



David Reisman

William Godwin and Thomas Robert Malthus

Economics, Justice,
Population and the Poor

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Godwin's *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Morals and Happiness* in 1793 had a profound effect on the British intelligentsia. The French Revolution in July 1789 was followed by the execution of Louis XIV in January 1791. The *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, the commitment to liberty, equality, fraternity and property, was a major watershed in world history.

On 4 November 1789 at the Dissenting House in Old Jewry Dr. Price addressed the London Revolution Society (its mission was to perpetuate the spirit of 1688) on the liberation of all men from tyranny and superstition. William Godwin was there to hear him. Calling his speech a *Discourse on the Love of our Country*, Price said that all of us have an absolute right to 'chuse' and 'cashier' our own rulers and to 'frame' our own constitution (Price, 1790: 24). A king who is 'a fool and a bigot' (Price, 1790: 33) has no claim to the throne. 1789 had sent the message loud and clear. 'Tremble all ye oppressors of the world' (Price, 1790: 50). It was, purely by coincidence, the day before Guy Fawkes Day.

In 1790 there was Burke's reply to Price in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*: 'Few harangues...have ever breathed less of the spirit of moderation' (Burke, 1790 [1968]: 94). In 1791 and 1792 there were the two parts of the *Rights of Man* in which Tom Paine collectivised the state: 'Government is nothing more than a national association acting on the principles of society' (Paine, 1792 [2000]: 178). Banned in 1792,

its author was tried for treason in absentia. In 1793 there was the Aliens Act. In 1794 Habeas Corpus was suspended. In 1795 the Sedition Acts were enacted. Dissidents were transported to Australia.

Yet 1789 was not the end. Following on from 1789, there was mob rule in Paris, widespread violence and, from 1793, Robespierre's Reign of Terror. War with France broke out in 1793, only days before Godwin's *Justice* was published on 14 February. It was, purely by coincidence, Valentine's Day and Malthus's birthday. Continuing until 1815, accompanied by the 'Continental System' of disruption to trade, war was the background to the ideas of Godwin and Malthus. France had, within a decade, become a military dictatorship. Napoleon made himself First Consul in 1799 and Emperor in 1804. By 1798 when Malthus entered the debate about progress, English Jacobins, republicans and free thinkers like Godwin were increasingly abused and marginalised. They were the Fifth Column within. They were closet Catholics, unEnglish outsiders, corrupters of the youth. Reds under the bed were a serious concern. Even moderate Whigs were not exempt from criticism.

Optimism and perfectibility were under threat. The clergy were preaching original sin and the revealed moral code. British public opinion was returning to the devil it knew. Readers would have reacted differently if Malthus, responding to Godwin, had broken into print only ten years earlier. The American revolution in 1776 and the American constitution in 1787 had said that even wise Socrates had to be bound by the rules. George III was experiencing bouts of insanity. The aristocracy was riding roughshod over the peasantry.

Britain had staged its own 1789 with the execution of Charles I in 1649. There had been Cromwell's puritans, the Diggers, the Glorious Revolution in 1688, the halting steps to electoral reform. The London Revolution Society, the London Corresponding Society and the Friends of the People had been interfacing with a more receptive British public than was the case when the navy mutinies at Spithead and Nore in 1797, the French landings in Wales in 1797, the suspension of convertibility in 1797, the Irish rebellion in 1798, the food riots in 1799 and the Luddite riots in 1811 were reminding the British people that it might be inadvisable to undermine a going concern. Self-made Napoleon invaded Switzerland in 1798. It was not just the kings and the lords that could sacrifice lives and livelihoods for *la gloire* and *Lebensraum*.

Talk is cheap. Riots are not. At least 285 people had lost their lives in the Gordon Riots in 1780. 'Orator Hunt' and his dissatisfied leftists were

demonstrating in Spa Fields, Islington, in the post-war recession and deflation that was the ugly face of Malthus's fifth *Essay*. It could happen again if Jack Cade were allowed to create chaos under the banner of Tom Paine.

