PROBLEM: STRUCTURE

Thomas Malthus in 1798 argued that living conditions for the masses could not be improved, because nature would never be able to produce enough food to keep pace with the rapidly expanding population. Was he right? Bring examples and reasons to support your point of view.

Thomas Robert Malthus, the first history and political economy professor at the East India Company College and a member of the Royal Society[[1]](#footnote-1) had a very clear idea mankind’s future. In his “An Essay on the Principle of Population”, published in 1798, Malthus stated the impossibility of improvement for the masses’ life conditions. He thought that the growing numbers of the human population (currently around 7.6 billion)[[2]](#footnote-2) would result in the complete depletion of the planet’s resources. Therefore, he regarded population growth itself as an obstacle to progress and to humanity’s life quality. Malthus’ scarce resources hypothesis was not wrong, but his prophecy of it being humanity’s downfall was.

It is undeniable that our planet offers limited assets. It has been pointed out countless times that Hearth’s resources will not be enough to sustain a human population which will reach 11 billion people by the end of the century[[3]](#footnote-3). Scarce water supplies will make it impossible to breed cattle and soil deficiency will make harder and harder to practice extensive agriculture. Oil shortages will paralyze our industries and a new medieval era will start, until the decreasing number of our population will allow a new, slow and sustainable growth. Such is the “Malthusian paradox”.

All these catastrophic predictions have been proven wrong. In fact, scientific and technical progress offer a solution to every predicament humanity may stumble upon. The paradox Malthus hypostasized offers no exception. Moreover, the future breeding impracticability has already been dealt with. Some insects have been found to be edible and nutritious. Crickets farms are currently being constructed and there is already a market for cricket protein bars.[[4]](#footnote-4) Neither oil scarcity is considered a possibility. In fact, not only new researches have pointed out that oilfields are far from being exhausted, but even the main oil producing countries have put in place projects to ensure that by 2030 their economies will revolve around renewable and green energy sources[[5]](#footnote-5). Not even soil shortage can be considered a real threat. The new technologies available nowadays have widely broadened the possibilities’ spectrum: the immense African continent is almost uninhabited. The countries with the highest fertility rate and fastest growing economies, like, of course, China, have already started to turn such unforgiving land into cultivable soil.

Malthus’ theory could however be applied to several realities. Countries like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, India, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and South Africa[[6]](#footnote-6) are among the best performing economies of 2017 and their fertility rates are also very high. Although their actual development is a different thing and, therefore, their population does not benefit from their astonishing growth. The reason behind this phenomenon is not one which could have been foreseen by Malthus in 18th century. It is in fact due to their Governments’ incapability to match their economic growth with infrastructures and welfare projects. It is however a common opinion that this will change in the near future.

1. BBC History: http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\_figures/malthus\_thomas.shtml [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://worldpopulationreview.com [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/08/how-do-we-meet-the-challenge-of-population-growth/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexknapp/2018/01/30/farming-the-next-big-food-source-crickets/#4fbb7c1e1168 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/news/qatar-gets-serious-about-solar [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. https://intpolicydigest.org/2018/06/26/was-malthus-right/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)