest in population growth was correlated with the development that was seen in 1850-60 when the belief emerged that France’s population was no longer growing rapidly.

Leading up to the publication of data by George Tucker in the 1840s, the dominant view was that the population in America would grow at a rate similar to what had been the observed from 1790 to 1860, a rate that would allow the population to double approximately every 23 years. Spengler points out that Franklin had estimated “the annual number of marriages at two per 100 persons, the number of births per completed family at eight, and the period of doubling at about 20 years.”<sup>40</sup> Spengler

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<sup>40</sup> Joseph J. Spengler. Population Prediction in Nineteenth Century America. American Sociological Review, Vol. 1, No. 6 (Dec., 1936), p.906

explains that this rate was not only accepted by the majority of Franklin's contemporaries both in America and abroad, but also by Malthus himself. The "3 percent" rate as forwarded by both Franklin and James Madison<sup>41</sup> was largely accepted as truth.

Again, in keeping with Franklin's stance on the need for expansion, J.W. Scott, writing in the 1840s, predicted that the population would continue to increase at that rate, but the bulge in population would largely inhabit areas of the country yet explored and civilized. Here Spengler provides another example of the optimism of the writers of the time. It is clear to him that the overriding mood was that the American population would continue to grow healthily and was far removed from the burden of population pressure.

For Spengler, George Tucker again becomes the point of interest. Through deep analysis of census data dating up to 1840 (not unlike the work Spengler himself did for his thesis and early writings), Tucker proved that, in fact, that rate of natural increase was falling. His conclusion put the rate of natural increase at "far below the ordinary estimates"<sup>42</sup> which led him to suggest that unless the volume of immigration drastically increased, the period of doubling would continue to increase. In an issue of *Hunts Merchants' Magazine*, published in 1854, Tucker wrote that "the laws of population, as laid down by Malthus, must be considerably modified."<sup>43</sup> Tucker revisited the concept of the carrying capacity of land and formulated an acreage-per-person proportion to be used in determining the possibility and likelihood of population growth for a specific area.

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<sup>41</sup> Spengler links the 3 percent rule to the *Niles Register*, which approved the number based largely on Blodgett's earlier observations on the eve of the War of 1812.

<sup>42</sup> Spengler 1936. 913

<sup>43</sup> As quoted by Spengler 1936 914

The unrealistic predictions by most American writers lead Spengler to a common conclusion: lack of understanding. He writes “With the exception of the forecasts of Tucker and Walker neither the population forecasts nor the estimates of population capacity set down by American writers give evidence of much knowledge of the sociological and the economic determinants of population growth and capacity.”<sup>44</sup> Americans, caught up in the youthful expansion of their country failed to anticipate the population approaching an upper limit as early as 1900. Spengler writes that the Americans failed to full grasp Malthus. They only took into account the supposition that the growth of population is governed strictly by the available food supply. They failed to allow for cultural factors (division of labor, class stratification etc.) that tend to be conducive to deliberate family planning, in Spengler’s words, the “wide diffusion of effective means of family limitation”<sup>45</sup>

In Spengler’s capstone paper on American Malthusian and anti-Malthusian thinkers, he is expedient in synthesizing both of their quantitative predictions and their theoretical frameworks. Spengler does this all without taking his eye off of the subject, that being their relation to Malthus.

For Spengler, the transition from studying American to French writers meant moving from criticizing those who had simply misread Malthus to criticizing both the predecessors and contemporaries of Malthus. His level of critique is elevated in his discussion of French writers and his reading of Malthus is further challenged. In late 1936, Spengler published a two part paper in the *Journal of Political Economy* titled “French Population Theory Since 1800”. In this paper, he would in the first section

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 918

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 921

address French contemporaries of Malthus, followed in the second by a close reading and critique of his critics.

### **Spengler's Critique of French Thinkers**

In contrast to America, where the intellectual climate was not prepared or geared toward Malthusian views, the social and intellectual conditions in France were favorable toward a positive reception. In France, the density of the growing population had begun to lead to more widespread poverty, and the whole of the country was becoming aware of it. Jean-Baptiste Say<sup>46</sup> predated Malthus in observing that “other things equal, the population of a country proportions itself to its products, or always to the quantity of its products.”<sup>47</sup> Say, a pessimist like Malthus, believed that in France, although the per capita means of existence necessary to insure the supply of crude labor might rise, bringing with it the level of real wages, the “wages of the rudest and lowest class of labour would seldom rise.”<sup>48</sup> Spengler finds a strong mercantilist influence in Say's contemporary, Charles Ganilh, who believed in an absolute maximum in political economy based upon the ability of a population to obtain an increase in produce (increase level of subsistence) for a smaller expense. Ganilh and Say were firm believers that as long as manufacturing and industry were maintained at increasing returns, a population would be able to sustain growth, again here indicating that a reliance on import agricultural products would be possible. Say was followed by DeTracy, who Spengler credits with establishing the concept of a “fixed wages fund”. DeTracy assumed

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<sup>46</sup> In Say's writing, Spengler also found reference to and influence from Adam Smith, Hume, and Montesquieu and also labeled him as a follower of the Physiocrats.

