THE RISE OF PROFESSIONALISM

Monopolies of Competence and Sheltered Markets

Magali Sarfatti Larson

With a new introduction by the author

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To my parents,

Amedeo and Pierangela Sarfatti

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M. S. L.

University of Pennsylvania

Introduction

My interest in the professions was initially awakened by practical experiences. During a strike of college teachers in the sixties, the accusation was heard that these professors were behaving "like longshoremen." Later, I was told by the organizers of a union of employed architects in the San Francisco Bay Area that most of their potential members resisted unionization, as something "unprofessional." Somehow, architectural employees, most of whom can be laid off without prior notice from one day to the next and are paid hourly wages often lower than those of semi-skilled laborers in construction unions, believed that unionization would further reduce their dignity and their prospects as working people. I began asking myself, "what's in a name?" What made professors and architects—not to mention physicians, lawyers, and engineers—feel that the tactics and strategy of the industrial working class would deprive them of a cherished identity? What is there, in the attributes of a profession, that compensates for subordination, individual powerlessness, and often low pay?

In most cases, social scientists provide an unequivocal answer: professions are occupations with special power and prestige. Society grants these rewards because professions have special competence in esoteric bodies of knowledge linked to central needs and values of the social system, and because professions are devoted to the service of the public, above and beyond material incentives.

The list of specific attributes which compose the ideal-type of profession may vary, but there is substantial agreement about its general dimensions.[1] The cognitive dimension is centered on the body of knowledge and techniques which the professionals apply in their work, and on the training necessary to master such knowledge and skills; the normative dimension covers the service orientation of professionals, and their distinctive ethics, which justify the privilege of self-regulation granted them by society; the evaluative dimension implicitly compares professions to other occupations, underscoring the professions' singular characteristics of autonomy and prestige. The distinctiveness of the professions appears to be founded on the combination of these general dimensions. These uncommon occupations tend to become "real" communities, whose members share a relatively permanent affiliation, an identity, personal commitment, specific interests, and general loyalties.[2]

These communities are concretely identified by typical organizations and institutional patterns: professional associations, professional schools, and self-administered codes of ethics. It is not clear how much "community" would exist without these institutional supports; yet these supports are features that occupations which aspire to

the privileges of professional status can imitate, without possessing the cognitive and normative justifications of "real" professions.[3]

In fact, the professional phenomenon does not have clear boundaries. Either its dimensions are devoid of a clear empirical referent, or its attributes are so concrete that occupational groups trying to upgrade their status can copy them with relative ease. For instance, it is often emphasized that professional training must be prolonged, specialized, and have a theoretical base. Yet, as Eliot Freidson ironically points out, it is never stated *how* long; *how* theoretical, or *how* specialized training must be in order to qualify, since all formal training "takes some time," is "somewhat specialized," and involves some attempt at generalization.[4] The service orientation is even more problematic: it is, undoubtedly, part of the ideology and one of the prescriptive norms which organized professions explicitly avow. Yet the implicit assumption that the behavior of individual professionals is more ethical, as a norm, than that of individuals in lesser occupations has seldom, if ever, been tested by empirical evidence. Finally, it is true that most established professions rank high on the prestige scale of occupations, although they rank lower than positions of institutional or de facto power, such as Supreme Court Justice or cabinet member in the federal government.[5] Such rankings reflect synthetic evaluations, which fact makes it impossible to ascertain the weight assigned to the "professional" characteristics of competence and disinterestedness in such judgments; prestige may well be accorded on grounds that have nothing to do with the professions' distinctiveness, such as the high income and upper-middle-class status of many professionals.

Profession appears to be one of the many "natural concepts," fraught with ideology, that social science abstracts from everyday life. The most common ideal-type of profession combines heterogeneous elements and links them by implicit though untested propositions—such as the proposition that prestige and autonomy flow "naturally" from the cognitive and normative bases of professional work. Many elements of the definition reproduce the institutional means and the sequence by which the older professions gained their special status. Others do not seem to take notice of empirical evidence or even of common knowledge about the professions; for instance, the notion of professions as "communities" does not fit very well with the wide discrepancies of status and rewards which we know exist within any profession. It is also somewhat disturbing to note that competence and the service ideal play as central a role in the sociological ideal-type as they do in the self-justification of professional privilege.

The elements that compose the ideal-type of profession appear to be drawn from the practice and from the ideology of the established professions; medicine, therefore, as the most powerful and successful of these, should approximate most closely the sociological criteria of what professions are and do. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the centrality of medicine in the sociology of professions. And yet empirical studies of medical practice challenge the validity of the sociological model at almost every step: they question, for instance, the effectiveness (and even the existence) of colleague control;[6] they show that "ascribed" characteristics of the clientele are at least as important as "universalistic" or scientific methods of diagnosis and

therapy;[7] they show that in medicine as well as in the law, a practitioner's status is as closely related to the status of his clientele as to his own skill.[8] Historical studies of nineteenth-century medicine, moreover, destroy the notion that "regular" physicians had, in general, any more competence than their "irregular" competitors.[9] In brief, these ideal-typical constructions do not tell us what a profession is, but only what it pretends to be. The "Chicago School" of sociology—represented, most notably, by Everett C. Hughes and his followers—is critical of this approach, and asks instead what professions actually do in everyday life to negotiate and maintain their special position. The salient characteristics of the professional phenomenon emerge, here, from the observation of actual practices.

In his pathbreaking analysis of medicine, Freidson does much to clarify the nature of professional privilege and the processes by which it is asserted. His examination of the "archetypal" profession leads him to argue that "a profession is distinct from other occupations in that it has been given the right to control its own work." Among other occupations, "only the profession has the recognized right to declare . . . 'outside' evaluation illegitimate and intolerable."[10] This distinctive autonomy is, however, only technical and not absolute. Professions ultimately depend upon the power of the state, and they originally emerge by the grace of powerful protectors. The privileged position of a profession "is thus secured by the political and economic influence of the elite which sponsors it."[11]

Freidson's analysis has important implications. First, the cognitive and normative elements generally used to define profession are undoubtedly significant; but they should not be viewed as stable and fixed characteristics, the accumulation of which gradually allows an occupation to approximate the "complete" constellation of professional features. These cognitive and normative elements are important, instead, because they can be used (with greater or lesser success) as arguments in a process which involves both struggle and persuasion. In this process, particular groups of people attempt to negotiate the boundaries of an area in the social division of labor and establish their own control over it. Persuasion tends to be typically directed to the outside—that is, to the relevant elites, the potential public or publics, and the political authorities. Conflict and struggle around who shall be included or excluded mark the process of *internal* unification of a profession.

Second, an account of the process by which professions emerge illuminates the fact that professions *gain* autonomy: in this protected position, they can develop with increasing independence from the ideology of the dominant social elites. The production of knowledge appears to play a more and more strategic and seemingly autonomous role in the dynamics of these special occupations. If professions obtain extended powers of self-evaluation and self-control they can become almost immune to external regulation. The fact remains, however, that their privileges can always be lost. If a profession's work or actual performance "comes to have little relationship to the knowledge and values of its society, it may have difficulty surviving."[12] Revolutionary social change should therefore have profound implications for professional practice because it affects, in both relative and absolute terms, the social status that established professions had achieved in previous regimes.[13]

In the central part of his study, Freidson examines the potential for producing *ideology* that is inherent in the status of profession. This potential exists not only because cognitive and normative elements are used ideologically, as instruments in an occupation's path toward professional status, but also because, once reached, this structural position allows a group of experts to define and construct particular areas of social reality, under the guise of universal validity conferred on them by their expertise. The profession is, in fact, allowed to define the very standards by which its superior competence is judged. Professional autonomy allows the experts to select almost at will the inputs they will receive from the laity. Their autonomy thus tends to insulate them: in part, professionals live within ideologies of their own creation, which they present to the outside as the most valid definitions of specific spheres of social reality.

