THE INTRODUCTORY ECONOMICS TEXT: ANALYTICAL VS. DESCRIPTIVE

BY

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The current interest of the profession in improving the teaching material of Economics in Philippine freshman classes is a heartening sign of awareness of an urgent problem, and may be profitably compared with the sustained attention and controversy of the American economic profession in connection with the teaching of first courses in Economics in American high schools.[1] Our concern about the quality of textbooks and our deliberated judgments seem to be similar to the conclusions[2] drawn by the American Economic Association Committee on Economic Education:

> The ommission of analysis does not prevent authors from reaching categorical conclusions which are, of course, completely unsupported. Some have an element of truth, but even this is not demonstrated and others are misleading, if not in error.[3]

The common concensus of the Committee on Economic Education of the American Economic Association is that analysis has given way to description in an introductory course.[4] On this point see particularly the report entitled "Economics in the Schools", *American Economic Review*, supplement for March, 1963 issue.

It is perhaps not improper to warn that although no introductory texts can substitute for an adequately trained teacher, an inadequate

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[1]See for instance:
P. R. Olson, "This Is Economics in the Schools", *American Economic Review*, Vol. LI, No. 3 (May, 1961); H. S. Ellis, "This Is Economics", *Ibid;* G. L. Bach, "Economics in the High Schools: The Responsibility of the Profession", *Ibid.;* and discussions. Also, on a related problem, see the articles and discussions under "Efficiency in the Teaching of Economics: the Product", *American Economic Review*, Vol. LIV, No. 3 (May 1964), pp. 595-631.

[2]American Economic Association Committee on Economic Education, "Economics in the Schools." *American Economic* Review, Vol. LIII No. 1, Part 2 (March, 1963). Specially pp. 1-8.

[3]*Ibid.*, p. 12.

[4]"3. *Routine Description Dominates Analysis.* Perhaps the most alarming characteristic of textbooks in all three courses is the dominance of description over analysis in the treatment accorded those economic topics selected for discussion." The "three courses" referred to are Economics, Social Problems, and U. S. History as taught in American high schools. *Ibid.*, p. x.

teacher combined with a poor text spells almost irreparable damage, particularly in an introductory course.

It is a mute question just to what extent a beginning textbook in Economics can be tailored to specific national conditions. The frank, and thus meaningful, reviews[1] of a recent economics textbook written with specific reference to Filipino students[2] would seem to miss the prime consideration, *viz.:* is there such a thing as Philippine principles of economics? It is tempting to hint: is there a need for a textbook called *Principles of Physics for Filipinos* or *Elements of Chemistry in a Philippine Setting*?[3] But this comparison is perhaps not too cogent, admittedly. More cogent is the fact that there are no respectable texts called *Fundamentals of Economics for Americans,* nor did Alfred Marshall write his book *Principles of Economics for Britons.* Thus one finds American texts being used in introductory economics courses in Scandinavia, Dr. Timbergen's and Prof. Lange's texts adapted for a first course in Econometrics in American universities, and Samuelson's *Economics* widely used (and plagiarized) in many countries.

The problem, of course, is wholly different when it comes to economic history, economic institutions, economic policy, and economic geography. Here there can be no question about the validity of a history of the Philippine economy or of an economic geography of the Philippines. The same is true in regard to journals. Here of course, division of labor and specialization of studies and interests motivate and justify the publication of national journals.

Perhaps the widely voiced need for a Philippine Economics text[4] should be more carefully translated to mean a handy introductory text covering not only the usual economic analytical tools and methods, but

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[1] J. Encarnacion, Jr., book review of Principles of Economics in Philippine Setting, in *The Philippine Economic Journal,* Vol. II, No. 2 (Second Semester, 1963), pp. 224-225. G. P. Sicat, book review of *Principles of Economics in Philippine Setting,* in *The Philippine Review of Business and Economics,* Vol. I, No. 1 (February, 1964), pp. 84-85. Encarnacion's brief review is incisive and apropos. For comparison, Gragasin, Espiritu, and Ella's original meaning to substitute goods as "goods which may be used for the same purpose in place of other or genuine goods" stands equal to the maxim "Low taxes add to the money customers can pass over the counter—they are inflationary." Cited in A.E.A. Committee on Economic Education, *op. cit.,* p. 13.