<sup>47</sup> *Traite d'economie politique* (Paris, 1803) as quoted by Spengler in: Joseph J. Spengler. French Population Theory Since 1800: I. The Journal of Political Economy, Vol.44, No.5. (Oct., 1936) p.579

<sup>48</sup> Spengler 1936. 579

relatively fixed number of both jobs and wages which led him to believe that any increase in population would depress wages. The “fixed wage fund”, as fed by both “the income of passive capitalists...and the income of active enterprises”<sup>49</sup> both which remained constant could only sustain a certain wage level, one which would be lowered by an increasing population, especially at the lower end of the labor distribution. J.M. Dutens would go on to add the concept of net product to this litany.

Spengler credits the “French Liberal School” for greatly substantiating and defending Malthus. “In substance the liberals believed that, given free competition, individual responsibility, and the diffusion of prudence and forethought, capital per head would accumulate, wage levels would rise and the lot of the masses would steadily improve.”<sup>50</sup> In the absence of these conditions, as was largely the case, population would press on the limit of subsistence, in that any given population has a greater propensity to increase population than production. In an increasing population where invention and progress can not adequately outstrip the tendency to diminishing returns, the future of the wage level and subsistence level depends on whether or not the working class has the ability to defer marriage and thus check their increase. In this sense, Pellegrino Rossi, the Italian, converted French Liberal advocated as did Malthus that the general population be educated as to the realities of political economy and would thus be encouraged to limit their own numbers within their means of proportionate increasing production. In this sense, they both postulated that as a society advanced,<sup>51</sup> it would tend to develop a set of

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 582

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 585

<sup>51</sup> This is seen in the writing of A.H. Everett in that one of his main points was that “barbarism” was one of the natural checks on population. It is clear that although Everett may not have entirely understood his European contemporaries, he at least was willing to attempt to incorporate some of their views into his work. Rossi although, in this case uses the example of the Norman population to prove his point. Barbarism is presented by Malthus as his “fatal, inevitable law”.

more civilized principles and moral standards, standards which would include greater attention to both forethought and reflection. These standards would then act as a natural check on the population growth. Rossi wrote that this would then develop a “small competent population...(as opposed to), a poverty-stricken population.”<sup>52</sup> The sense of moral duty to restrict the population was further discussed by Joseph Garnier, who Spengler calls Malthus’s “most active French exponent.”<sup>53</sup> Garnier, like Malthus favored work and foresight, and advocated the responsibility of familial heads as to knowing how large of a family they could support. Taking welfare a step further, Garnier maintained that any sort of aid to the poor or a minimum wage was comparable to initiating communism. Of the utmost importance to Garnier was marital prudence. Spengler writes that “marital prudence produces comfort, reduces fatigue, diminishes competition among workers, and thus raises wages, develops conjugal qualities and filial respect, and promotes general well-being.”<sup>54</sup> Courcelle-Seneuil, another French Liberal attempted to apply Malthus through an equation that could be used to determine the correct population of a community. He wrote that the population of a community should be equal to “the sum of the individual incomes received by the community, minus the sum of the inequalities, divided by the minimum average individual consumption.”<sup>55</sup>

A number of contemporaries of Malthus attempted to link a system of free trade directly to the fluctuations in population. Gustave De Molinari believed that if a competitive price system were allowed to prevail, it would itself dictate the capacity of

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 587

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. 588

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 589. Spengler summarizes Garnier’s main points in the *Du principe*

<sup>55</sup> As interpreted from Courcelle-Seneuil by Spengler.  $P = (r-i) \div c$ , where P= the resulting population, r = the sum of incomes or the available means of subsistence, i = the sum of inequalities, and c = the minimum of individual consumption.

biologically fit persons that could function and exist within it. For Spengler, the work of M. T. Duchatel combined the theories of a “fixed wages fund” and diminishing returns and expressed them as the only realistic controls for population growth, and at the same time, the cure for poverty (being that the cause of poverty was an inadequate wage fund). He believed that the average rate of wages depended upon the ratio of total workers to the “sum appropriated each year in society to pay for labor.”<sup>56</sup> Through this, Spengler is able to draw the same conclusions from Duchatel and De Molinari’s writings, that only moral restraint and limitation could curb population growth, while public relief was an unfit solution.<sup>57</sup>

Spengler labels the next set of French writers as “Conditional Malthusians”, those who accepted Malthus in theory but not severity. They believed that overpopulation (if it ever were to seriously develop), would be countered by technological progress which would bring with it an increasing division of labor. This in turn would lead to the “expansion of man’s desires and standard of living”<sup>58</sup> which would then diminish population pressure. Conditional Malthusians believed that Malthus in his interpretation of population growth had ignored any and all possible beneficial aspects. Thinkers such as F. Bastiat<sup>59</sup> had faith in the development of men to check their own population. Man, in his theory should be elevated about the brute level of a freely populating animal and should be given credit for moral restraint and the development of the deferment of marriage over time. Most prominent of these thinkers in Spengler’s view was Peirre

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<sup>56</sup> Spengler 1936 594

<sup>57</sup> Spengler points out here that this point was further advanced by Cournot, a Malthusian and a Darwinian who supposed that state support of the poor would interfere with natural selection.

<sup>58</sup> Spengler 1936 600

<sup>59</sup> Spengler notes that Bastiat and his followers were clearly influenced by Henry Carey in a rare cross-pollination of ideas from America to Europe.

