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ON THE RAPPROCHEMENT OF THE PURE AND THE IMPURE

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Résumé — Ceci constitue une réplique aux "Notes from the Impure" de David Allan Rehorick, un commentaire critique sur mon mémoire de 1979 concernant l'enseignement d'un cours sur l'enquête démographique. Bien que parfois je ne sois pas d'accord avec lui, j'accueille la plupart des idées qu'il présente; ses remarques enrichissent mon article. La distinction qu'il fait entre étudiants spécialisés et étudiants généraux est, en particulier, utile. J'ajoute que les étudiants et les enseignants diffèrent en ce qui concerne leur concentration dans des problèmes; ils different aussi en leurs capacités au calcul.

Abstract — This is a reply to David Allan Rehorick's "Notes from the Impure," a critical commentary on my 1979 paper about teaching a survey course in population. Although I sometimes disagree with him, I welcome the majority of the ideas he presents; his remarks enrich my article. His distinction between specialist and generalist students is particularly useful. I add that students and instructors vary in their absorption with problems; they also vary in their numeracy.

Key Words — **students, pedagogy, numerate**

A commentary on a commentary on one's previous writing is supposed to be even more vicious than the initial commentary. Readers who look forward to the excitement of another such heated dispute will be disappointed by this exchange concerning my 1979 article on teaching a survey course in population.[1] Blame for this disappointment can be placed on David Allan Rehorick, whose pacific tone and opening and concluding compliments inspire me to reply in kind, as unprovoked invective would appear boorish.

After these apologies, I state at the outset that I regard Rehorick's remarks more as supplementing than disagreeing with my paper.[2] I generally agree with what he says. His paper adds several valuable points that I neglected to make, thereby enhancing rather than defeating my ideas. The following responses conform to the order of his notes.

Although I stand by my distinction between demographers and non-demographers as instructors, I do accept the usefulness of the term "population studies" as a mediator. I believe my article uses the word "population" much more than "demography" (although I have not taken the trouble to count the frequencies). My usage differs between the subject and the person. I usually call an expert a demographer, partly because "populationist" is disparaging and partly because such a specialist is expected to be skilled in the formal quantitative techniques associated with the term "demography." A non-expert does not have a clear-cut label, being sometimes called a non-demographer and sometimes simply someone who is interested in population. When referring to the subject rather than an individual, I generally restrict the word "demography" to occasions when I am being technical, preferring the word "population" for other (indeed, most) occasions because of its greater inclusiveness. I believe this latter usage resembles "population studies" closely.

I also accept (after all, it is history) the legacy of problem-oriented and amelioration-centred approaches to sociology, which carried over into population instruction. Evidence of this heritage is supplied not only by Warren Thompson's 1930 choice of title (*Population Pro-*

blems), but also by the earlier *Population Problems* by E.B. Reuter (1923), called to my attention by Lyle Shannon of the University of Iowa.

I cannot disagree with Rehorick's statements that demography "exhibits conflicting sets of 'facts' " and that "it is the organization of 'facts' into meaningful patterns that constitutes the basis for knowledge." Surely these maxims are true of all fields of knowledge. My espousal of their pertinence to demography is indicated by my belief (which was not stated in my 1979 paper) that instructors should assign only essay examinations, on the presumption that "objective" tests measure mainly the memorization of small pieces of information, whereas an essay shows whether the student can organize the material and think systematically about it.

I do, however, disagree with the final paragraph in Rehorick's "Goals" section. Explanation of values, in my opinion, is too large a task to be accomplished adequately as a secondary part of a one-term course. This disagreement is softened by my acceptance of a brief acknowledgment of underlying values. My objection is to the length of time needed for the detailed development implied by the word "explicate."

To see my paper as equating "purist" with "demographer" (as Rehorick does near the beginning of his section on the "three Ps" — purists, popularizers, and propagandists) requires, I think, a little injudicious reading between the lines or relating of sections. By writing that "purists either are demographers or have a serious interest in demography" (p. 174), I meant that it is not necessary to be a demographer to be a purist; puristic rigour can be found in any discipline, and some non-demographers may approach demography courses with the purism to which they have become habituated in their other work. Perhaps the source of Rehorick's complaint is my statement that "propagandists are much less likely to have had training in demography or to be PAA members" (p. 174), which implies that some of them are not really demographers. But some of them are, for I know several bona fide demographers who are active propagandists outside of class and presumably may also be so inside their classrooms. It is true, as Rehorick wrote, that some "30s demographers were acting as 'pro-fertility propagandists'." In sum, purists may be demographers or not, and propagandists may be demographers and vice versa.