In a sense, the more traditional view of the professions starts where Freidson arrives after a long process of analysis. Talcott Parsons writes, for instance:

> The importance of the professions to social structure may be summed up as follows: the professional type is the institutional framework in which many of our most important social functions are carried on, notably the pursuit of science and liberal learning and its practical application in medicine, technology, law and teaching. This depends on an institutional structure the maintenance of which is not an automatic consequence of belief in the importance of the functions as such, but involves a complex balance of diverse social forces.[14]

Yet in most cases, the "ideal-typical" or institutional approach tends to emphasize the functional relations of professions with central social needs and values, at the expense of the "complex balance of diverse social forces" which supports such relations. The functional importance of the professions appears to explain the historical continuity of the oldest among them, medicine and the law. The evolution of these two, and the professionalization of other occupations, pertains to general dimensions of "modernization"—the advance of science and cognitive rationality and the progressive differentiation and rationalization of the division of labor in industrial societies.

While the attributes of special status and prestige imply that the professions are linked to the system of social stratification, the emphasis on the cognitive and normative dimensions of profession tends to separate these special categories of the social division of labor from the class structure in which they also are inserted.[15] In particular, the ethics of disinterestedness claimed by professionals appear to acquit them of the capitalist profit motive. The ideal-typical approach seldom takes account of the concrete historical conditions in which groups of specialists have attempted to establish a monopoly over specific areas of the division of labor. The class context in which authority is delegated and privileges are granted to these particular occupations tends to be neglected. Thus, while Freidson's analysis emphasizes that a profession must gain support from strategic social or political groups, the institutional approach suffers from a tendency to present professions as categories which emerge from the division of labor in unmediated connection with society as a whole.

Both sociological ideal-types and the self-presentation of professions imply that the professions are independent from or at least neutral vis-à-vis the class structure. Professionals can be viewed as themselves constituting a class—especially if class is reduced to its indicators, socioeconomic status and occupation. But the emphasis on the professions' cognitive mastery and the implication of "class neutrality" place them, rather, in the stratum of educated and "socially unattached" intellectuals whom Karl Mannheim described in these terms:

> Although they are too differentiated to be regarded as a single class, there is, however, one unifying sociological bond between all groups of intellectuals, namely, education, which binds them together in a striking way. Participation in a common educational heritage progressively tends to suppress differences of birth, status, profession, and wealth, and to unite the individual educated people on the basis of the education they have received. . . . One of the most impressive facts about modern life is that in it, unlike preceding cultures, intellectual activity is not carried on exclusively by a socially rigidly defined class, such as a priesthood, but rather by a social stratum which is to a large degree unattached to any social class and which is recruited from an increasingly inclusive area of social life.[16]

Mannheim's notion that cultural life in capitalist societies was becoming "increasingly detached from a given class" contrasts sharply with the Marxist tradition.[17] Marxist thought concedes to intellectuals a measure of autonomy and detachment from any predetermined social group, but it sees those attributes as a potential which remains within the confines of a class society. In the same perspective, intellectual products either break with the dominant ideology (by a self-conscious effort of their authors), or remain within its bounds.[18] The social function of intellectuals is normally that of consciously articulating, propagating, and organizing culture and ideology, giving them internal coherence and realistic flexibility. For Antonio Gramsci, intellectuals—a category that includes practically all "intellect workers"—are "organically" tied to the class whose interests are actually upheld by the intellectuals' work and productions. Intellectuals are obviously of strategic importance for the ruling class, whose power cannot rest on coercion alone but needs to capture the "moral and intellectual direction" of society as a whole. A revolutionary class must secrete and develop its own "organic" intellectuals in order to challenge the hegemonic power of the ruling class and strengthen the "counter-hegemonic" consciousness of the masses. A complex historical formation includes, however, intellectuals whose function in the "organization of culture" is not as directly linked to the maintenance of ruling class hegemony. Gramsci calls them "traditional" intellectuals: their organic ties to the ruling class have been lost, because they remained attached to a class which itself has lost its central position of power; other, more vital groups of intellectuals have superseded them in the creation and transmission of ideology. The relative social superfluity of "traditional" intellectuals enhances their isolation within institutions that are relatively autonomous from the state and the predominant fractions of the ruling class. "Traditional" intellectuals thus tend to constitute closed, caste-like bodies, which are particularly difficult for a revolutionary movement to co-opt or absorb. Defending corporate vested interests, they speak for abstract intellectual freedoms, for the

independent service of disembodied knowledge and "pure" ideas. Examples of "traditional" intellectuals would be the clergy (in an increasingly secularized society), certain branches of the professoriat, and, in Gramsci's analysis of the Italian South, the legal "caste" tied to a landowning class which has not risen to national power.[19]

This outrageous oversimplification of Gramsci's analysis of the intelligentsia suggests, at least, why I think that analysis is so relevant for understanding the position and functions of professions in a class society. Different professions, and different groups *within* a profession, form different ties with a ruling class which itself consists of changing coalitions. The model of profession which emerges from most sociological ideal-types appears to confer upon the established professions the seal of "traditional intellectuality." Historical continuity is not only implied; it is deliberately and actively sought in the attempts by organized professions to give themselves a culture with roots in a classic past. The caste-like appearance of established professions is reinforced by their jealously defended autonomy and their guild-like characteristics. Yet this "traditional" presentation is contradicted by the professions' involvement in the everyday life of modern societies and also by the proximity to power of many professional elites. The contradiction is resolved if we recall that the "organic" or "traditional" character of a category of intellectual workers is not a static feature, but the outcome of a complex historical situation and of ongoing social and political conflicts.

It is clear, at this point, that Gramsci's perspective on the intelligentsia complements Freidson's account of how a particular occupation rises to the status and power of profession. As it rises, an occupation must form "organic" ties with significant fractions of the ruling class (or of a rising class); persuasion and justification depend on ideological resources, the import and legitimacy of which are ultimately defined by the context of hegemonic power in a class society; special bodies of experts are entrusted with the task of defining a segment of social reality, but this trust is also to be understood within the broad confines of the dominant ideology. One could say that the professions seek special institutional privileges which, once attained, steer them toward relatively "traditional" intellectual functions. But the need to defend these privileges, and particularly the professions' immersion in the everyday life of their society, counteract this tendency towards "traditionalism." Not surprisingly, the appearance of detachment and "pure" intellectual commitments is more marked in academic circles than in the consulting professions. However, one may ask with Freidson how far a profession (or an academic discipline) can move toward the "traditional" role and still retain social support; for, indeed, "traditional" intellectuals have little relationship to the predominant forms of knowledge and concerns of their society.

These brief comments on the literature suggest how the initial focus of my research began to shift as I looked at what contemporary sociology has to say about professions, and as I tried to relate the problem of professions to the more general problem of intellectuals in a class society. It appeared to me that the very notion of profession is shaped by the relationships which these special occupations form with a type of

society and a type of class structure. Professions are not exclusively occupational categories: whatever else they are, professions are situated in the middle and upper-middle levels of the stratification system. Both objectively and subjectively, professions are outside and above the working class, as occupations and as social strata. In the first half of the nineteenth century, many professionals may have shared the life conditions of small artisans and shopkeepers; changing work conditions in our century may be drawing increasingly large numbers of professionals closer to a proletarian condition. The fact remains that individual professional status is still undeniably a middle-class attribute and a typical aspiration of the socially mobile children of industrial or clerical workers. The internal stratification of professions cannot be ignored; but the market of labor and services within which professionals operate is structurally different from the labor market faced by less qualified workers. Their relative superiority over and distance from the working class is, I think, one of the major characteristics that all professions and would-be professions have in common.

Another general point emerges from the sociological literature on professions: most studies implicitly or explicitly present professionalization as an instance of the complex process of "modernization." For professions, the most significant "modern" dimensions are the advance of science and cognitive rationality, and the related rationalization and growing differentiation in the division of labor. From this point of view, professions are typical products of modern industrial society.[20] The continuity of older professions with their "pre-industrial" past is therefore more apparent than real.