Challenged by republicanism at home and war on the Continent, Britain by the mid-1790s was turning from Wordsworth's 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive' (Wordsworth, 1791, 1851 [1994]: 40) to Burke's 'revolution harpies of France, sprung from night and hell' (1796 [1826]: 21). Regeneration was no longer being taken for granted. Godwin went out of fashion. Malthus's *Essay on Population* in 1798 reminded a public that did not need much reminding that utopias always devour their children. It became part of an ongoing debate on sudden change versus tried-and-tested continuity. The French way was frightening the horses.

Qu'ils mangent de la brioche was being superseded by *il faut cultiver son jardin*. The cotton industry, Malthus said, had grown 'wonderfully' (SE II 33). An 'admirable machinery' had been raising productivity (SE II 33) in the new manufactures that had been turned loose by Hargreaves's spinning jenny in 1764, Watt's steam engine in 1769, scientists like Joseph Priestley and entrepreneurs like Jedediah Strutt. An industrial revolution was announcing a new dawn of commerce and prosperity.

That, however, was in Lancashire and Yorkshire. Malthus near Hartford, Godwin in London, neither had much first-hand experience of the new technology. Their image of manufacturing was more likely to have been small-scale craftsmanship on the model of the silk weavers in Spitalfields or the Wedgewood workshops in Staffordshire than of child labour in the Manchester mill towns or the long production-runs in the fixed-capital-intensive Carron Steelworks at Falkirk. Their imaginative reconstruction of working-class attitudes to population, mobility, subsistence and stratification was, Francis Place says, little short of 'puerile' (Place, 1822: 156). What they knew better than capitalism was unimproved agriculture, the landowning aristocracy, inherited influence in House of Lords, restricted suffrage, and the 'rotten boroughs' in the House of Commons. Politics was the liberal-leaning Whigs and the reactionary Tories. The fringe was fringy. Overheated dreamers, utopian visionaries and unwashed conspirators dismissive of the mainstream would have to be won over if they were to play a useful role in reform.

William Godwin (1756–1836) had been, like his Calvinist father, grandfather and uncle, a dissenting minister up to 1783. Unable to sign the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Faith, he had had no university education.

Apart from the Hoxton Academy in London, he was largely self-taught. Godwin was a voracious reader. He was drawn to the high ideals of Greece and Rome, to Voltaire and the French Age of Reason, to British individualists like Milton, Locke and Swift who, he believed, had seen correctly that ‘teaching virtue through the instrumentality of regulation and government’ (PJ 486) would not long survive. *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) which he first read at the age of five must have appealed to a bookish ascetic, never averse to being self-righteous and over-critical.

Godwin when he left the church made plans for a small school in Epsom. After that he became an independent writer and journalist. He lived in London, as frugally as one would expect from a lapsed Calvinist, on his pamphlets and (unsigned) articles in the *Morning Chronicle* under pseudonyms such as ‘Mucius’ or ‘A Lover of Order’. In *Cursory Strictures* in 1794, he objected that the treason trials were stifling free speech and assembly. In *Considerations on Lord Grenville’s and Mr. Pitt’s Bill* in 1795 he attacked ‘the enemies of science’, comparing their barbarism in the ‘gagging Acts’ to that of the Goths and Vandals, ‘drenched and disfigured with human gore’ (UW 212).

Godwin, dependent on his earnings, was extremely prolific. He knew that the mercenary and the mediocre will necessarily fall short of excellence. It was the price that a jobbing freelancer had to pay. There were works of history such as the *Life of Chatham* (1783) and, about Cromwell and, obliquely, the Levellers, the Diggers and Winstanley, the four-volume *History of the Commonwealth* (1824, 1826, 1827, 1828). There were Drury Lane plays. There were long novels and word-intensive thrillers with a message. Whether *St. Leon* (1799), *Mandeville* (1817) or *Cloudsley* (1830), the message was always the same. The weak do not stand a chance against the ‘gore-dripping robes of authority’, the ‘cold-blooded prudence of monopolists and kings’ (CW 219).

