

The Great Debate:

Malthus

vs.

Engels

Plan of Action

6/12/06

Topic: Population Change and Food

(1) Malthus

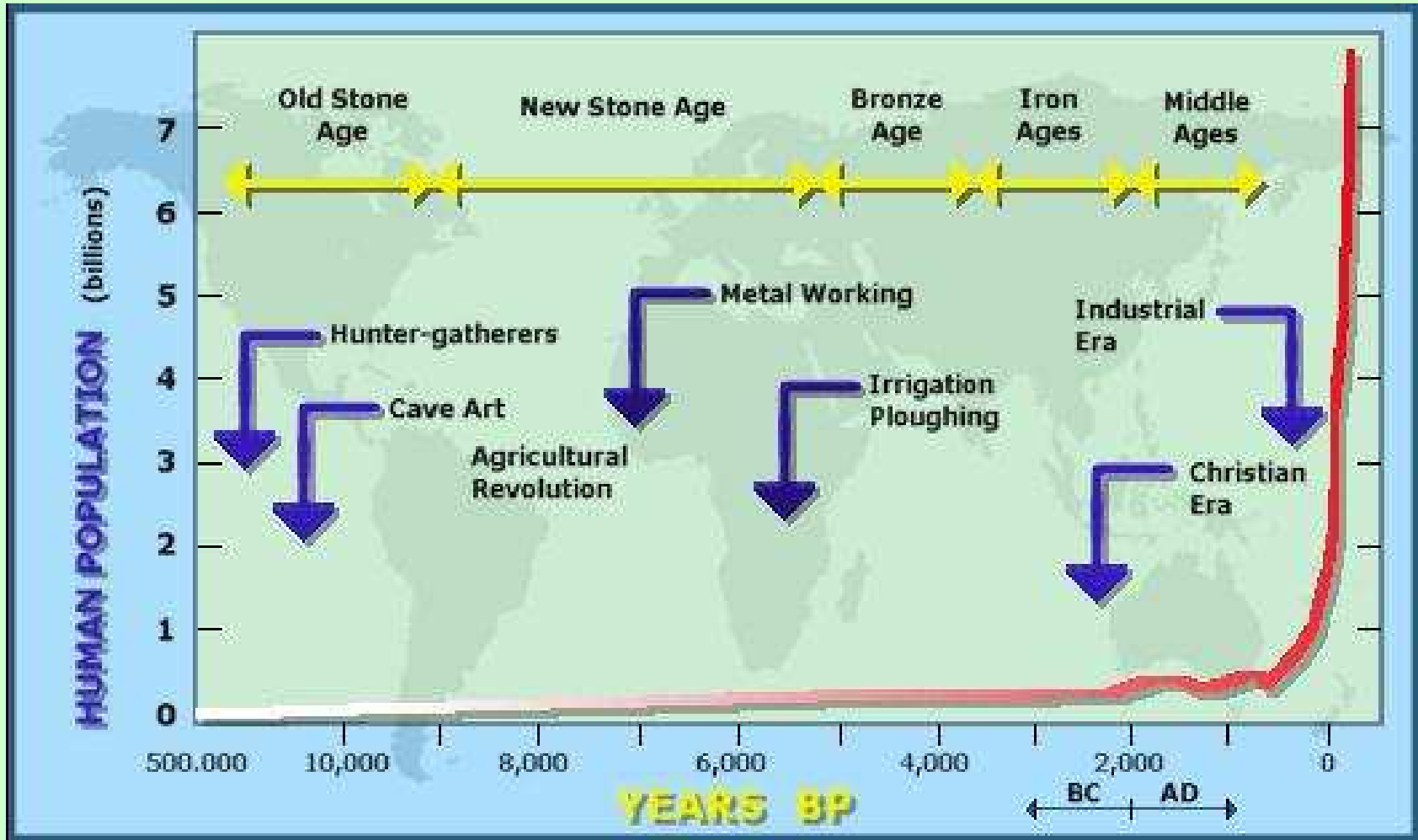
(2) Engels

(3) The Population/Food Debate

Thomas Robert
Malthus
(1766 – 1834)