[2] J. V. Gragasin, *et al., Principles of Economics in Philippine Setting.* Manila: R. M. Garcia Publishing House, 1962. XVIII, 411 pp.

[3] Perhaps one has been written? On this there is a parallel in G. F. Zaide, *World History in an Oriental Setting.* Manila: Rex Book Store, 1962, IX, 939 pp. Vide review by T. R. Catindig in *Philippine Studies,* Vol. 12, No. 3 (July, 1964) pp. 563-565. Gragasin, Espiritu, and Ella's mystic definition of the Law of Diminishing Returns is equalled by Zaide's "Besides the natural wonders, one can also find in the Philippines outdoor sports, jam sessions, Christmas cards, Halloween parties, and the Peace Corps."

[4] "That Filipino students deserved an introductory text in economics is widely (in fact, acutely) felt." Sicat, *op. cit.*

also with examples and data drawn from Philippine economic history and based on our national institutions. But such a text would be only "handy" and perhaps not too significant in the final analysis. Not significant in the sense that:

a) not much real improvement can be expected over existing well-revised and pedagogically time-tested texts easily available (one bears in mind that the art and monetary incentive for writing introductory textbooks are very well-developed indeed, and a great deal of ink has been spilled in repeating the same old axioms in more or less the same old way);

b) the use of the word "rice" in place of "bread" or the letters x and y for sugar and copra is no improvement over the use of say, Samuelson, supplemented with books and articles, on Philippine economic geography and history,[1]

c) Bach's *Economics*[2] explained and taught in the light of Philippine experience would do just as well, or better, than another rehash.

But perhaps it is too much to expect that our introductory economics teachers will read up both on Samuelson or Bach or any number of introductory texts and *also* on books about Philippine economics, history, institutions, and geography, thus alternative (b) above is not available and alternative (c) is perhaps even more markedly beyond reach. One fears that inspite of Encarnacion's well-placed remarks that the demand for Gragasin's book "will come largely from those who read for amusement."[3] perhaps the demand would really come from people who hope to read the book over once and thus qualify themselves to teach economics.

One last point may be worth considering. The price of most foreign texts may be too expensive for our college students, which then generates a ready demand for lower-pericd, locally-published texts. If this in fact is the real reason for the need for a Philippine textbook in economics, then perhaps one may suggest a paperback reproduction of any good foreign text, completely unpretentious about making a contribution to economic knowledge, or specifically designed for Asians, Britons, or Martians.

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[1] Such as A. V. H. Hartendorp. *History of Industry and Trade of the Philippines.* Manila: Philippine Education., Co., 1961. R. E. Huke. *Shadows on the Land: An Economic Geography of the Philippines.* Manila: Bookmark, 1963. XI, 428 pp.

[2] G. L. Bach. *Economics (An Introduction to Analysis and Policy).*

[3] Encarnacion, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

It might spare students a lot of confusedly written, poorly organized, and downright wrong economics, and perhaps not unimportantly, save reviewers the pain and effort of groping for diplomatic language.

We may perhaps conclude by citing a well-deliberated recommendation of the American Economic Association Committee on Economic Education:

> Errors of fact could be reduced and the use and treatment of economic data improved by more careful editing and review of the manuscript by economists who are interested and skilled in presenting economic materials and also competent to deal with economic history.
>
> In the absence of any modification of current textbooks, consideration should be given to the development of materials which could be used by teachers to supplement the text. Materials could be prepared which would trace some of the more important economic developments over the past quarter of a century.[1]

For the time being, and until an acceptable text can be written it would appear that the above recommendation is appropriate both for U. S. high schools as well as for Philippine freshman Economics.

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[1] *Op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.