Emile Levasseur, who subscribed to the central Malthusian thesis and recognized the challenge that well being could only be increased when production effectively outpaces population growth, but rejected Malthus's ratios and held that production could surpass the rate of population growth. Spengler writes that Levasseur maintained, "the density of population on a given territory is determined principally...by the climactic productive advantages of that territory, by the relative amount of capital available, by the degree of advance in science and industrial arts, by intelligence and industry of the population, and by the degree of efficiency in social organization and government"<sup>60</sup>, all factors which could be steadily developed and controlled.

Spengler divides the French critics of Malthus into two distinct categories, first, the "collectivists and non-collectivists" who blamed poverty as the result of population pressure on capitalist institutions, and second, those who had faith purely in cultural determinants of fertility to ease natality and limit population pressure. Of the early thinkers in this group, Spengler first presents Sismondi, who labeled population pressure as a result of the local environment. Sismondi wrote that in the pre-capitalist era, the social system and division of labor was such that each member of society could accurately predict the demand for their services, and plan a family accordingly. With increasing industry came decreasing specialty and a further removal from the product one is crafting (worker alienation), this in turn no longer allows a laborer to be able to gauge the demand for their services, and they then lose their perspective on how to properly plan for managing a family. Burnet, who Spengler labeled as a follower of both Godwin and Everett succeed Sismondi, extending the societal environment to institutions. In Spengler's words, he believed that "Population naturally remains below the means of

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<sup>60</sup> Spengler 1936 607

subsistence, and if it attains them, if it sometimes exceeds them, it is the fault of economic institutions; it is not that of human nature.”<sup>61</sup> Spengler concludes that the French anti-Malthusians in this category were unable to accept the asceticism of Malthus and his association of moral restraint with the system of private property and individual responsibility.

The non-socialist anti-Malthusians, Spengler labeled as being of the “Psychologico-Cultural School”. As defined by Spengler; “Aside from their greater emphasis upon the non-economic advantages of population growth, the critics included in this group criticized Malthus chiefly for his supposition that the growth of subsistence was the major detriment of the growth of population.”<sup>62</sup>

Spengler’s critical assessment of both French Malthusians and their critics serves to further represent his confidence in the subject matter. For Spengler, his understanding of Malthus serves as a tool which he uses to pick apart the arguments on both sides of the issues in order to reveal their true meaning and significance. Although Spengler’s critique of French writers begins to reveal his own, it was not until he stepped away from other writers and addressed Malthus directly that his interpretation of Malthus became clear.

### **III**

#### **Spengler Engages Malthus Directly**

In the last stage of the development of Spengler’s relationship to Malthus, his writing comes to maturity and he is able to step away from voicing his opinions on Malthus through the critique of others; he was able to address the subject directly.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 747

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. 754

Spengler, having exhausted the use of Malthus as a critical lens and having the utmost confidence in his reading and understanding of Malthus, initiates his personal interpretation of Malthus. This stage would take Spengler from one side of the Malthusian argument to the other, beginning with his “Restatement and Reappraisal” and ending ultimately with his 1966 paper “Was Malthus Right?”

The month before Spengler published his most comprehensive paper on Malthus, he published “Population and Per Capita Income”. This piece serves as a benchmark in that it shows Spengler stepping away from other thinkers and beginning to make his own statements on the very topics that were so hotly contested by those on either side of the Malthusian arguments. In this Spengler employs a new and more aggressive tone and mode of argument. This work indicates Spengler’s initial engagement of Malthus within his own realm. For his first topic, he chose the effect of population changes on economic conditions as measured by per capita income. This was appropriate considering that the increasing or diminishing returns and wage level issue had been the biggest point of contention for Malthus’s followers and critics.

Spengler writes that per capita output is governed by a number of factors, all subject to the influence of population. Spengler defined them as:

The “ratio of population to the productive factors used jointly with labor in the creation of goods and services; occupational composition of the population; pattern of consumer demand; the extent to which the economies associated with improved organization, with specialization and the division of labor, with large-scale production, and with agglomeration, are being realized; trading relations with other economies; age composition of the population; and fullness of employment.”<sup>63</sup>

With this, Spengler addressed a number of the most prominent Malthusian points of contention. Spengler concludes that the diminishing returns caused by population

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<sup>63</sup> Joseph J. Spengler. Population and Per Capita Income. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol 237, World Population in Transition. (Jan., 1945) p.183

growth are in fact a feature of the restraint placed on man's productive capability by the environment (land and natural resources). He writes that science and innovation had not "delivered man and his growth from the restraints imposed by agriculture, nor has it freed modern industry of dependence upon those natural resources whose supplies are fixed or being depleted."<sup>64</sup> He continues to address the cultural issues brought up by earlier thinkers in writing that "nor has cultural change everywhere clipped the wings of the stork and released mankind from the clutches of the Malthusian Devil."<sup>65</sup>

It is clear that Spengler does not forget Malthus in his own assessment of the population problem. At this point in his career, he would be labeled as a staunch Malthusian, regarded his greatest proponent. In what follows, Spengler takes stock of the current (1945) state of Malthus within the context of the changing field of demographic research, and utilizing the same daft critique and strong inquiry makes his total statement on the status of Malthus.