Modern professions made themselves into special and valued kinds of occupations during the "great transformation" which changed the structure and character of European societies and their overseas offshoots. This transformation was dominated by the reorganization of economy and society around the market.[21] The characteristic occupational structure of industrial capitalism and its characteristic mode of distributing rewards are therefore based on the market. Weber, in particular, defined the ability to command rewards in the marketplace as a function of both property and skills, and the possession of skills may be seen as a typically "modern" form of property.[22] A contemporary sociologist observes that "to characterize the occupational order as the backbone of the reward structure is not to ignore the role of property, but to acknowledge the interrelation between the one and the other."[23] And he adds: "Broadly considered, occupational groupings which stand high in the scale of material and symbolic advantages also tend to rank high in the possession of marketable skills. . . . To be sure, positions which rank high in expertise generally attempt to maintain or enhance their scarcity, and thus their reward-power, by various institutional means . . . it is no simple matter for an occupation to restrict its supply in this way."[24]

My intention is to examine here how the occupations that we call professions organized themselves to attain market power. I see professionalization as the process by which producers of special services sought to constitute *and control* a market for their expertise. Because marketable expertise is a crucial element in the structure of modern inequality, professionalization appears *also* as a collective assertion of special social status and as a collective process of upward social mobility. In other

words, the constitution of professional markets which began in the nineteenth century inaugurated a new form of structured inequality: it was different from the earlier model of aristocratic patronage, and different also from the model of social inequality based on property and identified with capitalist entrepreneurship. In this sense, the professionalization movements of the nineteenth century prefigure the general restructuring of social inequality in contemporary capitalist societies: the "backbone" is the occupational hierarchy, that is, a differential system of competences and rewards; the central principle of legitimacy is founded on the achievement of socially recognized expertise, or, more simply, on a system of education and credentialing.

Professionalization is thus an attempt to translate one order of scarce resources—special knowledge and skills—into another—social and economic rewards. To maintain scarcity implies a tendency to monopoly: monopoly of expertise in the market, monopoly of status in a system of stratification. The focus on the constitution of professional markets leads to comparing different professions in terms of the "marketability" of their specific cognitive resources. It determines the exclusion of professions like the military and the clergy, which do not transact their services on the market.[25] The focus on collective social mobility accentuates the relations that professions form with different systems of social stratification; in particular, it accentuates the role that educational systems play in different structures of social inequality.

These are two different readings of the same phenomenon: professionalization and its outcome. The focus of each reading is analytically distinct. In practice, however, the two dimensions—market control and social mobility—are inseparable; they converge in the institutional areas of the market and the educational system, spelling out similar results but also generating tensions and contradictions which we find, unresolved or only partially reconciled, in the contemporary model of profession.

The image or model of profession which we commonly hold today, and which we find as well in social science, emerged both from social practice and from an ideological representation of social practice. The image began to be formed in the liberal phase of capitalism, but it did not become "public"—that is, commonly understood and widely accepted—until much later. Not by accident, the model of profession developed its most distinctive characteristics and the most clearcut emphasis on autonomy in the two paramount examples of laissez-faire capitalist industrialization: England and the United States. In the Anglo-Saxon societies (and, one could add, in Anglo-Saxon social science) the image of profession is one which implicitly accentuates the relation between professional privilege and the market. Profession is presented, for instance, as the antithesis of bureaucracy and the bureaucratic mode of work organization. The development of professions (and of their image) was, in a sense, less "spontaneous" in other European societies with long-standing state bureaucracies and strong centralized governments. For instance, engineering emerged in Napoleonic France as a *corps de l'état,* and this model has informed the aspirations of other professions, such as architecture; the Prussian legal profession was reformed by direct and repeated state intervention and remains to

this day closely supervised and regulated by the state; Westernized medicine was similarly created in Tsarist Russia by the political authority.[26] The model of profession should be closer in these cases to that of the civil service than it is to professions in England or, especially, in the United States. For this reason, I believe it should present its "purer" features in the Anglo-Saxon countries.

In the United States, in particular, the model of profession has acquired a singular social import. It shapes, for one thing, the collective ambitions of occupational categories which in other countries could never hope to reach the status of profession. The extension of professionalization reflects, among other things, the particular openness of the American university to new fields of learning and the widespread access to higher education in American society.[27] Basing occupational entry on university credentials does not lead, in other words, to excessive social exclusiveness. Furthermore, professions are typical occupations of the middle class, and the vision of American society and culture as being essentially "middle class" is not challenged as strongly as it is in Europe by the alternative and autonomous vision of a politicized working class. The strategy of professionalization holds sway on individuals and occupational categories which are inspired elsewhere by the political and economic strategies of the labor movement.

To limit my analysis of profession and professionalization to England and the United States is not entirely an arbitrary choice, but it is a restrictive one. My account of the establishment and the meaning of professional privilege can in no way be generalized. However, because it is based on societies in which the professional model has developed the most freely out of the civil society, and where it structures the diffuse perceptions and aspirations of large numbers of people, it may help to illuminate efforts and representations which, in other societies, are less systematically tied to the model of profession than they are in the United States and England.

Finally, my historical account of professionalization is relevant to the experiences with which I started. The model of profession emerged during the "great transformation" and was originally shaped by the historical matrix of competitive capitalism. Since then, the conditions of professional work have changed, so that the predominant pattern is no longer that of the free practitioner in a market of services but that of the salaried specialist in a large organization. In this age of corporate capitalism, the model of profession nevertheless retains its vigor; it is still something to be defended or something to be attained by occupations in a different historical context, in radically different work settings, and in radically altered forms of practice. The persistence of profession as a category of social practice suggests that the model constituted by the first movements of professionalization has become *an ideology*—not only an image which consciously inspires collective or individual efforts, but a mystification which unconsciously obscures real social structures and relations. Viewed in the larger perspective of the occupational and class structures, it would appear that the model of profession passes from a predominantly economic function—organizing the linkage between education and the marketplace—to a predominantly ideological one—justifying inequality of status and closure of access in the occupational order. This book is concerned with exploring that passage.

Introduction to the Transaction Edition

PROFESSIONALS AND THE MONOPOLY OF EXPERTISE

It is humbling but also instructive to look at a book that I wrote in the early 1970s. Any book is a reflection of the political times in which it is written; it does not only respond to the questions that defined its field but also to the intellectual styles that were then predominant. In the social sciences, moreover, it is difficult to avoid tensions and conflicts that emerge from the subjects of research themselves, and unwise to ignore problems that affect the subjects' lives and practices. In the first part of the 1970s, the broad subject of expert knowledge, its constitution and its uses, was fraught with anguished criticism of what appeared as the misuse of expertise in the conduct of the Vietnam War. Also, in France, Michel Foucault had been advancing for a decade the groundbreaking work that would culminate in the indissoluble coupling of knowledge and power in the "Discourse on Language" (1971), in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and in *The History of Sexuality* (1976). Experts were suspect.

The authority of experts, the trust they deserved, and their relation to democracy had been subjects of debate since the United States was founded: the Federalist Papers and Tocqueville were concerned with the place of men of knowledge in the new republic. Yet, in the 1970s, what power experts actually commanded was far from clear. In 1971, the *Pentagon Papers* had given ammunition to the anti-war movement, but not necessarily to the critique of experts; in 1972, David Halberstam precisely accused the elite in charge of our foreign and military policy of ignoring the authentic expertise produced by professionals at State and in the Defense Department.[1] And forty years later, as we marched toward another war on flimsy and often falsified public justifications, experts at the Central Intelligence Agency were asked to set aside what their professional knowledge stood for.[2] Michael Schudson wrote in 2006, "[T]he problem is not that experts have too much authority, but that they have too little" (Schudson, 2006: 498). In the early 1970s, I did not see the problem quite so clearly. Yet, as I approached the typical professional problem of writing a doctoral thesis in sociology, our trust in expertise, the effects of this trust, and the real power experts had were questions that hovered in the background of my work.

