

*Utilitarianism and Malthus's Virtue Ethics.
Respectable, Virtuous and Happy*

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Cremaschi's book offers a stereoscopic view of Malthus's social science and moral and political philosophy, affirming a noteworthy revision of the ethics and politics of Malthus.

Cremaschi notes how Malthus's comprehension of population theory and political economy requires empirical investigations to be able to pronounce justified value judgments. However, Malthus's population theory and theory of economics are not value-free sciences and his political view is explicitly based on a set of familiar moral assumptions. Yet such considerations are meant to justify traditional normative ethics, which are distant from Bentham's 'new morality'. According to the author, Malthus's criteria for policy appraisal are not utilitarian: the author notes that utility is merely one element in Malthus's ethics. Malthus's normative ethics and politics are different from Bentham's, and this is consistent with the central role played by the test of utility in Malthus's views. This test, for Bentham, is the key to normative ethics whereas, for Malthus, it is the key to moral epistemology.

The book is composed of eight chapters. The first aims to reconstruct the complexity of Malthus's relationship towards utilitarianism. The second shows an overview of eighteenth-century Anglican ethics and underlines how the Cambridge tradition gives a particular weight to natural theology as opposed to positive or revealed theology. The third chapter is about Malthus's metaethics and retraces it in the two ethical chapters of the second *Essay* and in other ethical scripts. Regarding Malthus's normative ethics, the author explains that it changes over time: the fourth chapter is about Malthus's early normative ethics (a morality of freedom); whereas the fifth chapter is about Malthus's intermediate normative ethics, which can be defined as a morality of prudence; Malthus's more mature normative ethics, a morality of humanity, is finally focused in the sixth chapter. The seventh chapter reconstructs Malthus's treatment of a few issues in applied ethics, as the issue concerning sexual morality, political theory and public morality. To conclude, in the

eighth chapter the author claims that Malthus's criteria for policy appraisal are not utilitarian: his normative ethics and his politics are certainly different from Bentham's.

The most significant contribution lies in the heart of the book, where Cremaschi reconstructs Malthus's meta-ethics, normative ethics and applied ethics on such topics as population, poverty, sexuality, war and slavery. Here the author claims that Malthus's ethics is not dependent on Paley's, but came from Cumberland, Butler, Gay and Brown.

Regarding Malthus's meta-ethics, the volume presents a new answer to the problem of theodicy: Malthus's view is that passions could be dominated and kept under control, making the world a relatively happy place to live, where God has proved, or believed, to be omniscient, benevolent, and omnipotent. A society where moral restraint prevails would reduce abject poverty to very few cases and the middling ranks would become more numerous; this would reduce dependence, preserve traditional liberties of the English Constitution, and finally give the working class a chance of living respectable, virtuous, and happy lives.

According to the author, it is important to reconstruct Malthus's moral ontology, which opens a definition of moral good in terms of happiness, and Malthus's moral epistemology, because in this field a number of peculiar assertions can be observed. One is the Golden Rule, a key element of morality. Another is the function of general rules which are necessary for a moral government to define virtue and vice, where vice is defined as a class of actions, the general tendency of which, is to produce misery. Here the test of utility is conceived as a test to perceive whether a maxim is a law of nature (or, in other words, for detecting the will of God who established the differences between right and wrong), rather than a standard for establishing what is right and wrong. Other relevant observations in Malthus's moral epistemology are his considerations on religion, morality, and the *veil of ignorance*, which is the idea that human inability to foresee the consequences of behavior is established by the Creator, in order to leave room for freedom and genuine virtue.

As observed, Cremaschi identifies three different moments regarding Malthus's normative ethics. Firstly, Malthus's early views on the foundations of ethics, where he adheres to a voluntarist-consequentialist ethics. Then he looks towards different political issues, agreeing with traditional Whig concerns, such as political freedom, personal independence and dignity. Lastly he leans towards theological arguments, identifying an unorthodox theodicy.

Malthus's claim concerning a dynamic society derives from an inevitable law of nature and not by human depravity or by the opposition between public and private good. The main question is whether a little social evil could

contribute to the general good; Malthus suggests that physical evil is necessary to stimulate activity. Malthus's criterion for value-judgment is consequentialist, namely 'the aggregate mass of happiness', and it implies that partial evils are balanced with those partial goods with which they are intertwined.

Malthus focuses on two main natural virtues – benevolence and chastity – and artificial virtues – respect of rights, love for equality and liberty, prudence. In a social, but pre-political, state such as that of people living without government and law, there are two defined natural virtues such as those of helping one's neighbor and of forming a stable attachment to a person of the other sex. Artificial virtues exist as soon as the transition to the political state is accomplished. Rights are not innate, they appear in the political state, and have no existence before institutions such as marriage and property. Prudence, has a special place: it emerges in both the pre-political and the political state and governs both individual quest for happiness and collective quest for the public good. It also provides an invisible link between the private and the public domains, where it contributes in combining self-love with general happiness.

Moreover, Cremaschi shows that Malthus, over the years as his views became more mature, develops a new view: the morality of humanity. During the beginning of the 1800's a controversy advanced among evangelical authors such as Gisborne, Sumner, and Chalmers. The controversy leads to several important changes in the formulation of Malthusian ethics, in the adoption of moral improvement rather than happiness as the end to be improved, and in the adoption of general education as the main instrument against poverty. Malthus's Whiggism ideas are re-elaborated as a moral discourse, or anti-Machiavellian politics, focused on rights, equality and self-reliance.

Finally, Cremaschi focuses on Malthus's conception of applied ethics. On the one hand, the view concerning sexual morality concentrates on chastity as a dominant virtue. Malthus describes the joys of virtuous love as a reward for such a virtue, defining marital fidelity as a specification of chastity and marriage only at a time when one is ready to start a family, and he is against premature marriage for women and birth control within marriage. Chastity is regarded as a moral duty imposed by prudence and by natural laws. On the other hand, regarding poverty, under pressure of critics, Malthus finally surrenders to an institutional approach, making room for basic education and free market. The aim is to raise the standards of the lower classes, encouraging them to be more like those who no longer patiently accept the thought of depriving themselves and their children of being respectable, virtuous and happy.

In this book, Cremaschi has reached his objective: the volume deeply clarifies Malthus' view regarding moral philosophy, natural and political sciences. Referring to the literature on Malthus's work, the volume sets a dispute be-

tween Donald Winch and Samuel Hollander on Malthus's Utilitarianism and, agreeing with Winch although with more radical claims, affirms a noteworthy revision of Malthus's ethics and politics: his overall system of ideas was caused by his non-utilitarian recommendations and was focused on a form of familiar moral assumptions, a great step away from Benthamite 'new morality'.