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THOMAS MALTHUS MODERN SOUNDING

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ABSTRACT. Thomas Malthus was perceived in history as a man of one idea, of one law, namely, as the author of 'the law of population'. His ideas have been inspiring hot arguments and discussions for over 200 years. In our article we want to present Thomas Malthus as a profoundly decent man, social thinker, humanist and zealous servant of the ideals of Enlightenment.

KEY WORDS: Thomas Malthus, Malthusianism, population growth, productivity, standard of living, poverty, charity.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to dispel the many misconceptions surrounding the figure of Thomas Malthus and his book. These misconceptions are not random; they are due to ideological unacceptability of Malthus teaching for both left and right. The first resented his desire to reduce the pressure on the labour market in order to raise labour costs, instead of radically reorganizing the society; the second resented his extremely hostile attitude to all measures that infringe the economic interests of the working class. Even the encyclopedic dictionary 'Demography' published in 1994 by the publishing house 'Great Russian Encyclopedia', has an enormous article 'Malthusianism' which contains a statement that is far from being true, that 'he [Malthus] considered the spreading of Christian asceticism among people, and the 'moral rein' (or voluntary refusal to get married and give birth to children) as means against overpopulation'. We should thank God that Malthus, being a true ardent Christian, priest and theologian, had no chance of reading it himself. This venerable publication gives a very short (and very dry) article devoted to Malthus as a person and thinker, where it is not even mentioned that he was a Foreign Honorary Member of the Saint Petersburg Academy of

Sciences (1826). Indication of this fact, absolutely obligatory for all encyclopedia publications, is strangely omitted in the article ‘Malthus’ in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, which had been prepared with much more assiduity than the Great Russian Encyclopedia. The article ‘Malthusianism’ in the GSE ends as follows: ‘The provisions of Malthusianism and neo-Malthusianism are a clear confirmation of the reactionary bourgeois ideology, that is why the classics of Marxism – Leninism stressed more than once the necessity of the decisive uncompromising and merciless struggle against Malthusianism, neo-Malthusianism in its all diversions, ... against the attempts to impose this reactionary and cowardly theory on the most advanced, the strongest class, the class of modern society that is ready for great developments’ (Lenin, 1973: 257).

MALTHUS AS A SOCIAL THINKER

Thomas Robert Malthus (17.02.1766 – 23.12.1834) was a true ardent Christian and he faithfully served the ideals of the Enlightenment. He showed brilliantly that the belief in Reason can combine with the belief in God very naturally. Nowadays some people do not believe in God, some in Reason, the rest in anything, and the amount of the latter increases. It will not be easy to attract attention to the ideas of the kind old rationalist, but maybe the fate of his hideously perverted ideas, the ideas of this slandered and denigrated man would be interesting to us, those who live in the era ‘of natural extinction of the light of Reason’? Since Malthus’s contemporaries were not fair towards him, just like his descendants, he had a chance to answer many of their attacks: ‘They say that I have written my big work just to prove that the population increases in geometric progression, and the means of livelihood increase in arithmetical progression. It’s not fair. The first statement seemed to me obvious as soon as the degree of reproduction in America was proven, and the second didn’t even need the proof. The main aim of my composition is to study the effects that should arise and that actually arose among human societies due to the laws described on the first pages of my work’ (Malthus, 1993: 116).

It would not be quite right to put the social thinker, who lived and worked two hundred years ago, to the trial of today and reproach him for the mistakes. Naturally, the population does not increase in geometric progression, except some not very long periods in the history of individual states. Naturally, physiocrats were mistaken when they thought that national income was created only in agriculture, and Malthus followed them and believed that it was harmful for the economy to help the poor giving them money. He thought it extremely honourable to cultivate a piece of land and then give the crop to those in need,

instead of giving them the money. The money, in his opinion, would only increase the aggregate demand for the same amount of food and thus cause the increase of prices. Malthus was thinking in the categories of his time and he is of interest to us as its progressive representative. We can not but respect his clever observation: 'It is difficult to understand, how there can be an opinion, after the work by Adam Smith, that the super power of the government can influence the change of economic conditions of the country, and that the supply and demand can become equal after taking certain decrees?' (Malthus, 1993: 36).

