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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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tional analysis and measurement, what he called *political arithmetic*. "The method I take," he wrote, "is . . . to express myself in terms of number, weight, or measure; to use only arguments of sense, and to consider only such causes, as have visible foundations in nature. . . ."⁴

While Petty coined the term political arithmetic and outlined the significance of a quantitative study of social fact, the first important demonstration of the usefulness of the statistical approach was undertaken by his friend John Graunt. His classic contribution appeared in 1662 under the title *Natural and Political Observations . . . upon the Bills of Mortality*. While Graunt's work was not without antecedents, he blazed a new trail and brought to light a number of important facts.⁵ In the first place, he demonstrated the regularity of certain social and vital phenomena. Thus he noted "that among the several casualties some bear a constant proportion unto the whole number of burials; such are chronical diseases, and the diseases whereunto the city is most subject; as for example, consumptions, dropsies, jaundice, gout, stone, palsie, scurvy, rising of the lights or mother, rickets, aged, agues, fevers, bloody flux, and scowring; nay, some accidents, as grief, drowning, men's making away themselves, and being kill'd by several accidents, & c. do the like; whereas epidemical and malignant diseases, as the plague, purples, spotted fever, smallpox and measles do not keep that equality: so as in some years, or months there died ten times as many as in others."⁶ Secondly, Graunt was the first to note the excess of male over female births as well as the eventual approximate numerical equality of the sexes. Thirdly, he called attention to the excess of the urban over the rural death rate.

Although Graunt seems to have been aware of the social significance of his studies, he did not pursue further this aspect of the matter. It was precisely in this area, however, that Petty made his most pregnant contribution. In line with mercantilist thought and practice, he approached problems of health and disease in terms of

⁴ Petty, *Economic writings*, vol. 1, p. 129.

⁵ Jakob Burckhardt, *The civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. London and New York, Phaidon Press, 1944, pp. 45-47, 50-52; Alfred von Martin, *Soziologie der Renaissance*. Stuttgart, Ferdinand Enke Verlag, 1932, pp. 26-31; G. N. Clark, *Science and social welfare in the age of Newton*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1937, pp. 121-132.

⁶ Petty, *Economic writings*, p. 352. A good deal has been written about the possible authorship of the Graunt treatise by Petty. Those interested may consult the following: Petty, *Economic writings*, pp. XXXIX-LIV; *The Petty Papers*, 1927, vol. II, pp. 273-284; Major Greenwood, *Medical statistics from Graunt to Farr*. Cambridge, At the University Press, 1948, pp. 36-39.