Indeed, as critics have so frequently noted (not with praise!), this book started as a dissertation. The first steps I took toward the subject of professions came from practical experiences rather than political ruminations on expert power. As a lecturer at San

Francisco State, I had seen the faculty strike of 1968 greeted by other colleagues and the press as "behavior unbecoming" for professionals. Later, when I became interested in the attempts to unionize employed architects in the Bay Area, the organizers reported that many architectural employees considered unionization as something unprofessional. This was very different from what I knew had happened (and was still happening) in Europe.

Wondering about the special status to which employed professionals wanted to cling regardless of their conditions of work, I looked for the explanations that sociologists offered. One assumption was common: I wrote in the old introduction, "[P]rofessions are occupations with special power and prestige. Society grants [them] these rewards because [they] have special competence in esoteric bodies of knowledge linked to central needs and values of the social system, and because professions are devoted to the service of the public, above and beyond material incentives" (Larson, 1977: x). They are, or try to be protected from the competition of "outsiders." The professions also are, as I came to emphasize later on, special communities of discourse endowed with the authority of speaking *about* and *for* their field and, in so doing, constructing its meaning for the lay public.

My inclination was to ask how real were the rewards and protection and how they had come to be. I did not find many inclusive or satisfactory answers. My focus became the process or, as I called it to mark the power of agency, the *project* by which these privileged occupations had become what they were, or what the public and many sociologists assumed they were. If the resulting work was taken as a general theory of professions, it may be because it was one of the first works on professions to come in the wake of the dominant evolutionary interpretation given by functionalism, and thus seemed to counter it.

In the early work of Talcott Parsons, *both* the modern professions and the bureaucratic organizations of big business belong to the movement of rationalization that characterizes capitalist societies. They share "elements of the common institutional pattern," and both contribute to the maintenance of the normative social order. Professional authority does not flow automatically from the social importance of a profession's duties; rather, this authority depends on an institutional framework sustained by "a complex balance of diverse social forces" (Parsons, 1954: 36 and ff, 48). However, in the British tradition that had started in 1933 with Carr-Saunders and Wilson, as in the important work of William J. Goode, Robert K. Merton, and, later, Harold Wilensky, the central social functions that professions serve is what mainly explains the attributes hashed and rehashed in the multiple definitions of professions. The centrality and interdependence of these social functions determine the extensive knowledge professionals must acquire, the specificity of their work, the reliable uniformity of their behavior, their privileged social status, and the unity of their organized group—the "community within a community" in the words of W.J. Goode. In the functionalist perspective, professions are agents of order because of their special knowledge and their ethics, while lesser occupations aspire to follow the path that leads, presumably, to the same desirable end point. Neither the "diverse social forces" needed to sustain the collegial communities of profession nor the different courses they had followed

frequently appear in accounts that often seemed to echo the professions' glowing image of themselves.

This was a failure of empirically based sociological analysis that the Chicago School, following Everett Hughes, wanted to correct. As Hughes taught students like Howard Becker, Anselm Strauss, and Eliot Freidson, among others, to look at the substance and actual unfolding of work even among occupations that do not enjoy the valued title of profession, he showed a way to ask the right questions about "higher level" occupations and about the meaning of work itself. Hughes states,

> I have come to the conclusion that it is a fruitful thing to start study of any social phenomenon at the point of least prestige. For since prestige is so much a matter of symbols, and even of pretensions … there goes with prestige a tendency to preserve a front which hides the inside of things …. On the other hand, in things of less prestige, the core may be more easy of access (Hughes, 1971, 341-342).

Both schools looked at medicine, acknowledging its eminent status among professions. The research on professional socialization conducted by Robert K. Merton and his associates was a full-fledged and probing empirical study in the training and personality formation of young physicians, quite different from the theoretical generalities on the physician–patient relation that Parsons had outlined (Parsons, 1951). However, the title of Merton's study, *The Student Physician,* suggests the difference in tone and reverence compared to the 1961 Hughesian *Boys in White* by Howard Becker.[3] In my view, the most illuminating study of the medical profession came later, from Eliot Freidson; his landmark book, *Profession of Medicine* (1970) laid out, in a way that could transfer outside of medical sociology, the questions of process and becoming, of economic power and status acquisition, that I was interested in asking.

I did not expect to be original, and I do not believe I was, except that, as I said, I may have been the first to try to do something different in the sociology of professions. I was interested in *both* structure and agency in the making of modern professions. In plainer English, since the advantages that professions as collectivities enjoy relative to other occupations are various but long-lived, sustained, as Parsons said, by an institutional framework that is educational, economic, intellectual, juridical, and political, I needed to clarify what that base was and how it had been assembled, by what means, by whom, and for whom. Only then I thought that I would be able to understand architects and teachers and other occupations that were neither medicine nor law.

Time was of importance: first, because of my desire to finish graduate school at Berkeley before the birth of my child, and secondly, shortly thereafter, because of my teaching duties and my publisher's deadline. It is hard to remember now how one could write before the personal computer, depending on the goodness of hired typists for a clean manuscript, before the Internet and Google![4] Every piece of material, every secondary source that I used, every citation that I followed had to be physically retrieved from the library. Furthermore, many of the most important works that either confirmed or changed my thinking, and that I feel honor bound to recommend to the reader in the attached bibliography, were yet to be published.[5] To name but a few important authors on the subjects of professions, higher education, and special professions like

medicine or law: Randall Collins (1979), Paul Starr (1982), John Heinz and Edward Laumann (1982), Terence Halliday (1987), Sydney Halpern (1988), Andrew Abbott (1988), Keith MacDonald (1995), Steven Brint (1996), Elliott Krause (1999); and among historians, David Noble (1977), Morris Vogel (1980), Gerald Geison (1983), Matthew Ramsey (1984), Wilfrid Prest (1986), Charles Rosenberg (1987), Harold Perkin (1989). Except for MacDonald and Krause, the sociologists only looked at the Anglo-American world.

I should note at the outset that the abbreviated notion *Anglo-American* is problematic. It has been used to criticize the alleged ethnocentrism of a concept of profession improperly transposed to other shores mainly by American social scientists (Torstendahl, 1990). Inevitably, the term *Anglo-American* evokes similarities between two nations that "had in common a comparatively passive state apparatus with a strong but by no means unambivalent *laissez-faire* ideology and a small civil service" (Freidson, 1994: 17). I limited my study to a woefully incomplete comparison of England and the United States because I could not possibly do more at the time, but, like Keith MacDonald almost twenty years later, I emphasized differences as much as commonalities. Thus, for example, my "English" chapter is titled "Uses and Limitations of the Aristocratic Model" and the "early American" chapter titled "Professional Privilege in a Democratic Society" (Larson, 1977, Ch. 7 and 8).

I agree with Freidson that the term *profession* as "a distinctive form of organized occupation" is restricted to a particular period in history and to a few nations in that period. Responding to Torstendahl and others, Collins has suggested a bimodal paradigm of professionalization: in the continental European model a directive state takes the lead, creating, governing, and controlling the institutions on which professionals depend; this top-down model contrasts starkly with the institution-building process in England and the United States (Collins, 1990). Here, professional reformers rise out of the civil society to found their own institutions of training and certification, not under the aegis of the state, but nevertheless addressing to the state their quest for market protections and guarantees. The manner and content of regulation differ as much as the actual implementation of protective rules; however, as I would argue, in all societies that rely on higher-level credentials, privileged workers put their educational advantages to comparable uses. Florent Champy remarks that international comparisons always reveal that status advantages are not distributed randomly; in most countries, the same "old" professions are protected by law from unqualified competitors, while new occupations sheltered by market closure tend to perform activities in the national interest (Champy, 2009: 175-76).