We can not but sympathize with Malthus in his struggle against the most dangerous prejudice, that is at the bottom of most, if not all, social upheavals: 'Disasters and distress of the lower classes and the habit to blame the government for them seem to me the true pillar of despotism. These disasters and this habit create the foundation for the abuse of the power' (Malthus, 1993: 61). According to Malthus, it is the necessity to keep the lower classes under control that justified the despotic ruling and represented the main threat to democracy.

Furthermore, Malthus is developing this topic: 'Thus, the responsibility, that Payne and his supporters lay on the government for the disasters of the people, is obviously a mistake. Though independent government institutions and a good government provide the decrease, to a certain degree, of the poverty, nevertheless their influence occurs to be only indirect and extremely slow. The consequences of such influence do not correspond to the expectations of the people who want direct and rapid relief that can be gained by revolutions. These exaggerated expectations and the excitement due to the fact, that they have not been fulfilled, give the false direction to the efforts of the people to gain freedom, and prevent the introduction of possible transformations, though slow and gradual, but at the same time, without a doubt, leading to the improvement of the fate of the people' (Malthus, 1993: 33).

Apparently, Malthus was an evolutionist and democrat. Hereinafter, we will try to show that Malthus partly was even a social-democrat, who had anticipated long before the emergence of this movement certain very important positions. However, we will first show that, in spite of the notoriety, or bad fame, Malthus was a true humanist, and the idea that the interests of a person should be subordinated to the interests of the government was absolutely unacceptable to him.

Malthus's approach to the problem of emigration, in this respect, is quite characteristic: 'It is necessary to accept as undeniable, that *eviction is certainly not adequate for the elimination of disasters, connected with overpopulation. But if we look at it as a temporary and individual measure, taken for the sake of expanding culture, then eviction turns out to be fit and useful.* Maybe it is impossible to prove that governments must actively promote eviction, but it is without doubt, that forbidding eviction is not only unfair, but also a very big

mistake. It is hard to think of anything more unreasonable than the fear that eviction can cause depopulation. Love to motherland and attachment to family hearth are so essential and strong, that people will never decide to leave, unless the political displeasure or hopeless poverty make them resort to this step, and in that case, their eviction is useful for the motherland. Also, the suggestion that eviction increases wages is unreasonable. If wages give an opportunity to the lower classes to live without extreme deprivation and suffering, people are sure not to think about eviction; but if the wages are so low that they cause deprivation and suffering, it would be cruel and unfair to stay in the way of evictions' (Malthus, 1993: 33).

The misleading stereotype that Malthus considered wars and epidemics as natural regulators of population should also be rejected by citing Malthus himself. Malthus considered such regulators deeply preternatural. He wrote: 'One of the most important reasons for the wars among ancient people was the deficit of space and food; though in conditions of existence of modern people certain changes have taken place, the same reason still exists, having changed the degree of tension. The ambitions of the rulers would have lacked the weapons for destruction if disasters had not urged the lower classes to stand under their banners. Recruiters dream of a bad harvest: it is profitable for them to have a big amount of spare hands without work – in other words, surplus in population is profitable for them. In early times wars were the main occupation of people, and wars caused the decrease in population much more than now, so the legislators and statesmen were constantly looking for the means to attack and defend, and thought it their obligation to encourage breeding of population; to achieve this cause they shamed celibacy and sterility, and on the contrary, honoured marriage. Folk beliefs formed under the influence of these rules. In many countries fertility was the object of worship. The religion of Mohammed, founded by sword and by significant destruction of faithful followers, established for them the commitment to bear a huge amount of children in order to praise their God, as the most important. Such rules served as the most powerful promotion of marriage, and the rapid increase of population was simultaneously the consequence and the cause of the constant wars that marked that period of humanity. Areas, ravaged by the preceding war, filled up by new dwellers that were used to form new armies. The speed with which recruitment was done, was the cause and the means for new destructions. Under the rule of such prejudice it is hard to envisage the end to the wars' (Malthus, 1993: 52).