### **Spengler's *Malthus's Total Population Theory: A Restatement and Reappraisal***

As described above, the field in which Spengler was working was going through a state of change development. The methods of research were shifting while new theories and ideas were vying to become the new standards in the field. Overall, it can be seen that within the field there was a widespread rejection of Malthusian ideas. What had been the basis of study for so long was being eroded by the downturn in populations. Spengler had dealt with this on an empirical level in his thesis, and in "France Faces Depopulation"<sup>27</sup>. The essay under examination here can be seen as Spengler's reaction

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<sup>64</sup> Spengler 1945 191

<sup>65</sup> Spengler 1945 191. Also note here that the term "Malthusian Devil" is one that Spengler originally used in 1931.

<sup>27</sup> Joseph Spengler, *France Faces Depopulation*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 1938).

on a more theoretical level. Not entirely a defense of Malthus, the paper rather presents a more thorough explanation of the many aspects of Malthus's works that Spengler believed had been largely overlooked and misinterpreted.

In his opening paragraph, Spengler directly addresses commentators on Malthus: "They have overlooked his extended consideration of the question of population in the *Principles*, where his primary concern was the increase of the supplies on which population growth depends. They have, therefore, missed his *total* population theory, and the manner in which it developed."<sup>28</sup> With this in mind, Spengler sought to bring to light in his essay Malthus's whole population theory.

The first section of Spengler's work deals primarily with the *Principles*<sup>29</sup>, Spengler notes that it is there where Malthus "most fully developed the thesis that the progress of population in number and well-being depends upon the maintenance and the expansion of the effectual demand for labour"<sup>30</sup>. Spengler advances the point that a country's population may fall far short of its capacity (a given value fixed by its resources), due to the progress of a country's population in number and well being depending on the growth of the "effectual demand" for labor. This demand is the overall determining factor which dictates whether or not a population will increase. He quotes Malthus, "this demand is proportioned to the rate of increase in the quantity and value of funds (read here as wealth), whether arising from capital or revenue, which are actually

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<sup>28</sup> Joseph Spengler, "Malthus's Total Population Theory: A Restatement and Reappraisal", *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science/Revue canadienne d'Economie et de Science politique*, Vol. 11 No. 1. (February 1945), pp.83-110. Vol., Vol. 11 No. 2. (May 1945), pp.234-264

<sup>29</sup> Thomas. R. Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy considered with a view to their Practical Application*, (London, 1836)

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 84

employed in the maintenance of labour.”<sup>31</sup> Keeping this in mind, if “effectual demand” continues to fuel population growth, what then are the checks on growth? Spengler, deriving thought from Malthus writes that the answer “depends ultimately upon the habits of consumption of the population and upon the skill and industry with which they develop and utilize their resource and equipment.”<sup>32</sup> When the ceiling for population is reached and each individual is producing at their maximum potential, wealth will move to a point where it is produced at “the lowest rate required to maintain the actual capital.”<sup>33</sup> By emphasizing Malthus’s theory on demand, Spengler believes one can deduce that through this demand, Malthus was in fact aiming to set limits to the capacity of his principles to generate progress in a given situation.

Spengler then gives attention to the development of Malthus’s thoughts on commerce. “To commerce Malthus now attached much greater importance than in his early writings.”<sup>34</sup> The exchange of goods dependent on the varying tastes of the population increases the “exchangeable value of our possessions, our means of enjoyment, and our wealth.” Spengler points out that such exchange is coupled with a desire to consume, a desire that maintains markets and therefore profits, preventing them from coming to a “stand” as indicated earlier. In theory, a desire for exchange and the maintenance of markets can be seen as supplying the “effectual demand”, a key concept as previously discussed.

Spengler focuses the conclusion of this section on this concept of “effectual demand”, a theory of demand which evolved from Malthus’s consideration of the

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<sup>31</sup> *Principles*, p. 234 as quoted by Spengler, p.89

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 90

<sup>33</sup> Spengler here is indicating that for example, rent and interest rates would come to a stand. p.90

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 97

population question. Spengler believes that Malthus clearly understood this concept but received insufficient credit for his insight. Through his examination of checks on population growth, Malthus was able to consider both the “long-run as well as short-run determinants of the effectual demand for labour and population”<sup>35</sup>. Spengler labels Malthus’s study of industrialization as Malthus looking into how that process acted to dissolve barriers that prevented the increased of this “effectual demand”.

In the next section of the essay, Spengler turns to the role of industrialization. Spengler and his contemporaries saw industrialization as something that would tend to reduce population pressures in a number of ways. He writes that industrialization “provides employment for the excess agrarian population, supplies purchasing power...and brings about urbanization and the adoption of a cultural pattern suited eventually to bring population growth to a stand.”<sup>36</sup> The point that Spengler seeks to reveal is that this twentieth-century outlook on industrialization is not far from what Malthus was both thinking and studying, “a nation’s economy should be sufficiently industrialized to establish a working balance between its agricultural and its non-agricultural branches, but not so industrialized as to make it partly dependent on foreign sources for foodstuffs and therefore insecure with respect o provision”<sup>37</sup> Overall, Spengler indicates that for Malthus, his original focus was much more fully on subsistence, and only in later editions of the *Essay* did he begin to write on the primacy of agriculture in economic expansion. In this light, Spengler points out that Malthus criticizes heavily the remnants of feudal society in England, indicating that it is in effect a

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 100

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. 100

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 100. The last point here is addressed by Spengler in greater detail in later sections of his essay and will this be discussed here accordingly.

block on “effectual demand”, industrialization and reorganization being a better suited system.