I do not believe that there can be a general theory of professions for all places and all times, as David Sciulli claimed (Sciulli, 2008). The particular concept of profession that involves association, self-governance, control over training, and moral overtones of superior ethics and deserved trust is reserved for very special occupations in England and in the United States. In Durkheim's classic, *The Division of Labor in Society*, "profession" meant occupation, as it normally does in French, and Durkheim addressed his hopes for the moral integration of industrial societies (produced by the "organic solidarity" of advancing specialization) to *all* occupations organized in guild-

like corporations. If we avoid, as we should, the search for defining attributes that occupied Anglo-American sociology in the 1950s, the idea of occupations based on special expertise is so widespread in modern societies that it has become increasingly difficult to restrict the title of "profession" to those occupations that have managed to be so recognized.[6]

I shall return later to the assimilation of profession and expert occupations; here, it is enough to posit that "profession" has a special acceptation in Anglo-American societies, but professionalism, and the process by which privileged occupations attain and justify their privileges, have broader connotations. When I started this book, sociologists had not yet clearly situated, or explained these phenomena in their historical contexts. With much work and many revisions, I put together not a theory, but *an interpretation* of the modern professional phenomenon after the late eighteenth and nineteenth century Industrial Revolution, which Karl Polanyi described in *The Great Transformation*.

Polanyi marked my entire way of seeing more lastingly than Marx, on whose framework Polanyi had built his own, as he moved toward a powerful explanation of the triumph of the market, the social resistance to its destructive effects, and the collapse he witnessed after 1929.[7] I had imagined that my allegiance to Polanyi would settle the accusation of economic reductionism that any evocation of Marxist concepts, no matter how distant, seems to stir up; indeed, critics complained about the Marxist terminology I used (we all had different intellectual fashions), but few misread my argument as narrowly socio-economic, or as denouncing professions for self-interested "conspiracies against the laity" as G.B. Shaw said in *The Doctor's Dilemma*.[8]

It seemed to me that even if words persisted, ancient forms of organization and rites of passage could not stay the same, or perform the same service for the same kinds of people if their historical matrix changed profoundly. Hence, I tried to link modern professions to the transformation of Western societies, in a Polanyian key. Undoubtedly, I exaggerated the discontinuities between the pre-industrial past and the market society; a more attentive observation of history would have dispelled them. But even the profession of law, which was the first to disengage itself in fourteenth-century Europe from the tutelage of the church, did not develop until the nineteenth century the stable and intimate connection with training and examinations (or "objectively" verified competence) that came to be the hallmark of profession.

It has been noted that painting in seventeenth-century France administered examinations, offered meritocratic advancement, and enjoyed self-governance in the *Académie Royale de Peinture et Sculpture* (Heinich,1993; Duro,1997; Sciulli, 2007), but given the overriding importance of patronage in allowing these putative "expert services" to be rendered, I would not consider it an antecedent of modern professions except in some forms. Royal corporations were also the norm in England for older professions (medicine, law, university teaching, divinity, and their hierarchical subdivisions); and the early professional associations that strove to represent the "lower branches" organized to obtain recognition comparable to the corporations—at least in London, within the confines of which the latter's prerogatives applied.

The conditions for professional organizing ripened toward the end of the eighteenth century, and I focused on these changes in "social technology." According to an im-

portant essay by my teacher, Arthur Stinchcombe, these changes provided incipient organizations with resources that not only permitted them to be conceived, but also to function effectively (Stinchcombe, 1965). Advances in literacy, urbanization, communications, and the economy should not be exaggerated; however, European countries (especially England) and later the Northern United States moved rapidly toward the qualitative leap most visible in the second half of the nineteenth century. On the level of ideology, the idea of careers open to talent had been raised against birth and patronage since the formation of American democracy and the French Revolution. The idea of merit took time to develop as an ideological resource, its progress tied to the development of the middle class and its political fortune in England and on the continent. What I called the professional project, overstating a consistency that could only be discerned ex post facto, was part of these incomplete but awesome transformations.

A recognizable professional association of ample (even if not quite national) scope is a necessary tool for advancing "jurisdictional claims" in Andrew Abbott's apt expression. If association is an acceptable marker for the maturity of the professional project, then professions emerged in England and in the United States in a wave of association: in England, civil engineers, lawyers, physicians, architects, pharmacists, veterinary surgeons, teachers, librarians, accountants, dentists, nurses, opticians (ten out of the thirteen professions listed by Wilensky in 1964 as "established" or "in process") acquired an association of national scope between 1825 and 1880. In the United States, the same ten (plus social workers) were organized in forty-seven years—from 1840 to 1887 (Larson, 1977 and this edition, Table 1).

What were these associations seeking to obtain? It appeared from the history of early professions that modern reform movements organized in response to *both* the expansion of market opportunities and the inability of the traditional warrants of moral probity to govern excessive competition. The older professions were powerful and enjoyed the favor of rich and highly placed clienteles; they were difficult to dislodge but also unwilling (and unable) to take advantage of potentially widening markets. They could not survive unchanged. Extracting the needed structural change from the history of reform movements, I saw professionalization as aiming to translate one order of scarce resources into another. Specifically, professions, as historically specific forms of organizing work, depended on establishing *structural links* between relatively high levels of formal education and relatively desirable positions or rewards in the social division of labor. On the one hand, we have what we now call credentials—formal, certifiable, and certified education under professional control; on the other hand, we have market positions that guarantee a respectable social status. In other words, credentials and market shelters, for the excesses of unregulated competition were the main incentive for seeking reform.[9]

Opportunity, or threats to what little there was, was one reason that moved practitioners toward reform movements. For this, trust had to be gained (and warranted) in transactions that could now take place among strangers in a market driven by the "cash nexus." Professionals were eager to sell their services; specialized labor was, in their case, produced to be sold. Nevertheless, the knowledge on which it depended is a fictitious commodity in Polanyi's sense: producers themselves have to be "produced"

and their services made recognizable, not only as different from alternative forms of service but, hopefully, also as superior.

Seeing professional education as "the production of producers" whose services must be branded as superior in a competitive market makes it easier to see that said branding cannot emerge from the market itself. Ultimately, it is to the state as institutional guarantor that professional movements address their claims, justifying them by virtue of principles that reside *outside the market.* Superior learning, which had connected older professions to the university since the Middle Ages, in modern reform projects was oriented toward practice, verified by objective examinations, and embodied in credentials. Disinterestedness, seeking the public's greater good above and beyond the "cash nexus," was a principle *against* the market, even though professionals transacted their services commercially. But this "institutionalized altruism," as Merton called it, must be guaranteed structurally: indeed, a sanctioned profession's superior competence is what ensures that the greater good is served better than lesser (and unsanctioned) rivals would serve it. Knowledge, in other words, comes before morality.

The nature of the knowledge that had been produced and certified was important, but *effective* superiority over rival practices did not need to be demonstrated, only institutionally asserted and believed by relevant sectors of the public.[10] Looking at how professionals went about obtaining the security and stability they desired in harshly competitive markets showed one thing: certified knowledge was absolutely necessary in the professionals' self-presentation to the public, but it was not a sufficient resource. Knowledge by itself, be it in Latin or vernacular, classic or "modern," abstract (as Abbott believes) or empirical, restricted or created in excess by overtraining, was in any case never sufficient to establish the superiority of trained professionals *vis-à-vis* their rivals, even those less trained.

To recapitulate, professional projects aimed at market closure required the production of the producers. Different projects involved jurisdictional disputes with rival occupations that Andrew Abbott sees as central, but resolution could not be obtained just by relying on the cognitive base or invoking its superiority. In taking this position, I broke ranks with functionalist assumptions; however, I did not deny at all the necessity of training in a knowledge that was formal, codified, standardized, verified, and, probably as much as possible, advanced.

I was looking at professionalization as a movement and a project, but it was wrong to proceed as if a profession had existed as a unified actor at the onset. On the contrary, the field in which professional reform could advance—the modern profession itself—had to be created. It was an arduous job, as Elizabeth Popp Berman has so effectively shown in her compelling study of English medicine from 1780 to the Medical Reform Act of 1858. She writes, "[*P*]*rofessionalization is the project of constituting a profession as well as that of controlling a labor market.* In early-nineteenth-century England, more things divided doctors than united them. It took several attempts to create an organization with a strong shared identity to bind doctors together despite the partitions of rank, geography, and tradition" (Popp Berman, 2006: 188, italics mine). Popp Berman finds, as I also emphasized, that the appearance of hospitals provided doctors with an identity-forming organizational base. However, I did not go into the

real workings of a field "before the project." Too often, I gave the impression that professional unity was found, rather than having to be produced, and this is one more reason for my shortcomings.