In the same unambiguous way the 'misanthrope' Malthus expressed his opinion of epidemics: '...I stated, and continue to believe it now, that if the means of livelihood of the country do not allow rapid increase of population (and this is not correlated to the injections against smallpox), then either increase of deaths

due to some other reason, or decrease of relative number of births should take place. But at the same time I expressed my wish that the latter should take place: that is why, on the basis of the principles that I had always proclaimed, I should be considered the most ardent supporter of injections against smallpox. I am doing everything possible to improve the livelihood of the poor and to decrease the deaths/mortality among them, and it fully corresponds to my principles' (Malthus, 1993: 113). Malthus, offended by his contemporaries, refuted: '*One should absolutely misunderstand my teaching if they consider me to be the enemy of reproduction. My enemies are – vices and poverty* [italics by Malthus]' (Malthus, 1993: 111).

Let us distract a little from the actual demographic problems and look at Malthus as a social thinker. We will try to understand how he treated the poorest people – as the goal or as the means. For those who are acquainted with his book the answer is obvious – his position was genuinely humanistic and consistently refused to accept everything that caused a decrease in the cost of the labour force, was it either the introduction of potatoes and milk as the major food for the workers, or giving them cows as the means of commending their efficiency and improving their nutrition. Only the relatively high labour cost could give a worker an opportunity to use certain means to improve his poor conditions. '*As the consumption of milk, potatoes and cheap soup – the main food of common people – will cause the decrease of wages* [italics by the author], then maybe there will be a heartless politician who will advise to take this measure in order to be able to produce in England and supply the European markets with the goods at the lowest uncompetitive prices. I can't approve of such strivings. Actually, it's hard to imagine a more disgusting action, when for the sake of higher profits the authorities make their working classes suffer extreme poverty. The wealth and power of a nation are of any importance only if they promote happiness to all people comprising this nation. Saying all this, I don't mean to reduce the importance of wealth and power, v.v. I consider them the necessary means for achieving this goal. But, if in any individual case such goal and such means start to contradict each other, then intellect knows without doubt what choice to make' (Malthus, 1993: 92).

Malthus believed in intellect and the necessity to treat marriage very seriously; marriage can be possible only if there is possibility to support offspring without shifting this sacred responsibility onto the society. He saw the way out in late marriages, but not in the refusal to get married and have children. Hereto, he was decisively against the tradition, when a very young woman married a man much older, just for the purpose not to remain single. Older men, according to Malthus, should get married by all means, but to women closer to their age. Such a suggestion was, of course, in the interests of women, but not

of Malthus himself. But that was not the main reason why his contemporaries, and unfortunately, his descendants, disliked him.

True to Enlightenment ideals, Malthus believed in a responsible attitude to family as the duty of every man. Thus, it would be absolutely immoral to favour early marriages among the poor, giving them a chance to live at the cost of the society, i.e., parish. He thought it extremely dangerous to give the poor the right to be fed. It is absolutely necessary to help those in need in case of crop failure or other disasters, but they must not have the right to receive help, as it causes an irresponsible and dependent attitude. Has this problem become less current two centuries later? Has Malthus's approach become less unpopular?

