Eco. 301Y1: Economic History of Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe

Topic No. 6 [13]: The Population Problem and Economic Development in Early Modern Europe: Was There a ‘Malthusian Trap’?

A. Textbooks and General Studies:


B. The Debate in Journal Articles: A Malthusian Approach to Living Standards?


C. The European Marriage Pattern and Demographic Change


3

QUESTIONS:

1. Did population growth in England and western Europe during the 16th century produce a ‘Malthusian crisis’ by or sometime after ca. 1600? What did Malthus (and Ricardo) say about population growth? Were ‘diminishing returns’ the inevitable result of population growth in this era? Were technological changes sufficient to counteract the ‘law of diminishing returns’?

2. Whether or not England experienced a ‘Malthusian trap’, what happened to real incomes and living standards during this era of population growth: for urban and rural labourers; peasants; artisans; landlords? Who gained and who lost in this era? What other factors, besides demographic ones, determined changes in real incomes during this period?

3. Explain when, why, and how Europe's population grew during the 16th and 17th centuries, and then why it ceased to grow. If there was no ‘Malthusian trap’, why did that population growth not continue into the modern era? What role did famine, disease, warfare, and the ‘European marriage pattern’ etc. play in European demography before 1750?

4. Discuss the positive and negative effects of population growth in England from 1500-1750: on technological change and investment in agriculture, industry, trade and overseas expansion.