In *Caleb Williams* (1794), published at the time of the treason trials, an innocent peasant on the run from ‘a man of rank and fortune’ (CW 178), is pursued by the Javert-like bulldog Gines. A paid agent of the aristocratic murderer Falkland, the lawman Gines never grasps the true cause of crime. Caleb does: ‘Oh poverty! Thou art indeed omnipotent!...Thou fillest us to the very brim with malice and revenge’ (CW 121). Only the powerless cast out from society know what iniquitous persecution means: ‘We, who are thieves without a license, are at open war with another set of men who are thieves according to law’ (CW 224).

There were also the big books on the big ideas: *Thoughts on Man* (1831), the *Enquirer: Reflections on Education, Manners and Literature* (1797) and, most of all, the *Political Justice* (1793). Despite its length, it was completed in 16 months (PJ 4) at the rate of three or four hours a day. It sold 4000 copies and made Godwin famous. Brown calls it ‘one of the strangest and most influential books of the century’ (Brown, 1926: 45). Godwin’s *Political Justice* became for anarchy what Locke’s *Second Treatise* had been for liberalism and Marx’s *Capital* was to be for communism. At the zenith of his popularity, Hazlitt recalled, Godwin ‘blazed as a sun in the firmament of reputation; no one was more talked of, more looked up to, more sought after; and wherever liberty, truth, justice was the theme, his name was not far off’ (Hazlitt, 1825 [1971]: 31).

Godwin’s was the first philosophic treatise to argue for stateless spontaneity. It had an especial appeal to the young and idealistic. Wordsworth told a fellow student: ‘Throw aside your books of chemistry and read Godwin on Necessity’ (in Hazlitt, 1825 [1971]: 33). Southey ‘read, and all but worshipped’ the *Political Justice* (Brown, 1926: 62) to which his *Wat Tyler* in 1794 paid tribute. Coleridge even before he had finished reading Godwin’s book wrote a ‘Sonnet on Godwin’ to say how much the ancient mariner had changed his life: ‘Thy steady eye has shot its glances keen.... Thy voice, in Passion’s stormy day/Bade the bright form of Justice meet my way’ (Coleridge, 1795 [1880]: I 141). Only one year later Coleridge decided that proto-Jacobinism was not after all to his taste: ‘I do consider Mr. Godwin’s policies as vicious, and his book as a pander to sensuality’ (in Brown, 1926: 153). Coleridge decided that Godwin on Helvétius to the exclusion of Holbach had had missed the point. Mind is not superior to matter. A field cannot plough itself by a gigantic act of will. Death cannot be cheated because a sovereign thinker is not in the mood. Godwin, Coleridge suggested, should get out more.

Political Justice was revised in 1796 and 1798. The changes were not so extensive as to affect its underlying message. As George Woodcock says: ‘The later editions of *Political Justice* contained no single alteration in the basic principles, and no deletion of any importance in the social conclusions to be drawn from them.... The principal social criticisms remained, uncompromising and unanswerable’ (Woodcock, 1946: 150–1).

Godwin confirms the integrity of the core. Such alterations as he made, he recalls, were ‘not of a fundamental nature’ (PJ 10). His assessment is supported by F.E.L. Priestley’s detailed comparison of the three versions (Priestley, 1946) and by Mark Philp who regards the differences as

marginal: ‘Godwin did not renege on the central beliefs of the first edition—they remain central’ (Philp, 1986: 218). Peter Marshall says of Godwin that ‘the spirit and outline of his system remained intact’ (Marshall, 1984: 4). The present book takes the 1798 *Political Justice* as Godwin’s considered judgement save where there is an indication that he changed his mind on a matter of substance.

After 1798 there was a gap of two decades before Godwin returned to social and political thought. In the Preface to his *Essay on Sepulchres* in 1800, he describes himself as ‘a man of no fortune or consequence in my country; I am the adherent of no party; I have pursued the greater part of my life in solitude....There are numbers of men who overflow with gall and prejudice against me’ (Sepulchres, vi). He was more sensitive to the status of hate figure than he was to the lack of income.