Malthus was arguing actively with the contemporaries who supported this right: 'Whatever is said about this right, our behavior shows, that this imaginary right (the right of the poor to get fed) does not exist at all. If the poor could enjoy this right, no one would be able, without breaking the sense of fairness, to wear an expensive dress or eat meat. Those, who support this right, but at the same time drive a coach, live in luxury, feed their horses on the land, that could serve for feeding people, in my opinion, live in contradiction with their principles' (Malthus, 1993: 92). Rationalist Malthus was thinking about long-term consequences of such social policy much more than his contemporaries, or our contemporaries: 'Isn't it more useful to give away your piece of lamb to a poor worker, who has not had meat for the whole week? Isn't it better to give it to a family, who has nothing to eat? If such needs did not arise naturally after their satisfaction, it would be very good to satisfy them, and I would recognize their rights. But experience and speculation show, that recognition of such right would increase the needs to such a degree, that it would be *impossible* [italics by the author] to satisfy them, and, as the attempt to promote this way of action would plunge humanity into the most devastating hunger, it becomes obvious, that our silent refusal of such a right corresponds to the laws of our nature more, than the futile eloquence, that supports its existence' (Malthus, 1993: 116–117). Can we now say that Malthus was deeply wrong? Or else, that he is hopelessly obsolete?

Malthus wrote: '...we must take one inevitable, in my opinion, step, before we undertake any important alterations in the existing system, whether it is the matter of decreasing the aid or banning it absolutely. It will be fair and honorable. It is necessary to *openly renounce the imaginary right of the poor to be kept at the public expense* [italics by the author]. To fulfill this goal, I would recommend taking a law that envisages that parish authorities refuse to give allowance to children, who are born to marriages concluded one year after this law, and to all illegal children born two years after taking this law. In order to make this law known and understood by the people, I would recommend to oblige the

priests to explain to the newlyweds the obligations of each person towards their children, and to remind them, how immoral it is to get married without having a hope to fulfill these sacred obligations, of disasters of the poor, when they tried to substitute their own duties by the care of the public institutions, and, finally, of the need to refuse such attempts, that caused absolutely reverse consequences' (Malthus, 1993: 71).

Malthus considered voluntary assistance necessary and desirable, both in the moral and political aspect, as it promotes establishing solidarity among different classes of society; however, obligatory assistance corrupts the first and does not bring satisfaction to the others. Nevertheless, he clearly distinguished the goal and the means. The recognition of the right of the poor to receive assistance is possible and even useful, unless it causes negative consequences to the society as a whole. Malthus's position was as follows: a man must get married only when he is able to support his wife and six children. Such a position was fully justified when there was absolutely no family planning, wasn't it? Malthus acted wisely and humanely, when he proposed to pay an allowance to workers with more than six children, didn't he? 'One can object, that all this prudence [abstaining from marriage till certain possibilities] may be useless, as one can not predict how many children he would have and whether he would have more than six children. It is fair, and I believe that it could be quite possible to give allowance for every child after the sixth, but not as a bonus for a large family, but in order to help with the burden, that could not have been predicted before marriage. Consequently, the amount of the allowance should place him in the same position with the family with six children. As for the decree of Louis XIV, that envisaged certain advantages to families with ten or twelve children, Montesquieu remarks that such decrees could not promote the increase of population. I am inclined to state that such decree could be approved without any danger' (Malthus, 1993: 103).

Malthus was the son of his time and he could not envisage the family planning, moreover, family planning based on technology, but how can his descendants, who have turned child birth into one of the main sources of profit for the large part of the population of European countries, reproach him for the absence of sagacity. Malthus met the challenges of his time, he worried a lot about the growth of the cities, considering the conditions of existence there extremely dangerous for people, and took a consistent humanistic position, without falling into conservatism: '...we must admit, that the increase of population was being delayed by the success of civilization. The number of cities and factories is increasing, but the improvement of conditions of living there is hard to be expected. Of course, we must do our best to prevent the decrease of life expectancy, but we are unlikely ever to succeed in making the life in cities and the work at factories as healthy, as the life in villages and work in rural areas. Acting

as destructive forces, cities and factories reduce the need of barriers that prevent reproduction' (Malthus, 1993: 104).