Malthus’s recommendations in later editions of the *Essay* clearly indicated his preference for an industrialized society. He wrote that a country is best off when it is able to find a favorable balance between “great landed resources with a prosperous state of commerce and manufactures”<sup>38</sup>. A country in this situation is able to self-determine the distribution of its growing capital between agriculture and industry in order to maintain this favorable balance. Spengler substantiates that Malthus was a predecessor to the thesis that the population of workers in a society moves “from agriculture to manufacture, and from manufacture to commerce and services”.<sup>39</sup>

In the third section (divided into five sub-sections), Spengler examines a number of more broad ranging topics which will be introduced as encountered. In the first of these, Spengler discusses Malthus’s views on the role of “luxury” and how it affects population growth. The main point of this section is that in Malthus’s view, luxury that required labor was entirely acceptable and even necessary in a society up until the point where it began to negatively affect the propensity and ability of the labor force to produce the maximum amount of agricultural output. Malthus clearly rejects the “horses versus men” thesis<sup>40</sup>, so heavily cultivated by his predecessors, and instead states that in no way would the production of luxuries in any case surpass the production of food. The

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<sup>38</sup> p.93-96, as quoted from the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the *Essay* by Spengler

<sup>39</sup> Colin Clark, *The Conditions of Economic Progress* (London, 1940), as quoted by Spengler, p. 107

<sup>40</sup> Cantillon, “Upon the tastes of the proprietors, therefore, depend the means allotted for the support of population, and, consequently, population growth itself. If, for example proprietors prefer horses to goods and services composed largely of labour, numbers will be less, for there will not be so much subsistence for their support, and its relative price may be higher”. as explained by Spengler, p.235-236

production of food was tied directly to the “mass happiness of society”<sup>41</sup>. In light of this, Malthus gave little thought to those who were in error by expanding manufacturing at the expense of agriculture, thus drawing resources away from farming (this leading to an upset of the delicate balance previously discussed).

In the second section, Spengler discusses the “Exportation of Work”, and again the role of trade. Spengler states that Malthus, building upon the insight of Adam Smith,<sup>42</sup> indicates that the exportation of raw produce is an indicator that a specific country or society has the potential for population growth, and the country on the receiving end of that trade is one that either has a population growth exceeding what it can create subsistence for or has let it self develop to a point of chronic dependence. Malthus openly “opposed a large country becoming dependent upon foreign-produced provision”<sup>43</sup>. Malthus indicated that the ability of a country to export labor, embodied in commerce and manufactures could not keep pace with the growth that would be needed in imports of raw foodstuffs in order to maintain a sustainable balance. He also noted that a country which relies on foodstuffs imports may face a very serious problem when the country supplying the foodstuffs develops to a point where it is able to produce not only the necessary foodstuffs, but also it s own manufactured goods, thus undercutting the previous comparative advantage of the manufacturing based country. As Spengler points out, Malthus’s “attitude toward import restrictions and export bounties derived from his belief that a nation should provide its own foodstuffs in adequate quantity.”<sup>44</sup> In

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 237

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 242

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 242

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 243. Spengler notes that in further discussion, Malthus when pressured, erred on the side of favoring protective import duties, he was extremely wary of making any part of a population reliant on foreign supplies.

this way, Malthus, although expressing an interest in trade, was more concerned with the development first of a self-sufficient nation (trade within the state being of importance far greater than that of trade outside).

In the third section, Spengler discusses Malthus and the retrospective view of whether or not he is considered “counter-revolutionary”. Spengler points out that Malthus did oppose revolution in general, and certain principles of the French Revolution, in that his thought was largely conservative and more focused on the elements of both man and society that were constant. This section, although possibly important for Spengler, provides little theoretical insight into the overall essay.

The fourth section of Spengler’s essay addresses the aspect of population growth and control associated with “Pro-Marriage and Pro-Natality Measures”. Malthus saw the growth of the English population as being directly tied to an increase in the country’s ability to produce. Spengler writes on Malthus saying he believes that “when food was available and accessible to the masses, men needed no additional stimulus to multiply.”<sup>45</sup> Malthus indicated that if numbers were to decline, “it is not for want of a disposition on the part of men to marry and multiply; it is from want of food.”<sup>46</sup> As explained by Spengler, for Malthus, any reason for decline could be deciphered from examining any conditions that prevented the growth or maintenance of food supply.

The last section of Spengler’s paper deals with the concept of an “Optimum Population”. The concept of an optimum population to Spengler is a subject not

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid. 256

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 257. Spengler quotes in his footnote in this section Malthus’s *Principles*, saying that “There never has been, nor probably ever will be, any other cause than want of food, which makes the population of a country permanently decline”. In lieu of what happened at the turn of the century, this theory only further displays the urgency within the field of population study to figure out how and why declines were happening.

addressed fully by Malthus. Instead, Malthus addressed optimum densities and also optimum growth rates. He did not address the issue of a deficiency in birth rates, because he assumed that “given sufficient industry and sufficient emphasis on agriculture, there would be no persisting deficiency of births or population.”<sup>47</sup> For Malthus, the concept of a declining birth rate was not realistic. Within the context of the time period in which he was studying and observing, this makes clear sense. It is only with the advantage of hindsight that those studying the dynamics of populations are able to address this aspect of the subject.