Nevertheless, I would defend as useful the insights I derived from an abstract comparative analysis of the resources available to medicine and to engineering in their march toward their sheltered markets. Medicine, which sociologists have so often distinguished as an archetypal profession, was nothing of the kind for most of the nineteenth century. In fact, the rivals that encircled it were at some times and in some places so powerful (such as homeopaths in the U.S. or in Germany) that they competed successfully for the best kind of clients. In the United States, it was not until the Flexner reform of medical schools that they were defeated (Larson, Ch.10), while in Germany, the regional medical societies did not succeed in approximating market exclusiveness until they engaged in forceful strike actions, which proved much more effective than training or persuasion (Gress et al., 2004). However, I believe that medicine entered the professionalization project with structural resources that engineering did not replicate, despite being just as able to claim a scientific knowledge base. (Arguably, the claim was more justified in the nineteenth century for engineering than for medicine.)

By means of successful organizing, and with the powerful support of the Flexner reform, the medical profession attained its incomparable position of preeminence in the United States in the first part of the twentieth century (Larson, 1977: 159-166). Thereafter, it was able to protect itself by dominating the discourse on health. However, after World War II it was not medical research, as Paul Starr has suggested, but new sciences like epidemiology, virology, and molecular biology that led the way in applying scientific developments to social policy.[11] The historian of science, Keith Wailoo, writes that "the high profile scientific developments of [the 1940s and 1950s] were feats of research and engineering," like the artificial kidney, penicillin, or the polio vaccine; [they] "raised such broad social issues that they moved the question of who controlled science outside of the control of the physician and the medical profession" (Wailoo, 2004: 650). Yet, in an acute critique of my book, Michael Schudson echoes the view of which medicine had convinced the broad public; he writes:

> Most critics of professions attend to the ways specific professions shape public discourse and the private lives of ordinary citizens. In this context, engineering is of negligible importance while medicine commands preeminent cultural authority. A medical model of social reality has directly influenced not only how we understand bodily ills but how we fathom the ills of the body politic … Larson is interested only in passing in how *specific professional ideologies control the public*; her central concern is in how *the general ideology of professionalism* pacifies professionals themselves (Schudson,1980: 220).

In part, I plead guilty: yes, I was interested in showing that the hopes placed by the "left" in a new working class, composed of technicians and educated workers, were misplaced.[12] As an extenuating circumstance, remember that I had started with college teachers on strike and architects who would not unionize, despite their lack of security and their low wages. I shall return to this exaggerated, albeit not entirely wrong, emphasis.

Something struck me as wrong in sociology's obsession with medicine, "the queen of professions" (perhaps because it is the one social scientists would like to emulate). First of all, my abstract analysis of the resources available to medicine (though not everywhere, nor all at the same time) showed that its success, the professional dominance that Eliot Freidson described, could not be repeated—the main reason being, quite possibly, because only medicine had *in principle* a limitless market for its services. Second, to say, like Schudson, that engineering was of negligible importance in shaping the lives of private citizens (while medicine had preeminent cultural authority), was either misreading the history of public health in Europe and America (and passing lightly over the medical profession's consistent sabotage of proposals for national health plans in the United States), or it was taking discourse exclusively as words and text. Engineering—responsible for the water systems of cities, electricity grids, roads and railroads, trains and airplanes, plants and nuclear plants (the Three Mile Island quasi meltdown happened in 1979), and the systems that made great inventions accessible to the public—had defined modern life more powerfully and irreversibly than medicine could ever dream of doing.[13]

The "discourse" of engineering did not have to influence *individuals* or provide metaphors for their understanding—and, looking at medicine within its own field, it is questionable how much the profession has in fact influenced the public's understanding of health or of healthy behaviors. Engineering, on the other hand, directly determines the life of *collectivities* by designing the material cadre of everyone's existence and also, even more silently, by helping set standards and regulations at government level (Freidson, 1986: 227-229). Culture is material; modern culture depends absolutely on what engineers and those who commissioned them have wrought. Thus, if people do not grant "cultural authority" to the profession directly responsible for so much of material culture, it may be because its specialties are so fragmented as to deny it perceptible unity. Above all, I believe it is because of most engineers' conditions of work, more often than not in corporations and for corporate clients, including the state. This grounded conviction led me to revise what sociology had often implicitly and explicitly presented as the essence of modern professions. Not only was independent medicine not an archetype, but also the conditions of work in engineering were more typical and were to become much more common among professions after the Second World War, even transforming employment in medicine and the law.

A hard distinction between profession and bureaucracy as different forms of authority and control of work (one to which Eliot Freidson returned in *Professionalism: The Third Logic,* 2001) seems impossible to sustain when, on the one hand, professionals occupy positions of authority in bureaucratic organizations, and on the other hand, bureaucratic officials and managers can represent an alternative form of professional career. It was a form embodied early on in the civil service model of continental Europe and promoted even in England by the Northcote Trevelyan Report of 1854. Indeed, most occupations that professionalized in the second half of the twentieth century came out of the concentration of management in the bureaucratic hierarchies of either the private or the public sector (notably hospital administrators and managerial varieties). A vaster

group came out of the expansion of public functions—those Foucault considered as the positive aspect of governance—in social work, city planning, librarianship, criminal justice and, of course, all levels of teaching. It is not irrelevant that the credentialing process, which most of these occupations sought to establish in the modern university, should have connected their future members from the outset with the powerful bureaucratized centers of higher education (Larson, 1977: Ch. 11).[14]

Certainly, despite the importance I attributed to "techno-bureaucratic" professions, I did not intend to say that sociologists of professions should forget about medicine and take engineering for their only model. In the United States, the entrenchment of medicine in hospitals, which were large, extremely advanced technologically, and administered bureaucratically, may have eroded some aspects of dominance for lower-level doctors, but it did not reduce it for the profession as a whole. Nurses have not become an alternative to doctors, despite the upgrading of their functions and increasing specialization; doctors, especially in teaching hospitals, have steadily blurred the line between themselves as practicing professionals and health system management (Mick, 2004: 911-912). In England, however, the National Health Service has changed the situation of medicine and allied occupations since 1948. The subordination of the profession to the NHS has placed it "at the forefront of the resistance to certain aspects of the [Thatcher] government's policies in respect to the NHS, most notably those which seek to introduce 'quasi-market' forces to the provision of health care through the introduction of cash limits for general practitioners, competitive tendering for hospital care, and so on" (Crompton, 1990: 148).

The case I made about "techno-bureaucratic" professions supported the idea that the search for market control in early professionalization projects was a necessary stage, but it was also provisional and temporary. The search for status, respectability, and trust through the certification of superior knowledge was a more lasting and general strategy for other occupational groups, even some that might have already achieved as much professional closure as they could expect.[15] This argument, however, leads directly to the dilution of profession into the broader and even less defined category of experts, in which professionalism fades into expertise.