Rehorick alleges that my identifying criteria reflect a normative bias toward purism. Yes, I do prefer a puristic viewpoint. I confess additionally to being one of those instructors who sometimes dilutes the course content "to the extent of becoming a semi-popularizer" (p. 175). How often and to what extent I do this depends on the scholarly qualities of my students and therefore on what I need to do to reach them, or, to use Rehorick's typology, whether the students are specialists or generalists.

Classification of students as either generalists or specialists is an excellent idea. I wish I had thought of this dichotomy when writing my paper. It is curious that I did not, for I have made this distinction (albeit usually tacitly) for many years as, I suspect, have many other instructors.

This leads me to a related issue — or another dimension. Table 1 of my paper includes two dimensions: type of instructor and goal of the course. It does not explicitly include the variable — type of student — because I focused on the decisions made by the instructor before the course begins. After reading Rehorick's critique, I considered enlarging Table 1 to have three parts: 1A, for classes with a majority of students who are specialists; 1B, for those with a majority of generalists; and 1C, for a mixture of the two. Upon reflection, I decided that the stub variable — course goal — implicitly allows for the third variable, on the assumption that the goal is set with the students' probable orientations in mind (I acknowledge, however, that these orientations can be faultily anticipated or even misread during the term). The utility of

the specialist-generalist dichotomy is, I conclude, confined to decisions concerning the sequence of topics, their degree of technicality, the time apportioned to each, and the kinds of examples used — an extensive list, indeed.

Omission of type of student as a variable may result from an elitist attitude that a purist like me might be expected to hold. This is not self-denigration, as elitism is surely an inescapable ingredient of any education that claims to be "higher" and accepts chiefly those students who excel.

I like Rehorick's plea for the instruction of generalist students in table-reading: "give us, some classes, our sense of how to read any table." Perhaps I did not include such a down-to-earth recommendation because of an unrealistically optimistic hope that all specialist students and many generalists would have learned the rudiments of table-reading in introductory sociology or elsewhere. Realistically, however, few students are numerate, and many instructors are not.

Here I seize the opportunity to promote a recent coinage that has both grace and utility. "Numerate" is to mathematics what "literate" is to prose. The noun is "numeracy," analogous to "literacy." Credit for this invention belongs to Karol Krotki of the University of Alberta. Although Dr. Krotki did not use "innumeracy" or "innumerate" pejoratively, Douglas R. Hofstadter wrote of "Number numbness, or why innumeracy may be just as dangerous as illiteracy" (*Scientific American*, 1982, 246(5):20).

The sequence of topics in a course is almost certain to vary from one instructor to another, so I am not surprised that Rehorick and I disagree. Indeed, I often disagree with myself. I have taught the basic survey course in population 49 times (an average of twice a year), which may be a world record, though too insignificant for the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

In these 49 efforts, I have tried a number of outlines, varying in several ways, including some mentioned by Rehorick. His recommendation to end with a look into the future is a case in point: I have used this ending, abandoned it, and may try it again next year. His suggestion of integrating policy into the presentation of the "big three" variables makes sense; despite my placement of policies as the final topic, I am unable to restrain myself from including some discussion of policies as I lecture on each of the big three topics. To repeat Rehorick's delightful alliteration, such an integration would tend to overcome the "polarization of 'purist' and 'popularizer' positions."

Variations in course outlines and contents certainly occur between countries. Courses in France, for instance, are organized differently from those in the United States. It would be interesting to examine syllabuses from various countries to determine whether there are consistent national styles. The sample would have to be large in each nation, and one might need to stratify among the "three Ps." It might also be instructive to examine course outlines in different parts of ethnically divided countries. For example, are there differences between the approaches to teaching population in the English-speaking and French-speaking universities of Canada?

In his final paragraph, Rehorick writes that students should be "able to recognize that ideas and facts [exist] within a humanly constructed and socially supported frame of reference." I agree completely and probably should have said so in my article. I presume I took it for granted.

Finally, I want to thank Rehorick for doing my paper the honour of writing a commentary about it. To receive letters is commonplace, but I had never expected a published critique. I particularly appreciate his courtesy, which I have tried to match.

Footnotes

1. All subsequent references to Ralph Thomlinson's "Goals and contents of a survey course in population" which appeared in Volume 6 (1979) of *Canadian Studies in Population* will be by page number only.
2. All references to or quotes cited from David Allan Rehorick are from his commentary in this volume.

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