

04 June 2018

Dear Dietz,

I sent your interesting and imaginative to three referees, all experts in the area. They have no reported back; in my view, they have done an outstanding job. Their advice to me spans the range of possible outcomes, from R+R to reject. One referee chose “weak r+r” as a recommendation.

My own reading is as follows: I think there is substantial interest in how Malthusian the world (still) is. I like the topic, which is why I sent the paper out to three sterling referees. One key concern here is that the paper is only partly about what I would think of measures of how Malthusian an economy is – ie the slope of death and birth schedules AND the existence of some factor in fixed supply. Instead, like Weil and Wilde, you estimate beta in the production function. As you know, production function estimation is its own little subject area, and the demands on the data are normally very large. I like the elegance with which you cut through much of that, but I am not entirely swayed by the robustness and appropriateness of all the shortcuts you take (R1). R2, who recommends rejection, raises the point that measurement error is probably not classical in nature, but greater in the tropics (and that having modern data adds another layer). R3 is the most favourable, but shares R2’s concerns about the use of modern data. He/she makes a number of useful points, which you may want to consider, in particular (2) and (3).

Overall, while there is much to like here, I am afraid that I do not see the paper quite measuring up to a contribution that we can take forward. For that, I would have to have confidence in mapping out a revision path that leads to eventual publication with a very

high chance of success. Unfortunately, that is not the case here. I would recommend you try the paper out on a more specialized journal, perhaps the *Journal of Comparative Economics*.

I am sorry for this outcome. I handle around 210 paper a year, out of which I can only publish 10-12. That requires some unpleasant choices. As you know, I greatly admire your work. I hope this won't discourage you from submitting other work to the EJ.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Hans-J. Voth', with a stylized flourish at the end.

(Hans-Joachim Voth)