Political Justice, costing £1.16.0 in 1793, was never banned. Paine’s *Rights of Man*, at five shillings (the same price as Burke’s *Reflections* and one shilling less than Malthus’s first *Essay*), was cheap enough for the common man. *Political Justice* was more of a stretch for an average labourer on £25 a year.

Pirated (in Dublin) and shortened versions conveyed the message more widely. The 1796 edition sold for only 14 shillings. There were the reading clubs and circulating libraries. On balance, however, the censor was confident that the lower classes would find Godwin’s long book difficult, confusing, repetitive and often leaden. A total of 895 pages bound in two heavy folios would test the understanding of the less educated. The workers would be alienated by the atheism and the rejection of marriage. The censor knew that the author, a self-avowed gradualist, had never been a member of the revolutionary societies. He had never been active in anything that could be called treason. Godwin was not Paine. His book was unlikely to do any harm.

Fame turned into infamy within only five years. It was followed by obscurity and neglect. Hazlitt in 1825 described the author of the *Political Justice* as a once-was one-hit wonder: ‘Now he has sunk below the horizon, and enjoys the serene twilight of a doubtful immortality....He is to all ordinary intents and purposes dead and buried’ (Hazlitt, 1825 [1971]: 31, 32). With Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the Reform Act in 1832, the suppression of the Test and Corporation Acts in 1828, a more liberal Britain had lost interest in a discredited firebrand. The French Revolution was fading into history. Malthus, despite what Hazlitt calls the factual inaccuracy of his philosophically ‘poisonous’ double ratio, was doing

better: 'His name undoubtedly stands very high in the present age, and will in all probability go down to posterity' (Hazlitt, 1825 [1971]: 253, 272).

Largely ignored, the ageing Godwin was running a children's bookshop. The Juvenile Library in Hanway Street could risk the name M.J. Godwin when the business moved to Skinner Street. Godwin was also operating a small publishing house: Charles and Mary Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* which he commissioned is still in print. Not a natural businessman, he eventually went bankrupt. Acolytes such as Shelley, Francis Place and (Thomas) Wedgwood gave him money. Shelley's early death in 1821 meant financial embarrassment. Loyal friends launched a subscription for their fallen star. They secured him a sinecure in Parliament as Yeoman Usher. He always denied that there was a parallel between private assistance to a deep thinker and alms to the poor: 'I ought to receive your superfluity as my due, while I am employed in affairs more important than that of earning a subsistence' (PJ 545).

The young and idealistic continued to view Godwin as their prophet. Shelley, aged 19, wrote to the dazzling 'luminary' (then 56) in 1812. Proclaiming his 'reverence and admiration', he declared himself both surprised and delighted that 'you still live' and are 'still planning the welfare of humankind' (Shelley, 1964: I 220). Soon he was telling Godwin how much *Political Justice* had 'opened to my mind to fresh and more extensive views': it had 'materially influenced my character' (Shelley, 1964: I 227).

Shelley was dissuaded by Godwin from establishing an ideal community to demonstrate the viability of social anarchism. Godwin told his young disciple that a better way to political justice would be quiet discussion and a rule of reason rather than a self-extinguishing chimera like the French 1789 that did not last. Mind could do to state, property and religion what matter could not. It gave Shelley a cause. The poet, Shelley declared, was de facto a visionary who 'beholds the future in the present': 'Poets... are the institutors of laws, and the founders of civil society, and the inventors of the arts of life' (Shelley, 1821 [1891]: 5, 6). In poem after poem in the decade after 1812, Shelley did his part to change men's minds as if a great legislator in touch with the facts.