According to Malthus the achievements of civilization themselves can not cause the reduction in population growth to such a degree that need for the moral curb of passions is eliminated: 'Are the cities and factories of Switzerland, Norway, Sweden the graves of humanity and do they prevent the possibility of surplus population? The ratio between rural population and urban in Sweden is 13:1, and in England – 2:1, nevertheless the growth of population in the latter is faster. How shall we correlate this fact with the statement, that the achievements of civilization are constantly accompanied by a corresponding weakening of the natural desire to reproduce? Norway, Sweden and Switzerland have been ruled rather satisfactorily, however, we do not notice here these 'preventive changes', that, according to Wieland, occur in any society due to the depletion of soil and that 'prevent many people from marriage and make more and more people unable to replenish decreasing population'. What prevents people in these countries from marriage, if not the lack of means to keep the family? What makes people unable to replenish, if not illnesses due to poverty and the lack of means? If our reflections about these and many other countries prove that early marriages cause the increase of deaths because of poverty, then how can we state that there is no moral basis to prevent such early marriages? As we know, the wages in many, maybe all, European countries are too low to support numerous families in good condition, so how can we state that population has not yet reached the extreme limits, and that the 'disasters arising from the excess population may occur only in a country populated to the point above which its means of existence can no longer increase?' (Malthus, 1993: 131).

SOCIALIST ROOTS OF MALTUS IDEAS

We should consider the combination of the afore-mentioned socio-democratic motives with a Stolipin-like hope for the middle class as an important and interesting feature of Malthus's ideology. Truly, in industrial England the representative of the middle class did not at all have the image of a strong farmer. Malthus continued his controversy with Wieland: 'This real reproduction should remain well below the maximum limit of the productive forces of the soil, giving means for food. This last condition follows, firstly, from the fact that we are not entitled to assume that art and industriousness of people in modern society could get the best *possible* use to meet this productive capacity, and, secondly, that the *largest [italics by Malthus]* production of nutrients **can not be achieved under**

the system of private property [italics by the author], as I explained before' (Malthus, 1993: 131–132).

Probably, the bridge between the quite socio-democratic attitude to the system of private property for the land and the quite bourgeois attitude to the middle class can form a non-acceptance of luxury by Malthus, both due to moral and economic reasons: 'There is no need for the rich to indulge in excessive luxury in order to maintain factories and for the poor to deprive themselves of conveniences in order to maintain population. The most useful factories are those, which maintain the needs of all population. On the contrary, if they satisfy the needs of the rich, they are not so important due to the limited demand for their goods, and, moreover, they can cause inconveniences, even problems, due to the changes of fashion, that rules them. Moderate luxury evenly distributed among all classes of society, but not the excessive luxury of a few – that is needed for the happiness and prosperity of people' (Malthus, 1993: 102). Malthus continues, expressing his hope for the middle class as the pillar of morality in society and the source of economic prosperity: 'Generally speaking, the middle position in society is the most advantageous for the development of virtue, industry and talent. But obviously, all people can not belong to the middle class. The upper and the lower classes are inevitable and very useful. If there was no hope for promotion and no fear to fall below in the society, if there was no commendation for hard work and no punishment for laziness, then there would not be such activity and zeal that make every man strive to improve his position and that is the main engine of social welfare' (Malthus, 1993: 102).

Malthus possessed not only insight, but vision. When he says that the prosperity grows together with the increase in the middle class, he remains true to humanistic principles and believes that technological progress will be the main factor of the growth of the middle class: 'Under the process when the lower classes become the middle classes (thanks to technological progress) each worker would have a hope that he could improve his position himself. Hard working and virtue would be praised. There would be more winners in the huge social lottery. The total of happiness would grow' (Malthus, 1993: 102). In spite of the common delusion, Malthus's works are full of social optimism, but not of premonition of disaster. True to rationalism principles, he called on his contemporaries to be realists, be courageous and work hard to achieve a better future: 'If the past experience could have given me hope that the improvement of social system was possible, or at least probable, than the fact of improbability would make me sad. On the other hand, the experience of the past does not give me a chance to hope for the better and that is why I view the natural difficulty, that we have to fight with permanently, without any sadness, as such fight enlarges human energy,

develops his capabilities, tempers his soul, makes him better in many aspects, to put it shortly, it is very useful for him. This view at the position of the society is much better, than the belief that we can easily get rid of all the troubles, unless the corruption of the people influencing social institutions spoiled different useful undertakings' (Malthus, 1993: 125).

