

Read the passage
and answer the four
questions provided

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and Number “ An Essay on the Principle of Population” Question For Malthus, how does nature check the happiness of human society?

Within the essay entitled “ An Essay on the Principle of Population,” Thomas Malthus describes the explosion of the human population and its overall impact on the world. The basic argument that Malthus discusses is that humans, animals, and plants have an instinct to constantly spread themselves and grow in their population even if nature does not have enough resources available to sustain such a population. However, Malthus also argues that nature has created a check on the population, which keeps it from spiraling out of control. Malthus states “ But as by that law of out nature, which makes food necessary to the life of man, population can never actually increase beyond the lowest nourishment capable of supporting it”(Malthus, 431). Basically, this means that nature has made it so that humans must have food and water to survive, and this is how nature keeps the population in check because without enough nourishment humans will die, which keeps the population down. When the human population is at the appropriate equilibrium, there is enough food and resources to go around, which makes for a happy society.

Question 2: What are his assumptions regarding food supply and demography, and are they valid?

Thomas Malthus makes the assumption that the more food and resources that are available, the quicker the human population and demographics will grow. Without enough food to go around, the population is not likely to increase as the birth rates will decrease and death rates will increase, which creates a more stable population. Malthus believes that the period between

the doubling of the population will be much lengthier if food becomes much more difficult to acquire (Malthus, 431). Overall, these assumptions do appear to be valid in that it is common sense that without sustenance, any population is less likely to succeed and thrive.

Question 3: How might this argument affect discussions on public relief of the poor?

To a certain extent, the argument developed by Malthus appears to have some roots in the idea of natural selection. The overall idea with natural selection is that the strong will survive, and the weak will perish. With this type of argument in mind, it is fair to say that public relief for the poor is essentially going against natural selection. By providing food and charity to the poor, this weak population is being kept alive instead of dying off like nature intended it. Therefore, in the view of Thomas Malthus, public relief should be discontinued or halted altogether because keeping poor people alive continues the process of draining nature's sustenance for the strong. In this way, charity is very harmful to the Earth and the human population as a whole because the weakest group is being kept alive because of it and will continue to be able to reproduce, which merely adds to the booming human population. Overall, Malthus appears to be arguing against public relief with these reasons in mind.

Question 4: How does this essay contribute to the emerging laissez-faire philosophy of the early nineteenth century?

Ultimately, Thomas Malthus's argument is very much in line with the laissez-faire philosophy which became popular in the early nineteenth century.

Laissez-fair essentially means hands off. The concept of this philosophy is to

not get involved and to let things work themselves out to a certain extent. This is exactly what Malthus is arguing in his essay. He wants charity and public relief to end. He believes that the government and the church should not interfere—should keep their hands off so to speak—with the poor as nature will work it out by itself. By advocating this method of population control, Malthus is very much in line with the laissez-faire philosophy.

Works Cited

Malthus, Thomas. "“ An Essay on the Principle of Population.” Western Civilization: Their History and Their Culture. Ed. Judith Coffin, et al. New York: Norton & Co. 430-432.