In 1812 and 1813 there was *Queen Mab* on 'the drones of the community' who 'feed on the mechanic's labour': 'Kings, priests and statesmen blast the human flower/Even in its tender bud....Nature rejects the monarch, not the man; the subject, not the citizen' (Shelley, 1972: I 250, 252, 256). In 1817 there was *Laon and Cythna (The Revolt of Islam)* on

murders that ‘pale’ and gold that ‘grows vile’: while ‘Want, and Plague, and Fear from slavery flow’, while ‘the Tyrant peoples his dungeons with his prey’, nonetheless ‘the seeds are sleeping in the soil’ that will one day flower into social justice (Shelley, 1972: II 158, 227, 250). Shelley lists Malthus among the sophists behind the Tyrant’s throne. Looking up, however, he sees a mighty eagle soaring high who will in the end liberate mankind from forced servitude to the few.

In 1820 there was *Prometheus Unbound*. In 1822 there was *Hellas*. There were also the letters on Godwin, ‘greater none than he’, in which Shelley praised the wise leader who had opened his eyes: ‘Added years only add to my admiration of his intellectual powers, and even the moral resources of his character’ (Shelley, 1964: II 202–3). By then, still married to Harriet, Shelley had eloped with Godwin’s daughter.

Godwin’s first wife was Mary Wollstonecraft. Her *Vindication of the Rights of Man* (a reply to Burke) was published in 1791, her feminist *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in defence of equal reason and thus of equal education in 1792. They were married in 1797 when he, probably celibate (Marshall, 1984: 89), was 41 and she was 38. They maintained separate premises before setting up home together at The Polygon, in Chalton Street, Somers Town. The site, now Oakshott House, bears a plaque to Mary. There is no mention of William.

Philosophically, William regarded both cohabitation and marriage as unfreedom: ‘Nothing can be so ridiculous...as to require the overflowing of the soul to wait upon a ceremony’ (MEM 154) So did Mary, who once wrote to him that ‘a husband is a convenient part of the furniture of a house....I wish you, from my soul, to be rivetted in my heart, but I do not desire to have you always at my side’ (in KP I 251). She died in childbirth in the year they were married. Her portrait by John Opie, now in the National Portrait Gallery, hung in Godwin’s study until his own death 40 years later. His own portrait, by James Northcote, is less frequently on display. Godwin’s *Memoir* of Mary’s life, deeply felt as it is, reveals privileged information about her friendships with Fuseli and Imlay, her attempted suicide at Putney and the birth out of wedlock of her daughter Fanny. A more sensitive widower would have kept personal confidences to himself.

Their only child, their daughter Mary (Shelley), was the author of *Frankenstein* (1818). Showing the influence of her father (to whom it is dedicated), it warns that artificial intelligence is no substitute for the human spirit. A second marriage followed in 1801, to Mary Jane

Clairmont. Francis Place called her ‘the Infernal devil’. Mary Shelley complained that ‘she plagues my father out of his life’ (in Brown, 1926: 298, 299). Jealous, possessive, deceitful, bad-tempered, unkind, Godwin was less happy with her. There was one son, educated at Charterhouse. Despite talk of a separation, the marriage did last for almost four decades. Godwin was a lonely man, in need of a companion, a housekeeper, a book-keeper and a mother to what would become a blended family of, at its peak, five children. Godwin is buried with the two Marys (together with Shelley’s heart) at St. Peter’s Church in Bournemouth. Mary Jane is not.

Don Locke calls Malthus’s *Essay* ‘the book which would prove the most enduring of all replies to Godwin, a work whose reputation would soon obliterate that of its original inspiration...Godwin himself regarded it as the best, perhaps the only reasoned critique of his theories, and he went out of his way to make Malthus’s acquaintance, and invite him to breakfast’ (Locke, 1980: 161). Following an exchange of letters in early 1798 the meeting took place on 15 August, and there were at least three others (Letters II: 54). The contact may have been made through Malthus’s publisher, Joseph Johnson, a unitarian and a friend of Paine (Winch, 1996: 255). Johnson will have known Godwin’s own publisher, George Robinson.