In his conclusion, Spengler frames the work of Malthus. Spengler observes that Malthus was working in a time of great transition; the industrial revolution, a shifting productive basis of society, changes in overall demand of the population, and movement away from an entirely agricultural society. Spengler wanted to demonstrate to his contemporaries in the field that at this point in time, a point where the field of study was rapidly changing; it would be imprudent to discard fully the works of Malthus. Instead, scholars should reevaluate Malthus’s thinking and apply it appropriately, while cultivating new theories and concepts as economic thought evolves.<sup>66</sup>

## IV

### Conclusion

From his thesis to “Malthus’s Total Population Theory: A Restatement and Reappraisal”, Joseph J. Spengler addressed Economics, Demography and political economy with a Malthusian lens that allowed him to analyze all aspects of the field, from quantitative sets of information to early European and American thinkers and writers. He

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 262

<sup>66</sup> To further develop the analysis of Spengler’s “Restatement and Reappraisal”, his personal notes in the Duke University Archives were examined. This analysis can be found in appendix B.

read and reread the works of Malthus continually and was constantly revising his definition of Malthusian ideals in order to best address the topic at hand. He was able to defend Malthus from the barrage of both classical and more modern thinkers. Spengler quietly gained an unwavering confidence in his reading of Malthus and by the time his “Restatement and Reappraisal” was published considered himself both Malthus’s greatest proponent and advocate. In his eyes Malthus’s theories were universally applicable and invaluable in the analysis of how a growing population would affect a country. In the three stages of development described, Spengler brought Malthus to the forefront of his work. His critique is untouched and his style of interpretation sheds light on aspects of Malthus that had yet to be examined.

Although his work on Malthus did not end with, “Malthus’s Total Population Theory: A Restatement and Reappraisal”, the article can be seen as the document that Spengler used to establish himself and his own interpretation of Malthus. After moving through three intense stages of development, it was finally, Spengler’s reading of Malthus revealed, and it brought to maturity his relationship with one of the most influential thinkers on population theory.

## Appendix A

### **Joseph J. Spengler on Alexander Hill Everett**

“Alexander Hill Everett, Early American Opponent of Malthus”

*The New England Quarterly*, 1936

It is often the case that over the course of study, a specific individual will peak the interest of the writer to a greater degree than others. This is the case for Joseph J. Spengler, who while researching the early opponents of Malthus took a keen interest in Alexander Hill Everett one of the most outspoken of the American anti-Malthusians.

Spengler published “Alexander Hill Everett Early American Opponent of Malthus” in March of 1936, just months before what is seen as his capstone on the subject, and just under three years after first publishing on the topic. The paper is a meticulous critique of Everett’s argument against Malthus.<sup>67</sup> Spengler wrote of Everett that “In his works is to be found the best expression of the opposition to Malthus which developed in America during the first half of the nineteenth century.”<sup>68</sup> That said, Spengler still maintained that Everett’s opinions were “typical” of American anti-Malthusians in that he was clearly “unfamiliar with the argument and purpose of the essay.”<sup>69</sup>

In response to Malthus, Everett formulated a three point argument. First, that both Malthus and Godwin’s interpretations were based upon “unsound philosophical assumptions.”<sup>70</sup> Second, that population did not have the tendency to grow unless provoked by physical warrant, and third, that the growth of population produced

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<sup>67</sup> Also included in the essay is a succinct summary of Malthusian principles that is unmatched in any of his other writings.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 97

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. 101

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 101

abundance, not scarcity (increasing returns to scale along with a higher wage rate). The dispute here is over whether or not, population increase has a negative or positive correlation to per capita income.

Everett sought to show that an increase in population would cause the level of subsistence to rise at a greater rate than the population itself. This directly counters the Malthusian argument that labor becomes less efficient and productive in proportion to the degree of skill with which it is applied. Everett largely drew his division of labor ideas from Adam Smith, but Spengler again here indicates a misinterpretation. As many other anti-Malthusians, Everett was convinced that as the population density of an area increased, the growth in per capita income would come from the shift away from agricultural products to those of industry. Again herein lies the argument of whether or not a country is able to sustain a growing population that requires the import of food for subsistence.

Spengler is quick to point out, that Everett's religious and standing philosophical views were the basis upon which he rejected both Godwin and Malthus. He makes the point that "a writer's social interpretations are largely governed by his personal attitudes"<sup>71</sup>, and in this case, finds fault with that, noting that it may have been the cause for Everett to so grossly misread Malthus. In keeping with this, Everett forwarded the idea that a natural limit would be reached through the development of religion, experience, and moral restraint. Everett contended that progress could not continue infinitely, and that high civilization was only the precursor to decay. The only checks on population were "moral and physical evil."<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 102

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 105

It seems that Everett was most interested in refuting Malthus solely for the purpose of denying the fact that the human race possessed the ability to grow indefinitely. In Everett's view there were four natural checks; "physical evils...private vices....vicious political institution...(and) barbarism."<sup>73</sup>

Spengler writes that in reading Everett's writing, it is clear that he was groping for a much broader cultural theory as to the growth of population, "a theory such as social scientists have only recently arrived at."<sup>74</sup>

