This is a seven-week, two-unit course devoted to a close reading of Thomas Robert Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*. The terms "Malthusian" and "Malthusianism" have become synonymous with apocalyptic visionaries and their visions, and Malthus himself has been accused of both unmitigated hatred toward the poor and predicting mass starvation and environmental disaster due to overpopulation. Although the main rationale for this course is not to dispel myths about Malthus but to read his works closely and understand them in their own terms and within the context of the times in which he lived, a secondary aim is to examine the variety of reactions and responses to Malthus's work during his lifetime and afterwards. Malthus had considerable influence on the development of political economic thought in addition to his somewhat misapplied reputation as prophet of environmental doom.

Since the course is restricted to seven weeks, our central focus will be on Malthus's *Essay* itself, both the short first edition, 1798, and the much longer second edition, 1803, which went through several subsequent revisions between 1806 and 1826. The first edition was born as a direct response to Enlightenment faith in the continual improvement of the conditions of human life and the promise of bestowing the benefits of civilization broadly and equitably to all people. Malthus saw a natural obstacle to all that optimism. This theme was not abandoned in the later editions but became entangled with the ongoing debates over social reform in the new century, as Britain struggled to deal with the consequences of rapid industrialization and urbanization at home while trying to exercise control over an expanding empire abroad.

**Learning goals.**

1) Gaining intimate familiarity with a classic text
2) Understanding Malthus's work within the context of developments in social theory, science, religion, and political economy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.
3) Gaining an introductory appreciation of the influence of this major work on subsequent developments in political, social, and economic theory and its continuing role in environmental thought in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries

**Course requirements.** (1) regular attendance and participation, including posting responses on the readings to the course forum for each class; (2) two short essays, 3-5 pages, due April 10 and April 27 (3) a longer essay (6-8 pages) due May 18. See page 2.

**Basis for evaluation.** Attendance and participation, including forum posts (25%); two short essays (20% each); final essay (35%).
Texts. The following texts have been ordered at the NYU Bookstore. Use only these two editions of Malthus's work:


In addition to the above, there will be supplementary reading selections, as indicated on the schedule that follows. These will be made available as handouts or placed on NYU Classes. Some additions and changes are possible over the course of the term.

Ground rules. **Attendance and etiquette.** I take attendance and expect you to attend every class. The class begins promptly at 12:30. Please respect your classmates and arrive on time; late arrivals always disrupt the atmosphere of a classroom, as do mid-class exits and re-entries. The only good reason for leaving the classroom in the middle of a class period is sudden illness, so expect to remain for the full 75 minutes. For obvious reasons, turn off cell phones before coming to class. The success of this class depends upon open discussions. Feel free to speak your mind, but also be prepared to listen and respect the opinions of others. **Turn off laptops.** If you bring a laptop, please do not turn it on or use it during class time. Notetaking with pen or pencil is a wonderful exercise of the mind and hand. **Late papers.** Papers are due on the dates designated. Unless the paper is late due to documented illness or emergency, it will be downgraded one grade for each day late.

**Documentation and plagiarism.** Out of respect for yourself, your fellow classmates, your professor, and the academic enterprise, *do your own work* and always acknowledge the work of others with proper documentation. I will assume that all written work is your own and that you understand the basic rules for acknowledging your sources. If you don’t please ask; I’d be more than happy to assist you. Also, please review the official Gallatin statement on academic integrity: [http://gallatin.nyu.edu/about/bulletin/undergrad/policies/integrity.html](http://gallatin.nyu.edu/about/bulletin/undergrad/policies/integrity.html)

**Reading responses.** Every student must post responses on the readings to the online forum on the course NYU Classes site for each class period. Your responses should be about a paragraph in length and can deal with any aspect of the readings for that date. They can be in the form of observations, insights, general thoughts, questions, criticisms, whatever. **You must submit them by 11 a.m. on the day of the class.** We will use these posts to help shape the discussion for that day.

**Essays.** The two short essays will be based on your reading in the first and second editions of Malthus’s *Essay*, respectively. These essays should be based on your responses to some aspect of the Malthus reading and each could be an expansion of one of your forum posts. I will provide some suggestions for approaching each of these essays about two weeks before the due dates. The final essay will focus on responses to Malthus and could include your analysis of one or two sources outside the course readings. Details to follow later in the semester.
SCHEDULE

You should come to each class prepared to discuss the readings listed for that date. We will try to stick closely to this schedule, but expect minor adjustments throughout the term.

M Mar 23  Introductions

W Mar 25  Read handouts from first class: Franklin, Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind (1751); Wallace, A Dissertation on the Numbers of Mankind (1753); and Smith, excerpts from The Wealth of Nations (1776)

M Mar 30  Malthus, Essay (Oxford), preface & chaps. I-VII (pp. 3-4 & 9-61)

W Apr 1  Malthus, Essay (Oxford), chaps. VII-XIII (pp. 62-108)

M Apr 6  Malthus, Essay (Oxford), chaps. XIV-XIX (pp. 109-58)

FIRST ESSAY DUE

M Apr 13  Malthus, Essay (Cambridge), Book III, chaps. vi-xi (pp. 110-64)

W Apr 15  Malthus, Essay (Cambridge), Book III, chaps. xii-xiv (pp. 165-206)

M Apr 20  Malthus, Essay (Cambridge), Book IV, chaps. i-vi (pp. 207-54)

W Apr 22  Malthus, Essay (Cambridge), Book IV, chaps. vii-x (pp. 255-88)

M Apr 27  Malthus, Essay (Cambridge), Book IV, chaps. xi-xiv (pp. 289-332)
SECOND ESSAY DUE

W Apr 29  Martineau, Charity; Huzel, Harriet Martineau: the female Malthusian? (NYU Classes)

M May 4  Darwin on Malthus; Marx & Engels on Malthus; Huzel, Cobbett against the Parson (NYU Classes)

W May 6  Mayhew, Malthus and the Dismal Age and Malthus the Transatlantic Celebrity (NYU Classes)

M May 11  Pearce, The Coming Population Crash (excerpts); other selections TBA

M May 18  FINAL ESSAY DUE