In 1801 Godwin answered Malthus in his *Thoughts Occasioned by the Perusal of Dr. Parr’s Spital Sermon, Being a Reply to the Attacks of Dr. Parr, Mr. Mackintosh, the Author of An Essay on Population, and Others*. Malthus wrote to Godwin that they had much in common but that the ratios were keeping them apart: ‘You think that the present structure of society might be radically changed. I wish I could think so too’ (in KP I 322). In the 1803 edition of the *Essay* Malthus replied to the *Perusal*. The sections were deleted in 1817.

Godwin, who had once captured the spirit of the age, was sinking into history. Caleb Williams in 1794 had glimpsed the future: ‘Henceforth I will be contented with tranquil obscurity, with the cultivation of sentiment and wisdom, and the exercise of benevolence within a narrow circle’ (CW 200). It was Godwin at his peak talking to Godwin at his nadir. Malthus fared better. Like Marx and Keynes, the name of Malthus, noun or adjective, was becoming a cultural artefact in itself. Malthus was the toast of the town. Godwin was just toast. By the end of the decade Godwin’s *Justice* was not being read and the dinner parties had moved on to Malthus.

Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* in 1776 had presented a different alternative to late feudalism. In contrast to Godwin, it was a vision of competition,

markets, growth, affluence, acquisition, interest, aspiration, property, frugality, productivity, moderate statism and rising real incomes across the board. It was about wealth. Bentham's *Fragment on Government* in 1776 and his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Population* in 1789, both of them about morality without God and progress without anarchy, had opened the door to philosophic radicalism that followed the tramlines of the going concern. Malthus in the 1817 *Essay* was devoting his attention to a new target, Robert Owen and Owen's just-published *New View of Society*. The smiling Enlightenment was gone. Winch believes that Malthus was 'seeking a middle way between Burke and Godwin' (Winch, 1996: 253). A middle way between no-change and all-change proved hard to find.

In 1820 Godwin published *Of Population: An Enquiry Concerning the Power of Increase in the Numbers of Mankind: Being an Answer to Mr. Malthus's Essay on That Subject*. He repeated his view that population does not increase precipitately. Even if it did, the earth's surface is largely uninhabited. It could without difficulty feed its own. Malthus reviewed *Of Population* in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1821. He added a few words on Godwin in a postscript to the 1826 (sixth) *Essay*. He made clear that Godwin no longer had anything to offer.

Thomas Robert Malthus (1766–1834) was a country clergyman. A Jesus College, Cambridge, graduate, chiefly in mathematics, he took holy orders and from 1788 was a curate at Okewood, in Surrey. After 1803 he was the rector of Walesby, in Lincolnshire. From 1809 until his death in 1834 he was Professor of History and Political Economy—'he was born before the age of specialisation' (James, 1979: 51)—at the East India College, Haileybury. He had had no previous experience of teaching.

The monopoly status of the company that owned the college appears not significantly to have offended his (qualified) free trade sympathies. At 18 miles, Haileybury was near enough to London for him to keep up his professional contacts but distant enough to insulate him from urban even if not from rural poverty. Malthus married in 1804 at age of 38. True to his principles, he had only three children.

His father, Daniel Malthus was a small landowner and political radical. Daniel Malthus was in tune with the Enlightenment idea of improvement. He had met Hume and Rousseau. Thomas Robert Malthus was more cautious. Perfectibility did not make sense so long as the lower classes, uneducated and impulsive, were magnifying the poverty that the 1601 Poor Law and its accompanying Laws of Settlement had been put in place to relieve.

The full title of the first *Essay* was *An Essay on the Principle of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers*. It drew on the 1793 and 1798 editions of Godwin's *Justice*. The declared subject was advance and improvement. The hidden subject was Paris. Paris had shown that Hobbes had not been civilised away and that anarchy could destroy an ongoing way of life. Population was a case study. It had as little intrinsic interest to Malthus as it had to Godwin when he wrote the *Enquiry*. Its importance lay in its close proximity to the overriding topic of the free individual become a part of an orderly whole. Jacobinism was an impossible goal. Evolution was more in line with the natural law.