METHODOLOGICAL INTUITION

It brings to mind a controversy between A.V. Lunacharskij (1875–1933) and A.I. Vvedenskij (1888–1946) about the origin of man. Vvedenskij having exhausted all his arguments said that he was ready to accept that Lunacharskij originated from a monkey, but he himself originated from God. To that Lunacharskij answered that he was ready to accept that he originated from a monkey, and that Vvedenskij originated from God, but he added that everyone who saw him, Lunacharskij, would exclaim 'What progress!', while, looking at Vvedenskij – 'What misery!' More than a century before that, Malthus, the son of the Enlightenment, a priest and theologian himself, was thinking in the same way. He was devoted to Reason: 'If ignorance is beneficial, there is no need in enlightenment. But if it is dangerous, if false views on social order stand in the way of progress, if they cheat on our hopes, then I think that feelings and expectations based on common sense are the source of comfort, and that people possessing this common sense are happier and they participate more in the process of improvement and consolidation of social welfare compared to those who rejected the truth' (Malthus, 1993: 125).

Social optimism, based on rationalism and courageous acceptance of objective realities, combined well with methodological intuition and placed Malthus well ahead of his time. Now, when the intellectual level in society is falling down catastrophically, now, when there is a dominance of empiricism in social sciences, and when the best known sociologists speak about the exhaustion of sociological theory, isn't it high time for us to listen to what he said two centuries ago? 'We have heard too many empty accusations against theories and their authors. People, who are against theories, boast of their devotion to practice and theory. We must admit that a bad theory – is a very bad thing, and the authors of such theories can harm the society. Nevertheless some defenders of practical methods don't notice, that they themselves fall into the trap, that they had been warning the others against, and that most of them could be called as the authors of the most vicious theories. When a person describes what he had a chance to watch, he increases the total mass of knowledge and thus benefits the society. But when he makes general conclusions or builds a theory on the basis of limited observation

of something, that happened at his farm or at his shop, and then he turns out to be even more dangerous, because he builds his theory on observation, but a reasonable theory must be based on general facts, and not on individual facts' (Malthus, 1993: 94). How far have we gone away from the views of Malthus? And have we been going forward?

At last we must study the question about the ratio between Malthus's views on the development of the society and his belief in God – we must study this question due to our respect for the personality of Malthus. He wrote: 'Without getting into too many details, we can establish on the basis of the teaching of apostle Paul the following general rule of Christian religion: marriage, unless it contradicts any higher obligations, is worthy of our approval, but if it contradicts them, is worthy of our censure. This rule fully corresponds to the demands of high morality: 'To understand the will of God it is necessary to appreciate the meaning of the deed in relation to the common good' (Malthus, 1993: 53). Further Malthus dwells upon this thought: 'I believe that the goal of the Creator is to have the Earth populated; but I think, that He wishes it to be populated with healthy, virtuous and happy people, but not with sick, vicious and miserable people. If under the pretext of obedience to the demand to bear and multiply we will populate the Earth with the latter breed, than we will be deprived of the right to blame the divine commandment for being unfair, and we will have to explain our own sufferings by the reckless fulfillment of the sacred law' (Malthus, 1993: 112).

