
This paper compares the thinking of Wallace, Godwin, Malthus, and Ricardo on population, to trace the historical development of population theory from the mid-eighteenth to the early-nineteenth century. First, Nakano emphasises that Wallace harbingered Malthus by arguing that any utopian society was doomed on account of overpopulation, which would in turn have resulted from its utopian or ideal nature (an emphasis which challenges the conventional wisdom that Wallace was a predecessor of Malthus, above all, in formulating the so-called geometrical rate of population growth). It was against this anti-utopian argument of Wallace, Nakano goes on to say, that Godwin presented his utopian scheme. Godwin refused Wallace, by asserting that overpopulation was probable only in a future so distant as to be negligible. In his First Essay on Population, Malthus rebutted Godwin’s scheme, using the same reasoning as Wallace, but—according to Nakano, mistakenly—blaming Wallace for being a utopian writer of the same kind as Godwin. Ricardo, a close friend of Malthus, sided with Malthus in the controversy between him and Godwin, but did not share any fears of overpopulation with Malthus. Judging from the title of the paper, it seems that Nakano concludes that the classical population theory originated, at least in part, with Wallace, and that from this perspective, he therefore deserves serious consideration.

Nakano’s project could potentially contribute to the history of population theory. In my opinion, however, this paper could and should undergo improvements through substantial revision. Some comments and suggestions follow.

1) The first section is not as clear or well organised as might be expected. In this section, Nakano should explain to readers how worthy of consideration the posed question is, and should make note (more) briefly of those conclusions he intends to draw. It is also unclear why this paper must touch on Ricardo, who seems to have had little or nothing to do with Wallace. (Although I do know that this paper was written for the Ricardo conference at Lyon.) Moreover, Nakano should first explain the reference to ‘the concepts of the population theory’ in the title.

2) Nakano argues that Wallace ‘abandons the utopia’ (p. 1) and undertakes ‘criticism of utopia’ (p. 3). However, it is unclear what Nakano means by these words, especially when he notes that Wallace wrote about utopia not because he was concerned about whether current society should be reformed in an egalitarian direction, but because he was
concerned about showing that the existence of vice was not at all inconsistent with the goodness of God. If so (that is, if Wallace made use of an idea of utopia by way of a thought experiment for his own theodicy), the depictions above might actually misrepresent Wallace as an anti-utopian similar to Malthus, who talked about utopia in order to object to Godwinite and other ideas of reform. Nakano should reconsider such depictions. Incidentally, he should first explain why Wallace’s view of population can be considered one of ‘optimism’ (p. 2; in the Leibnizian sense or else?).

3) Nakano avers that Malthus was incorrect in thinking of Wallace as a writer similar to Godwin (section 3). This argument may puzzle readers. Malthus criticised Wallace and Godwin en block, as he believed that population pressure has been at play throughout human history and therefore deserves practical consideration. Meanwhile, Wallace and Godwin—both of whom Nakano considers ‘optimistic’—had considered population pressure to be dormant in the society of the time. To Malthus vis-à-vis these optimists, therefore, the problem was not when overpopulation would present itself but rather whether or not it was of practical significance. If this is indeed the case, it would not be overly relevant to accuse Malthus of ‘misunderstand[ing]’ Wallace’s Prospects (p. 11; cf. ‘Malthus did not understand fully the idea of Wallace. The intention of Malthus’s criticism of utopia was almost same [sic] as Wallace.’ (p. 12)).

4) The fourth section is too crude in how it addresses Ricardo on population. Nakano says on one hand that ‘Ricardo did not acknowledge overpopulation’ (p. 14), but on the other that Ricardo addressed the question of how to save an economy from it ‘when overpopulation should occur’ (p. 15). This seems, at least at first sight, contradictory. Generally speaking, it is necessary to consider Ricardo’s population theory in light of his macro-economic dynamics overall (as is shown in the equation $\dot{N}/N = f\left(w/p - \bar{w}\right)$).

5) Nakano should check the quotations from the original texts more carefully, to ensure they are reproduced faithfully (e.g., he should replace “less” by “lest” in the quotation on page 9, and should delete the second line in the second quotation on page 15). Moreover, I would advise him to persuade a kind friend who is a native English speaker with some literary competence to review this draft with him.