In his important study of American professions, Steven Brint makes this a pivotal passage. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he argues, the ideal of "social trustee professionalism" joined superior expertise to superior civic morality, offering both as warrant to the public's trust (Brint, 1994). Beginning in the 1920s, the "incorporation of business training into the universities began to erode the status distinction between 'community-oriented' professionals and 'profit-oriented' business people" (Brint, 1994:9). The "social trustee" ideal, never too popular in the United States, retreated from the professional scene after World War II: the age of "expert professionalism" had arrived, pervading all but the public and non-profit refuges, and exempting only peripheral professions. What experts share, beside the obligatory passage through higher education and credentials of variable specificity, is a status that qualifies them as relatively affluent denizens of the upper middle class. Even in the midst of the Great Recession, the "professional and managerial" categories retain their relative advantages in the labor market, although we cannot distinguish what derives

from professional closure and what simply accrues to the better-educated segments of the labor force.[16]

As early as 1990, Rosemary Crompton's observed in an influential article that professions were increasingly considered "within the more general topic of the employment of expert labor" (Crompton, 1990: 157). Indeed, few sociologists are still looking for a general theory of professions; most subsume them within the larger theme of the construction, uses, and social consequences of expert knowledge. In this broader perspective, professions still retain their typical institutions, although their credibility has been reduced by scandals of negligence, malpractice, or fraud that cast a general pall over professional ethics.[17]

Yet, at the same time that the trust in professions has eroded, British researchers argue that the concepts of profession and professionalism "are increasingly used as discourses of occupational change and social control" in domains such as management, security, sales, or clerical staff (Evetts, 2006: 516; see also Grey, 1994; Fournier, 1999; Timmons, 2010). Valérie Fournier supports her thesis that "the appeal to professionalism is one of the strategies … deployed to control the increasing margin of indeterminacy or flexibility in work" via her research conducted within a large British service industry (Fournier, 1999: 281). There, the upper management's insistence on a "competencies framework" promotes "an appropriate mode of conduct" (in which the customer is king) "rather than simply a way of performing one's job" (Fournier, 1999: 296). Managerial employees often accept this "technology of the self" as a path of self-development, but most of those in computing reject this acclimatization of professionalism. For these highly educated workers, development is improving one's technical skills by moving between various projects; they talk in terms of "work well done," invoking a form of moral conduct different from management's ideas. Fournier concludes, "the meaning of professionalism… is not fixed but is highly contestable," which makes it an effective but imperfect disciplinary mechanism (Fournier, 1999: 301-302).

In 1977, I was making a similar argument. In "producing the producer," professions constitute his or her identity, starting with the idea of vocation and moving on to the central concept of *career*, on the basis of the intrinsic value that work has for the professional. I wrote, "[P]rofessional socialization aims … at the internalization of special social controls: it takes … standards defined by the profession's elites and makes them part of each individual's subjectivity" (Larson, 1977: 227). I argued, without too much empirical confirmation, that professionalism could free management from the onerous task of directly controlling a skilled workforce, from which it expected expertise, intelligence, and initiative.

I am no longer willing to defend the theory that professionalism spreads something akin to false consciousness among the expert workers upon which global capitalism increasingly depends. But the appeal to professionalism, which some British researchers in the 1990s considered a "technology of the self" used for distance control, is also detected positively as a new form of management by Paul Adler and others in the United States: in knowledge-based organizations, new "communities of practice" activate new forms of professionalism as a measure of self-worth and a deeply internalized commitment to the *intrinsic* value of "work well done" (Adler et

al., 2008). More recently, other British sociologists, probably studying higher levels of the labor force, identified new strategies and tactics of professionalization (such as membership in organizations, commitment to clients, protection of competence, and internationalization) that compare favorably with the path of classic professions (Muzio and Kirkpatrick, 2011). Not much is said, however, about what has become of the "institutionalized altruism" that Merton attributed to professions.[18]

The intrinsic value of work, expressed in the Weberian notion of *calling*, was cardinal in my discussion of "anti-market principles" in the professional project (Larson, 1977: Ch.5). I saw these principles in part as pre-industrial transfers incorporated in the modern conception of profession, and forming its ethical base, they included disinterest, as an echo of the gentlemanly notion of *noblesse oblige*, an aversion to purely commercial pursuits, and an insistence on high-ranking duties as well as rights. And while the market arguably upholds the notion that everyone has the right to be served (not too far from the idea of "universal service"), the classic professions also affirmed against the market, and in preservation of pre-industrial notions of community responsibility, that all have needs, and that needs must be met. In this, they participate in Polanyi's "counter-movement," safeguarding the social fabric against the destructive effects of the market. R. H. Tawney grounded the professions' civilizing function in an expansive idea of needs. In his words, professionals "may, as in the case of the successful doctor, grow rich, but the meaning of their profession, both for themselves and for the public, is not that they make money, but that *they make health, or safety, or knowledge, or good government, or good law*" (Tawney, 1948: 94, italics mine). Citing Polanyi and Tawney as I did, I can rest my case against the accusation that in my view professions do not contribute anything of value to society. Considering the anti-market principles in the constitution of professional identities also illuminates how much we lose in the passage to the superior, specialized, and certainly still "overtrained" knowledge base of today's ubiquitous experts. Nothing inherent in expertise stands for the expansion of needs or the provision of public goods, both of which are more concrete forms of advocacy than a phantasmal "service ideal."

The "age of the experts" acutely poses the political problem of who shall use their services and for what ends. But other grave problems are inherent in the experts' knowledge base, which now acquires overriding importance as the single distinctive feature of expert work. I can only outline here problems that loom particularly large, raising questions about the experts' claims to autonomy and unrestricted power over their work. First is the obsolescence of knowledge, which poses the problem of lifelong learning in the midst of a permanent explosion of knowledge. Specialized experts are still overtrained, the excess of training being an assurance that they could muster the "knowledge of the whole" in the case of crisis; but there is no guarantee that their training is up to date, perhaps excepting the relatively narrow areas of their practice. In consequence, a related problem is how to ensure the effective coordination of different specialties. Sociologists of management can record the spontaneous emergence of lasting collaboration in "communities of practice" (Adler et al., 2008), but there is also evidence of the large organizations' rigidity and difficulty in responding to failures (Tucker and Edmondson, 2003).

Secondly, there may be doubts about granting professionals and experts too much autonomy, but who is able to supervise them poses an almost insoluble problem. An example: since 2007, as the truth about our financial collapse became known, it also became clear that top management had been most of the time incapable of understanding what its "experts" were proposing.[19] In general, at a time where expert work in every field would require the highest integrity, the most humility, and an individual quest for transparency and external validation, there does not seem to be much regulation that we can trust; therefore, we depend more than ever on the internalized personal virtues that experts bring to their work. Lastly, the proliferation of specialties creates a social division of labor of such growing and bewildering complexity that it is almost incomprehensible to the non-initiated—that is, almost everyone outside the special sector considered. If the public does not *know* what most experts are good at, what they do, or who controls them, broad-based problems of accountability become insurmountable. These, in my view, are some directions in which the problem of knowledge/power is moving in the twenty-first century, beyond the *direct* effects over persons that Foucault theorized in the twentieth.

In this long introduction, I have tried to explain how the book developed, suggesting what I still think is valid and what I wish I had done better. I implicitly asked indulgence for now outmoded language (although the distinction between use and exchange value is, I think, illuminating, I could not defend the labor theory of value or the use of increasingly confused "relations of production"). I do not ask indulgence for things I got wrong, things I did not know, or things I overlooked. Most glaringly, I did not deal at all with the professions' discrimination against women and ethnic and racial minorities. I had some useful things to say about how the classic professions de-standardize their necessarily standardized knowledge base through differential prestige, and about the effects of internal stratification in the alleged "community" of profession. I also discussed the affinities between professionalism and individualism, and the resulting aversion to seeking collective solutions to their internal problems. But I should have pointed out how the classic professions—or should I say, the professions that were classic in the last century—were mostly male and mostly white. Much important work on the subject was to come, not only from individual authors (such as, among many others, Celia Davies, Evelyn Fox Keller, Ann Witz, Deborah Rhode, or recently Boulis and Jacobs), but also from institutions like the National Academy of Science or the American Bar Association, or publications like the *Journal for Women and Minorities in Science and Engineering*, started in 1994. This is a preeminent research topic; it remains to be seen if the feminization of professions will change their practices, or only their social advantages, and what effects, if any, changes in personnel can have on the deployment of expert work.

Finally, I did not deal directly in this book with the professions' *discursive function.* In all I said about the necessary creation of a cognitive base, it was implicit that I saw the professions as special communities of discourse. Perhaps what I wrote in 1977 was *too* implicit. As I started working on architecture, a profession that influences the cadre of our collective life far beyond the actual power that it enjoys, I placed this discursive capacity at the center, both in my 1990 article and in the 1993 book on the change of

paradigm in American architecture. Ostensible, public discourse is an elite function in architecture, and probably also in all the professions whose practice we recognize. The authority to speak for the whole field trickles down to ordinary practitioners, who *apply* the discourse within which they have been formed. Be they creators of this discourse or not, they act within its unquestionable *doxa*—the agreement about what questions to ask and not to ask that Pierre Bourdieu posited for scientific disciplines (Bourdieu, 1981). What we live with, what shapes our lives in ways that are often difficult to see and more difficult to understand, is also discourse. The power-effect of cultural capital is pervasive and it may be harder to discern and perhaps more lasting than the effect of economic capital. This is the laity's problem with experts, one of understanding as much as one of trust. Confronting it is a problem of democracy, not of expertise.