To understand the origins of Malthus's philosophy, we should remember, that the science of the New Era did not arise from the ancient science, though it used it a lot. It arose from the medieval philosophical scholasticism, from an exclusively fruitful idea that was born at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, that God created two, but not one, books – Scripture and Nature. The founder of the New Era philosophy – Francis Bacon (1561–1626) – was an ardent defender of the empirical method of cognition; he died of a cold that he had caught during his experiments on freezing chickens. He wrote about God: 'For us not to have any delusions, He has given us two books: the Scripture – where the will of God is revealed, and then the book of Nature – where the power of God is revealed. Out of these two books, the second serves as the key to the first, it not only prepares our mind to understanding the true sense of the scripture, but mainly develops our belief, makes us seriously meditate on the divine omnipotence, which marks are imprinted on the stones of his creations' (Petrov, 1978: 118).

Thus, the second book may and must be studied with the use of rational, i.e., logical methods, i.e., doing an experiment and the interpretation of its results, these results being described with the use of mathematical formalisms. The possibility of the latter was founded not only on the progress of mathematics, but also on the unshakeable faith in the perfection of God's intention. Hence

Newton's famous dictum that the book of nature was written in the language of mathematics. I. Newton (1643–1727) was a deeply religious man and treated space as God's. Malthus was as religious as Newton and he viewed his scientific studies as his Christian duty.

Let us try to cast a general glance at the conception of Malthus from the huge distance that is between us. The situation in Black Africa, where there has been no progress in the per capita production of food for three decades, makes us acknowledge that old Malthus was not so wrong, after all, and if the population growth is not curbed, there is no possibility to solve the food problem (together with the ecological problem, as excess load on farmland and deforestation cause rapidly increasing desertification). The situation on other continents hardly denies Malthus's teaching. Except a few rich oil-producing countries, no one succeeded in escaping poverty without significantly reducing fertility. Take China, where the fertility now is lower than in France. It is hard to overestimate family planning, but it is very important to raise the marriageable age, especially the birth of the first child, which is what actually Malthus had in mind.

Malthus would be pleased to know that life conditions in cities developed so much, and that life expectancy there is often higher than in rural areas. Nevertheless, it is the rapid, we can say even the avalanche of urbanization in developing countries that causes the reduction in fertility. Finally, when we say that there is an optimum population, that its number has been exceeded long before, that the population on the Earth will be increasing for several decades, and then it will gradually start to decrease, and that it is not evil, but good, we follow in the steps of the old rationalist, don't we?

NEW REFUTATION?

If there is a person who actually refuted Malthus, it is S.P. Kapitza. He showed with the help of the phenomenological theory of population growth on the Earth that world population was subject not to external, but to internal constraints (Kapitza, 1999). Such a conclusion grossly contradicts common sense, but the most interesting things in science begin when we do not listen to common sense. Exactly that happened when the theory of relativity, gravitational theory or the theory of quantum mechanics, and in our era the superstring theory, were created. However, Malthus would hardly be disappointed with the results of Kapitza – though he firmly believed in external constraints, Malthus was seeking the truth, but did not possess it arrogantly, and humility before the truth was typical for him to the same degree, probably, as the humility before God.

Maybe we have got captivated with quotations, but our goal is to restore the good name of Malthus, and it demanded from us giving him the floor himself. It is the only thing he needs to defend his views, and the understatement of his work, the rather low accessibility to the public are probably an unfortunate incident. One hundred and seventy five years ago a wonderful man, thinker and humanist, who was boundlessly loyal to the ideals of the Enlightenment and who deeply believed in God, died. We can do nothing for this man, who had suffered much because of the unfair attitude to his courageous search for the truth. In restoring the truth we try to render an adequate service to modern society, which is trying to solve the same problems as Malthus had been trying to solve, and often with less success. Paying tribute to the blessed memory of this man, we would like to finish our article with the same words with which Malthus finished his book: ‘...*the practical goal of the author of this book was to improve the fate and enlarge happiness of the lower classes of society* [italics by Malthus]’ (Malthus, 1993: 116).

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