Although Spengler took quite an interest in Everett, he points out that "The gradual ascendancy of the pro-Malthusian view in the second half of the nineteenth century, coupled with the weight given to Henry Carey's theories by the anti-Malthusian writers, served to submerge any importance which Everett might have otherwise attained."<sup>75</sup> Everett also lacked a strong interpretation of Malthus. His misreading of the central thesis of Malthus render the majority of his arguments useless. Spengler concludes "Everett is of interest, therefore, not as a critical thinker, but as an individual who possessed a certain philosophical bias and reacted characteristically to a theory which he obviously did not understand and plainly disliked."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid. 106

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 106

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 117

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 118

## Appendix B

### **Analysis of Joseph J. Spengler's Notes On Malthus's**

As further evidence in support of the argument that Spengler's views on Malthus underwent several real shifts of their course in his career, I examined the unpublished materials on Malthus in the Joseph J. Spengler collection in the Duke University Archives.

This section draws on a series of notes which are contained within the Duke University Archives. They are located in the Joseph J. Spengler Collection, in the accession labeled 88-010. The notes were contained entirely within Box 1. The folder containing the notes is labeled "Malthus" and we know they are relevant to the paper because of his mention of his "Restatement and Reappraisal" within the notes and also because of the presence of a rough draft. Other than this, the notes were in a state of complete disorganization. What follows is commentary on those notes and an attempt to decipher what Spengler was thinking while reviewing Malthus and preparing to write his paper. The condition of the organization of the notes prevented us from being able to cite functionally. Indication to a section of the notes is given when possible. Other than that, this section of the paper can give reference to the collection with the following footnote.<sup>48</sup>

In the first section of Spengler's notes, he points out some of the differences in terminology between Malthus's 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> editions of the Essay. While in the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the Essay, Malthus uses the term "resources," in the 2<sup>nd</sup> he uses the term "funds for the maintenance of labour." Furthermore, Malthus states that "even the exchangeable value of the whole produce may increase without any increase in the demand for labour" only in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition.

Spengler discusses Malthus's treatment of capital accumulation during the years of war. Specifically, he refers to a "stagnation of effectual demand during the close of the war (1815)". He annotates Malthus, writing that "the decrease of home revenue was aggravated by a rapid currency contraction. Malthus claimed that what was needed at the time was increased national revenue that will increase the exchangeable value of the bullion and its dominance over the dollar."

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<sup>48</sup> Joseph J Spengler. Duke University Archives. Accession 88-010. Box 1. Assorted Notes.

The relationship between the behavior of capital and population is addressed at length in Spengler's notes. Spengler writes that capital and population are similar in behavior. He explains that capital may be deficient in relation to population, and yet redundant in relation to demand for it. Similarly, labor may be deficient in relation to resources, but redundant in relation to demand for it. The similarity between capital and population is addressed directly when he states that capital increases following its destruction as population increases following its destruction, because of a high rate of return.

Spengler notes to himself to be sure to include that it is "better to have more proprietors than laborers" and that the "division of land would lead to overpopulation" in his section on demand. Later in his notes, Spengler interprets Malthus's statements that "it seems probable that our best-grounded expectations of an increase in the happiness of the mass of human society are founded in the prospect of an increase in the relative proportions of the middle parts" as "more middle class, less lower class." He also notes to include in the section on the feudal system that the diversion of men from menials and army can increase wealth. Spengler returns to discussing the relief problem later in his notes where he analyzes Malthus's proposition of public works. He writes of Malthus's theory of remedying the "the evils arising from the disturbance in the balance of produce and consumption."

The earliest of Spengler's notes on writing "Malthus's Total Population Theory" provide a clearer view into Spengler's initial purpose in writing the work. Similarly to his final draft of his work, Spengler writes in his notes that "students of Malthus always note his second proposition..." He then proceeds to explain what the students overlooked.

However, unlike his final draft, in his notes Spengler specifically refers to a “qualifying footnote” by Malthus. The development of this idea can be seen clearly in the introduction to the final essay and also here.

“By an increase in the means of subsistence is here meant such an increase as will enable the mass of society to command more food. An increase might certainly take place, which in the actual state of a particular society would not be distributed to the lower classes, and consequently would give no stimulus to population.”

Spengler clarifies, however, that it is not his intention to discuss the checks as Malthus makes the checks depend upon economic evolution (this again, is made clear in the final copy).

Spengler’s argument is quite clear even in these preliminary notes. Spengler argues that although this qualification does not appear until in the first or second edition, its substance is evident in certain chapters in the second edition and is foreshadowed in the first. The second part of this particular note discusses the importance of this qualification – Spengler writes that it “reflects a more inclusive theory of economic development which was enlarged in the succeeding editions of the essays and which received its most complete expression in his *Principles of Political Economy*.

He then writes that he plans discuss Malthus’s theory in length. Spengler explains that Malthus’s theory is that the expansion of subsistence depends upon the proper distribution of product as well as upon the availability of resources and technique. He continues by explaining that proper distribution in turn depends upon the existence of effective demand, so we have population dependent upon subsistence. Subsistence is obtained through employment, which is dependent upon the existence of effective demand which depends upon the distribution and this in turn depends in part upon the structure of the economy.