Population Growth Through History



Malthus' Postulates

- (1) Food is necessary for humankind to exist
- (2) The “passion between the sexes” is necessary and will not subside in the future

Malthus' Assertion

“The power of population is indefinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man”

- Unchecked population increases exponentially (“geometrically” is Malthus’ term)
- Food production increases arithmetically

“By that law of nature which makes food necessary to the life of man, the effects of these two unequal powers must be kept equal”

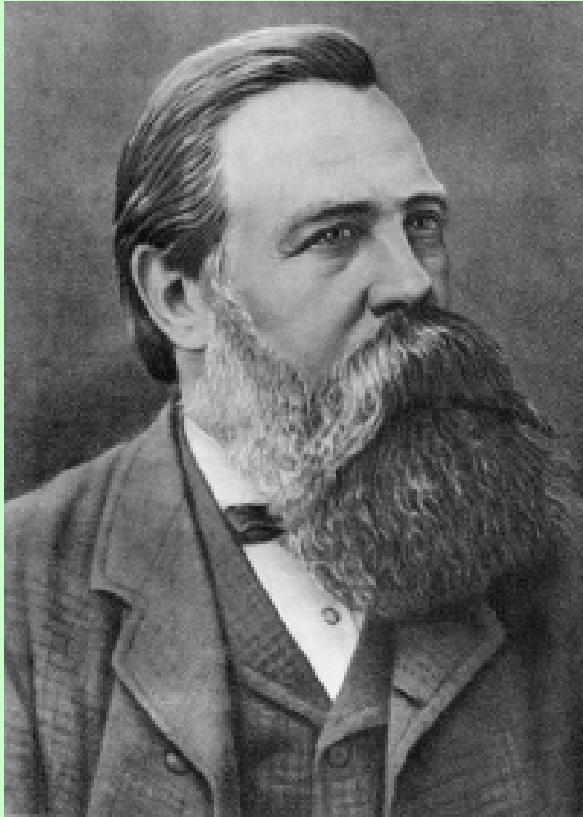
Malthus' Resolution: Checks on Population Growth

“Preventative” Checks (Limit Fertility)

- **Delayed marriage**
 - **Inability to Provide for a Family**
 - **Maintaining Economic Status**

“Positive” Checks (Raise Mortality)

- **Famine**
- **Disease**
- **War**



Friedrich Engels

(1820 – 1895)

Basics of the Conflict Approach

- Society consists of an unequal hierarchy of social classes
- Dominant groups (by wealth, gender, race, power) use resources at their disposal to control minority groups
- The primary outcome of elite control is the reproduction of the social structure (and the elite position of the dominant group)

Critique of Capitalism

- Property is the key variable that determines an individual's conditions in life
- Capitalism/private property forge two important classes: those who own the means of production (bourgeoisie), and those who only own their own labor (proletariat)
- Capitalists extract surplus from workers (profit)
- Workers are alienated from the fruits of their labor, and thus their humanity

Engels' Postulate

“No one capital [land, labor] can stand up against the competition of another if it is not brought to the highest pitch of activity.”

Engels' Assertion

“The productive power at the disposal of mankind is immeasurable. The productivity of the land can be infinitely increased by the application of capital, labor and science.”

Engels' Resolution

Resolve the inequities inherent in capitalism to unleash human productive capacity.

Malthus vs. Engels

Questions of Interest:

Why are there poor people?

What is the relative importance of population structure/change and social structure/change on food production?

Questions to Ponder

What is poverty? Why does poverty exist?

In what ways does population growth affect food production? What intervening variables influence this relationship?

Under what conditions is the Malthus/Engels debate applicable? Is it still relevant today?