The *Essay* went through six editions. The subtitle was revised in 1803 to read *A View of its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness; with an Enquiry into our Prospects Respecting the Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils Which it Occasions*. Godwin and Condorcet lost their star billing. The first *Essay* in 1798, published anonymously, clearly the work of a new man attacking a celebrity, was the one that seemed most succinctly to refute the French *philosophes* and the English troublemakers. The first Census in 1801 confirmed that the English population was indeed growing. The second *Essay* in 1803 added further statistics that shifted the test still further from deduction to induction. Social science was emerging. Philosophy was on its trial. Malthus regarded his new *Essay* in 1803 (no longer anonymous) as effectively a new work. It had grown from 55,000 words to 200,000 words in length.

There were changes and some excisions. Data was added. There were revisions in 1806 (with an important new Appendix) and 1807. In the fifth edition of 1817, there were new sections on checks in Britain and France, poverty, the Poor Laws, and another new Appendix. There was a sixth edition, only slightly altered, in 1826.

Malthus's other major work, his *Principles of Political Economy*, was published in 1820. It, together with Ricardo's *Principles* in 1817, consolidated the template of the classical economics. A second (posthumous) edition appeared in 1836. The *Principles* dealt with population but also with social stratification and economic policy. It reinforced Malthus's defence of the Corn Laws. Rich landowners were creating aggregate demand that in turn was keeping the poor in work.

The masses recur in the entry on *Population* that Malthus contributed to the 1824 *Supplement to the Encyclopedia Britannica*. It was reprinted in 1830 as *A Summary View of the Principle of Population*. Malthus's ratios,

simplified and even caricatured, influenced the views of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws that sat between 1832 and 1834 and led to the strict and judgmental New Poor Law of 1834. By then the grand old man had given evidence to the Select Committees on Artizans and Machinery (1824) and on Emigration (1827). The Establishment did not give an equivalent platform to Godwin. Even the ‘Peterloo’ demonstrations and the mass unemployment caused by demobilisation after 1815 did not return Godwin to the forefront of debate.

This book is about Godwin and Malthus. They carried on a proxy debate on population and poverty in order to conduct a much fuller debate on economics and justice. Market capitalism was gaining ground. The poor were still with us. State and nature were in competition for the commanding heights.

French ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity were in the 1790s already ensconced in Calais. It was only 26 miles from Dover. The London Revolution Society believed that the English *ancien régime* would be the next domino to fall. Grenville, Pitt and George III put a different gloss on the good society. The nation was divided. The intellectual community was divided. This book shows how two great thinkers, both committed to universal wellbeing that transcended the beefsteaks and the cinemas, sought to make ideas into weapons in order to make swords into ploughshares.

This book shows that Godwin and Malthus, writing in the shadow of 1789, were united in their search for balanced betterment. Their world is not our own. Or is it? Godwin and Malthus were united in their cross-disciplinary quest for an ethical consensus that would transcend the lonely crowd. Their journey remains as relevant in our own times as it was in theirs. The nation is divided. The intellectual community is divided. Ideas are not just history. Ideas are survival. This book demonstrates just how important it is for all of us, in the tradition of Godwin and Malthus, to listen and learn.

Ideas are survival. This book is about ideas. Returning to the bedrock classics themselves, it visits the building-blocks and reassembles the structures. It compares and contrasts. It does not keep score. An author’s vision is uniquely his own. Clark says: ‘Godwin never offers a proof of the power of reason’ (Clark, 1977: 38). That is just the point. There is no proof. Great thinkers string together the frequencies and estimate the probabilities. At the end of the day their numbers will not be the equal of their questions. Without ideas there would be nothing but the hemlock to think them out of the cave.

Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 explain how Godwin made his way to population through a broad and full vision of economy, society and the state. Chapter 7 shows how he extended that worldview of equality and equity in the *Enquirer*. Chapter 8 deals with Malthus's first *Essay* that was his first confrontation with Godwin. Chapter 9 examines Godwin's reply to Malthus, together with Parr and Mackintosh, in his 1801 Spital essay. Chapter 10 considers Godwin's last word on Malthus and the ratios in his *Of Population* (1820). Chapter 11 analyses Malthus's last word on subsistence in the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Principles of Political Economy*, Godwin's last word on social philosophy in the *Thoughts on Man*. The concluding chapter says that it was the commitment to fair play and the satisfaction of ingrained need that brought the two authors together. They wrote about population and poverty because their real interest was a just economy in which the differences between rich and poor would be less striking than the shared participation in a going concern.

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Justice: The Part and the Whole

The science of society is a dialogue between the part and the whole. Godwin is an individual-ist who factors down. Only I know where the shoe pinches and by how much. He is also a social-ist who scales up. Godwin believes that the good society is one that goes straight to the horse's mouth. He also believes that the good society is one in which the social organism morally and methodologically comes first. Godwin's worldview is a synthesis of the part and the whole.

There is more. Alongside the part and the whole there is the truth. The individual and his society may be in perfect agreement that shoplifting and murder, like commerce and charity, are in conformity with the normative benchmark. Philosophically speaking, however, they are not the same. *De gustibus* is debasing and divisive. No one has a right to a gold-plated mousetrap when his fellow citizens are sleeping rough on the street: 'Godwin's conception of pleasure is firmly rooted in his conception of man's *telos* as an ever-expanding rational consciousness' (Philp, 1986: 137). The objective trumps the subjective. The truth to Godwin must always have the final say.

2.1 FACTORING DOWN

The irreducible building block is the discrete social actor: 'The universe is no more than a collection of individuals' (PJ 156). Nations are fictions that hide the tool that is doing the work: 'Usefulness and public spirit, in

relation to them, chiefly belong to the transactions of their members among themselves' (PJ 435). The decisions that sum up to the polity are the choice-calculus of thee and me. Nothing is beneficial to a nation 'that is not beneficial to the great mass of individuals of which the nation consists' (PJ 445). Godwin says 'great mass'. What he means is 'all because each'. Democracy makes the particular into the general. It is a blunt instrument. Only I know where the shoe pinches and by how much.

It is misplaced concreteness run wild to say that a nation can experience pleasure or pain: 'Happiness, in order to be real, must necessarily be individual' (PJ 432). The totality is the sum: 'Society is an ideal existence, and not, on its own account, entitled to the smallest regard. The wealth, prosperity and glory of the whole are unintelligible chimeras. Set no value on anything but in proportion as you are convinced of its tendency to make individual men happy and virtuous' (PJ 431).

The aggregate consists of its atoms: 'Individuals are everything, and society, abstracted from the individuals of which it is composed, nothing' (PJ 452). The whole abstracted from each sequential part is nothing. Autonomous, self-willed, self-determined, it is the element and not the compound that makes things what they are: 'All the great steps of human improvement' have been 'the work of individuals' (PJ 482). Scientific advance, economic innovation, war and peace, all is ultimately the value added of the unique one-off: 'Individuality is of the very essence of intellectual excellence', of 'mental strength and accuracy' (PJ 677). 'The proper method for hastening the decline of error' is 'by exciting every man to think for himself' (PJ 678). *Every man. Each man.* Conformity is a dead end. The social actor who lives by the script that his community has drafted 'lives forgetting and forgot' (PJ 678).

It is both a statement of fact and a *desideratum* in itself: 'The universal exercise of private judgment' is 'unspeakably beautiful' (PJ 141). It must be treated with respect: 'Every man should stand by himself....No man must encroach upon my province, nor I upon his' (PJ 132). John Stuart Mill was a classical liberal who believed in the hegemony of the unique one-off: 'Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign' (Mill, 1859 [1974]: 68). So was Milton Friedman, who saw in the economic market an affirmation of 'the free man's belief in his own responsibility for his own destiny' (Friedman, 1962: 1). William Godwin was an anarchist. He shared with the great libertarians the conviction that I am I. Take away your $n + 1$ and your *sui generis*. We live by Wicksell's unanimity of consensus around here: 'When it comes to benefits which are