

Montesquieu and Robert Wallace to the effect that population levels had been higher in ancient as compared to modern times¹².

In dealing with this question Hume argued that "there is in all men, both male and female, a desire and power of generation more active than is ever universally exerted" (*Essays*, 381). Therefore in addressing the question at issue it is necessary to know the "situation of society" and to compare "both the *domestic* and *political* situation of these two periods, in order to judge of the facts by their moral causes" (*Essays*, 383).

In deciding in favour of modern society, Hume drew attention to the use of slavery in ancient times as "in general disadvantageous both to the happiness and populousness of mankind" (*Essays*, 396), pointing also to the incidence of military conflict and of political instability. But perhaps the most striking aspect of the argument is the attention given to the point that "Trade, manufactures, industry were no where, in former ages, so flourishing as they are at present in Europe" (*Essays*, 416). Population is ultimately limited not just by political factors, but also by the food supply and this in turn by the type of economic organization prevailing.

I grant, that agriculture is the species of industry chiefly requisite to the subsistence of multitudes; and it is possible, that this industry may flourish, even where manufactures and other arts are unknown or neglected (*Essays*, 419).

But, he added:

The most natural way, surely, of encouraging husbandry, is, first, to excite other kinds of industry, and thereby afford the labourer a ready market for his commodities, and a return of such goods as may contribute to his pleasure, and enjoyment. This method is infallible and universal; and, as it prevails more in modern government than in the ancient, it affords a presumption of the superior populousness of the former (*Essays*, 420).

There is thus no simple relationship between population and the food supply; much depends on the form of economic organisation, on the degree to which sectors of activity are interdependent and on the degree to which men are motivated by the desire for gain.

The same basic theme emerges in the essay "Of Money" where Hume rejected the conventional wisdom that money can be regarded as wealth (*Essays*, 281) and stated the famous relationship between changes in the money supply and the general price level; a relationship

12. See Rotwein's editorial notes to EW, pp. 108, 184.