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G. Rosen. Economic and Social Policy in Public Health, in Journal of the History of Medicine, 1953 [photocopie]

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Références bibliographiques

- [\[anonyme ou collectif\] Journal of the history of medicine](#)
- [Rosen, Economic and Social Policy in Public Health, in Journal of the History of Medicine, 1953](#)

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Références éditoriales

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wealth. Obviously, any loss of labor productivity due to illness and death was a significant economic problem.

It was in the interest of the state to have the largest possible number of healthy productive subjects. Moreover, since population was a factor of production it was essential to know the number and the "value of people,"² especially of those occupational groups esteemed most productive. It was the recognition of this need in England in the seventeenth century that led to the first significant attempts to apply statistical methods to the public health.

Another aspect of the larger question of population and productivity concerned the poor. To increase population was eminently desirable, but, unless employed, people were only potential sources of wealth. The problem of poverty was thus inextricably linked with that of employment, so that the poor occupied a strategic position in the logic of English social and economic policy. Numerous schemes for dealing with this question were proposed, and in this connection various individuals began to explore the problem of social action in matters of health, inclusive of medical care.

No one perhaps is more significantly representative of these trends than William Petty, physician, wealthy landowner, scientist, and above all, social projector. He personifies that combination of utilitarianism, commercial drive, and experimental philosophy which characterized the approach to social, economic, and health problems in the period following the Commonwealth.³ Petty's proposals for the advancement of knowledge and educational reform stem in a straight line from Bacon's *New Atlantis* by way of Hartlib's *Macaria* and point to the enthusiastic promulgation of elaborate projects for commercial undertaking, technological innovation, and social reform during the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Petty is representative, however, not only as a projector, but equally as a pioneer in the quantitative study of social phenomena. The application of the numerical method to the analysis of social problems was an event of first-rate importance and was destined to prove extraordinarily fruitful for the study and development of public health. Petty was convinced that such problems could be dealt with most effectively in terms of func-

² The phrase "value of people" is used repeatedly by William Petty. See *The economic writings of Sir William Petty* . . . edited by C. H. Hull. Cambridge, at the University Press, 1899, 2 vols., pp. 108, 152, 267, 454.

³ W. E. Houghton, Jr., The history of trades: its relations to seventeenth century thought. *J. Hist. Ideas*, 1941, 2, 33-60.