Spengler's notes are extremely extensive as he delves into the results of progress in population and wealth. There are two disadvantages noted by Spengler concerning this event. First, as the population and wealth progresses, a diminution in increase of food will result in the power of supporting children only sufficient. This ultimately leads to a fall in the "corn price of labour" because "families will not allow a further addition of numbers." Second, as wealth increases, a larger proportion of the lower classes "is engaged in unhealthy occupation" and in employments in which wages fluctuate more. Spengler then discusses the three things that compensate for these two disadvantages. The first is that an increase of capital, which is the cause and effect of increasing riches, emancipated a great part of society. Here, Spengler notes to himself to tie this information in with "Cantillon, Nieckers, and others" and with ideas of luxury – "show how higher standard of living is acquired." Again, these preliminary notes can be seen as leading directly to the 3<sup>rd</sup> section (luxury) and the section of the paper which directly references and addresses Cantillon as discussed previously.

Spengler returns to this concept of luxury when discussing Malthus's idea of a richer diet as a cushion against scarcity. He quotes Malthus saying that when people live principally on grains, as they did in England on wheat, they have great resources in scarcity – in cheaper but nourishing foods. As advised in his earlier notes, Spengler compares this to Necker, and argues that both indicate that if a cheap food is substituted for a dear food, the common price of labor will be regulated by that of the cheaper food. He explains that Malthus condemned "those who would provide for people in the cheapest manner."

Spengler makes a clear note to himself to include two points in his discussion of Malthus's treatment of the motives that make men work. First, that population pressure makes naturally lazy men work and that if the propensity to increase could be checked by birth control, depopulation would result. Second, the role of "vis medicatrix republicae" and the desire of men to better themselves. He notes that he might be able to include the luxury argument with the latter. He then writes about why it is that "other motives" to work must be supplied. Spengler draws an analogy of the beaver's teeth to the motivations of men. It is said that the beaver's teeth would grow if the beaver did not continually exercise them. Similarly, if men were designed to get fat and immobile if they did not work, following Malthus's reasoning, they now have adequate ground for working. However, since men are not constructed as such, other motives to work must be supplied.

Spengler's notes on the differences between the two editions of Malthus's *Essay* summarize what he believed were the core ideological differences. Spengler writes that "the fundamental purpose in the first edition was to indicate the nature of the chief obstacle in the way to improvement of society and to discover the weaknesses in the conjectures and proposals of the perfectibilian philosophers". In contrast, his objective in the second and later editions, according to Spengler, was to inquire into the nature and causes of poverty and the means of alleviating poverty.

Spengler writes that in the first edition of the essay Malthus argued mainly that population depends upon subsistence. However, he adds that Malthus noted that it is affected by employment too as mentioned by Smith. Spengler then explores Malthus's ideas of population and reflects upon them. He writes that Malthus found that population

was usually as great in most countries as the supply of subsistence allowed but it was not nearly so great in many countries as it could have been. Spengler considers the obstacles to population growth. Among his considerations are bad government, insecurity of property, and lack of industry. In the ancient world, he believed it was slavery. In the feudal system, it was the non-division of land, similar to Rome (inequality of land).

Spengler questions whether Malthus did not suppose also that population growth had not proceeded as far in some countries where the government was fairly good. He notes that Malthus apparently did yet Spengler remains intrigued as to why the population growth was limited in those countries. He speculates that the answer lies in the lack of an effective demand for labor. He thus concludes that this was the reason Malthus had to develop his theory of an effective demand for labor of which much evidence is given in the second edition. Next, Spengler builds a framework on which Malthus's work should be analyzed. He says that he will proceed from Malthus's consideration of the progress in population to that in supply and back to that of population. He also reiterates the importance of the notion of effective demand for labor in his population theory.

Another noteworthy comment made by Spengler in his notes is to make sure to include in the conclusion that the two views on population by Malthus in his *Essay* and *Principles* were never as completely integrated. As a result, he continues, our understanding of Malthus's population theory is imperfect and usually derived from the *Essay* and not the *Principles*. He conjectures that if Say's law had not come to predominate we should have had worked into population theory more of Malthus's ideas and we would have sooner have had a good theory of the circulation of labor.

Spengler's notes on his reading of Malthus prior to writing his "restatement" are extensive and exhaustive. He examines his theories with a keen perspective and an extremely meticulous ~~in his~~ analysis. Citing this as proof, one can grasp the passion for the subject that Spengler felt. In an era when interest in Malthusian thought was quickly drifting to the wayside, he attempted to keep it at the center of debate. His notes provide a unique perspective into the way Spengler both thought and developed his writing. Through this lens we can see the effort he put into every word of his essay as we sense the urgency of his handwriting. His notes on Malthus reveal themselves completely in the essay, and one can decipher his line of thought from the notes on Malthusian thought through to the final draft.

In "Malthus's Total Population Theory: a Restatement and Reappraisal," Spengler is at his best. Although other works may demand more attention from the field and his contemporaries, it is clear that Spengler paid to this topic his closest attention. His interest in Malthus was career spanning, the capstone work being his 1966 publication "Was Malthus Right?", in the Southern Economic Journal. By that time, Spengler presents himself as an expert on the topic and a figure who was able to captivate and influence the field with his work. *Malthus's Total Population Theory: A Restatement and Reappraisal* is a benchmark for Spengler and should be viewed as such, regardless of whether through it Spengler was able to change the course of the study of demographic economics.