NOTES

1. David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York, NY: Random House, 1972).
2. Paul R. Pillar, "Intelligence, Policy and the War in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* 85 (March/April 2006): 15-27.
3. Robert K. Merton et al., *The Student Physician: Introductory Studies in the Sociology of Medical Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957); Howard S. Becker et al., *Boys in White: Student Culture in Medical School* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961).
4. The Internet began to become accessible in the late 1980s. Larry Page and Sergei Brin only started the Google research project in 1998.
5. I did not see Jeffrey Berlant's 1975 University of California Press publication, *Profession and Monopoly: A Study of Medicine in the United States and Great Britain,* while I was writing my book, and I plead guilty for not having found Terence Johnson's 1972 essay. Eliot Freidson began to write on the professions in general in 1988, with *Professional Powers.*
6. In "The Professionalization of Everyone," Harold Wilensky tried to extend the professional model to the division of labor as a whole, coming closer to the Durkheimian meaning as he looked for the normative integration of different occupations (Wilensky, 1964).
7. Fred Block has convincingly shown that, in the 1940s, Polanyi was forming the idea of an "always embedded market economy" rooted in social relations and cultural constructions (Block, 2003). Block puts the difference succinctly, basing it on Polanyi's concept of "fictitious commodities," which also informed my analysis: "Marx analyzes a pure version of capitalism and finds it prone to crises, while Polanyi insists that there can be no pure version of market society because land, labor and money are not true commodities. In Marx, the contradictions come at the end of the analysis; for Polanyi, the system is built on top of a lie that means it can never work in the way that its proponents claim that it works" (Block, 2003: 281).
8. The late David Sciulli was an exception. As recently as 2008, he repeatedly accused me and other "revisionists" like Collins and Abbott of using "narrowly socio-economic" concepts instead of the "structural" and "institutional" ones he prescribed; he also objected to our bringing in "cultural and social psychological factors" (Sciulli, 2008: 8). In addition, Sciulli complained that I used "terms of disparagement favored by the left ('capitalist societies,' 'capitalist industrialization,' and 'industrial capitalism') rather than more neutral terms typically employed in the social sciences," of which he provided none (Sciulli, 2008: fn 10, p.13).
9. In her path-breaking study of the medical profession in England "before the professional project," Elizabeth Popp Berman notes that, especially after the New Poor Law of 1834 caused substantial hardship for provincial doctors, "the most pressing legislative goal was [for them] to create a clearer delineation between regular and irregular practitioners, to counter the constant economic threat of 'quacks'.…The question of corporate privileges little affected provincial doctors, so [the

association that succeeded in stably organizing a majority of practitioners and became the British Medical Association] did not have the antagonism toward the corporations that the London reformers did in this era" (Popp Berman, 2006: 179, 186). But she also notes that scientific societies were at the origin of professionally minded groups in the provinces (166 ff).

10. In the case of medicine, a profession that later claimed a scientific knowledge base, allopathic medicine was unable to demonstrate therapeutic superiority well after Pasteur and others had identified specific causes of disease (that is, after the 1860s). See Eliot Freidson (1974: 16) and Wailoo (2004).

11. Stephen Mick notes how, in front of a surplus of physicians, the "continued ability of medicine to define terms of debate in ways that favor its authority and autonomy" allowed it to emphasize a non-existent shortage of specialists (Mick, 2004: 910). On how the post-World War II years and new scientific developments altered medicine's "ostensibly close" relationship with science, see the brilliant critique of Starr's too simple narrative by Keith Wailoo (2004: 646 ff).

12. The literature is vast, and I quote much of it in my 1980 article, "Proletarianization and Educated Labor." I had come to the United States from France, and I had been greatly influenced by Serge Mallet's 1969 book on the new working class and the always-significant thought of André Gorz.

13. Obviously, engineering did not only affect social life after the "Great Transformation," but always. Chandra Mukerji has brilliantly shown the transformative power of seventeenth-century engineering on everyday lives, as much in the making of the Canal du Midi as in its results; she emphasizes the important contributions of simple people and women (Mukerji, 2009).

14. Moreover, as Schudson later remarked, the idea of professionalism could not have been an effective ideological support for the social order before the 1950s, when higher education credentials became the hallmark of "getting ahead" (Schudson,1980: 227). I made the same point more abstractly: "the central legitimations of the new forms of inequality…are lodged in the educational system" (Larson, 1977: 239 and 224-25).

15. Yet their leaders still seek to gain professional status, as have surgery-related technicians in the British NHS, where aspiring groups elevate their jurisdictional ambitions and conflicts to the Health Professions Council. One author suggests that the NHS uses professionalization to increase regulation and control over some occupational categories, rather than to increase their autonomy (Timmons, 2010).

16. In November 2010, with a national rate of unemployment of 9.3 percent, unemployment among "management, professional and related occupations" was 4.7 percent. In "business and financial operations," the rate went up to 6.6 percent (5.6 percent men, 7.4 percent women) while it was only 4.1 percent for "professional and related occupations" as a whole, a figure driven by "legal occupations" with the lowest rate at 2.2 percent (1.2 percent men and 3.3 percent women) and "healthcare practitioner and technical" at 2.5 percent (1.9 percent men, 2.8 women), to be compared with an 8.1 percent unemployment rate in the non-professional "health care support." These low rates were followed by "education, training and library" with 3.3 percent. In "architecture and engineering," unemployment had recovered somewhat from 7.0 percent in 2009 to 5.8 percent in 2010, to be read alongside the staggering rate of 19.0 percent in "construction and extraction." Among professional occupations, "arts, design, entertainment, sports and media" came closer to the national unemployment average with 8.3 percent, while the rest hovered around the category's 4.7 percent average ("Household Data Not Seasonally Adjusted, A-30. Unemployed persons by occupation and sex," last accessed December 24, 2011, http://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpseea30.pdf). If we turn to the civilian population older than 25 for seasonally adjusted unemployment rates by educational attainment, the rates in November 2011 were 8.8 percent for high-school grads, 7.6 percent for workers with some college or associate degrees, and 4.4 percent for those with bachelor's degrees or higher ("Economic News Release. Table A-4. Employment status of the civilian population 25 years and over by educational attainment," last accessed December 24, 2011, http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t04.htm).

17. There is no need to focus only on medicine's notorious lapses: the collapse of the accounting firm of Arthur Andersen was a clamorous case in point; see Bethany McLean and Peter Elkind, *The*

Smartest Guys in the Room: The Amazing Rise and Scandalous Fall of Enron (New York, NY: Portfolio Trade, 2003). More dangerously, the media has latched onto the suspicion of scientific misconduct; see Daniele Fanelli, "How Many Scientists Fabricate and Falsify Research? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Survey Data," PLoS ONE 4(5): e5738. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0005738. For a sharp perspective on the politics of science see Chris Mooney, *The Republican War on Science* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006).

18. What Merton meant by professional altruism still exists, of course. For a critical account of the medical profession and its relations with doctors who faced great odds to serve the special needs of women patients, see Carole Joffe (1993).

19. The literature is vast. I found a relatively short article by Felix Salmon impressive—"Recipe for Disaster: The Formula That Killed Wall Street," *Wired Magazine* 17(3) (February 2009). Gretchen Morgenson has collected her admirable series of 2008, "The Reckoning," (*New York Times* archives) in a new book. See Gretchen Morgenson and Joshua Rosner, *Reckless Endangerment: How Outsize Ambition, Greed and Corruption led to Economic Armageddon*, (New York, NY: Times Books, 2011).

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