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CAMERALISM AND THE CONCEPT OF MEDICAL POLICE

GEORGE ROSEN

I

In 1779, there appeared the first volume of the monumental *System einer vollständigen medicinischen Polizey* of Johann Peter Frank (1745-1821). During his lifetime six more volumes were issued, with two volumes appearing posthumously. This work is today considered a landmark in the history of thought on the social relations of health and disease. Nevertheless, to assess correctly the significance of Frank's work it is important to see it in terms of the social, political, and ideological context within which it appeared. Central to Frank's thought is the concept of medical police. The origin and growth of this idea require exploration. This essay seeks to study the development of the concept of medical police in the thinking of various individuals, and to show how the idea and the proper methods for achieving it grew in clarity and power until they reached their highest form in the work of Johann Peter Frank.

II

Admiration for the virtues of a growing population, and an intense desire to increase the number of people within a country mark the political and economic views of the later seventeenth century and of most of the eighteenth century.¹ This enthusiasm for increased numbers found expression in many quarters. In 1668, Johann Joachim Becher, a German physician, chemist, promoter of projects, and a writer on political and economic subjects, published a discourse on the rise and fall of cities and states.² This work lays great stress on the necessity of populousness. Becher's brother-in-law, the Austrian lawyer and privy councillor Philipp Wilhelm von Hörnigk, took the view that creation of population was the prime function of the state. All measures possible should be taken to

¹ Eli F. Heckscher: *Mercantilism* (2 vols.), London, George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1934, vol. II, pp. 158-161.

² Johann Joachim Becher: *Politischer Discurs von den eigentlichen Ursachen des Auf- und Abnehmens der Städte, Länder und Republiken, in specie, wie ein Land Volkreich und Nohrhaft zu machen und in eine rechte Societatem civilem zu bringen*, Frankfurt, 1668. For Becher see Wilhelm Roscher: *Geschichte der National-Oekonomie in Deutschland*, second edition, München und Berlin, R. Oldenbourg, 1924, pp. 270-289.

