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Theory of Professionalism: Method and Substance

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I would like to begin this paper with two little stories, each with a moral that speaks to my method of analysis. According to the Old Testament, after the Great Flood, 'the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech' and on 'a plain in the land of Shinar' people began to 'build a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven'. 'And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower ... and said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; ... and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel.'

The second story was told many years after the abandonment of the city of Babel when, during the course of a lecture on his belief that all is in flux, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus observed that you cannot step into the same stream twice. This observation was trumped by clever Cratylus, who replied that you cannot step into the same stream **once**.

The moral of the abandoned Tower of Babel is that without a common language, cooperative endeavors are impossible; the edifice of knowledge cannot rise. The moral of the elusive stream suggests that unless we fix the flux of empirical reality into formal concepts, transform process into structure, verb into noun, we float helplessly downstream without ever being able to keep our feet. Those morals suggest we must make deliberate even if arbitrary choices to establish a stable language or theory of professions, one that will allow us to cooperate in building a cumulative body of knowledge, and which will employ formal concepts as **heuristic** tools to fix our knowledge in a form that can be grasped and manipulated.

At present, the study of professions has begun to accumulate national and historical comparisons that employ such a multiplicity of perspectives and methods of thinking that instead of providing the resources for building a sturdy, growing tower of knowledge we will have instead a number of scattered straw huts. I believe that the progressive refinement of studies of professions and the cumulative value of their findings require the development of a theoretical model of professionalism. Models or definitions of the past attempt to distill the essence of professionalism out of the empirical characteristics of occupations called professions by their own members, by the public, by official classifications, or by scholarly analysts. But I hold that the most intellectually useful model should make no effort to fit particular empirical cases. Rather, it should be based upon an abstract theoretical rationale, and be elaborated on a logical rather than an empirical basis. This allows it to avoid the mire of historicism because its emphasis of logic over substance frees discussion

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from concrete and parochial perspectives. Of course it is not entirely free of its own time and place, but unlike 'essentialist' conceptions, it provides criteria abstracted from concrete national or historical circumstances that can be used to analyze the entire range of empirical data from every time and every place.

Since a profession is a kind of occupation, and the generic activity of an occupation is work, the foundation of my model is work and the knowledge and skill required to perform it. Following Johnson (1972), I define professionalism as the occupational control of work and suggest an ideal typical model of the institutions that sustain such control. The model is in some sense static, for it does not attempt to hypothesize an invariant process or 'natural history' by which occupational control develops over time. Rather, it specifies the formal institutions that constitute the 'perfect' or ideal typical form of occupational control. While such a model does not reflect the processual character of empirical reality, I believe it is an essential intellectual device for making sense of that reality. Like the concept, 'stream', it permits us to fix and grasp an ever-changing process. Furthermore, like Max Weber's model of rational-legal bureaucracy and, for that matter, the economist's model of the perfectly free market, it specifies what can but may never fully be. Like those other models, it can never mirror the variety of the empirical world, yet it can provide a stable, logically articulated framework with minimal national and historic bias, one that can organize the way we look at and compare a wide variety of cases.

Circumstances in which an **occupation** organizes and controls its work may be contrasted with the more common situation in which an employer (or labor consumer) organizes and controls work—that is, chooses who is to work on what terms and decides what tasks are to be performed and how. Labor consumers can make these choices either as individuals in an ideal typically open and unstructured free market, or as managers in an ideal typical legal-rational administration or firm. Professionalism is taken to represent the **occupationa**l control of work, which is logically and empirically distinct from **consumer** control and **managerial** control. In my analysis I try to draw out those logical differences and their substantively different consequences. I argue that occupational (or worker) control of work is equal in theoretical importance to the more commonly advanced models of the perfectly free market and rational-legal bureaucracy. It is especially important because, unlike the other two, its generic content is the knowledge and skill that provide the foundation for productive labor. In this it is unlike both the free market which is generically concerned with organizing exchange, and rational-legal administration, which organizes command, or dominance. The knowledge and skill embedded in the performance of productive labor is exogenous to both individual consumers and managers, who lack the knowledge and skill to perform the work of those they employ.

In elaborating that model of occupational control, or professionalism, I distinguish between institutional **constants**, which I use to define professionalism ideal typically, and institutional **variables** that represent the interacting contingencies of the process of professionalization. The defining elements of the ideal type, the constants, are, first, an officially recognized body of knowledge and skill which is believed to be based on abstract concepts and theories and to require the exercise of discretion, second, an occupationally negotiated division of labor, third, an occupationally controlled labor market based on training credentials, and fourth, an occupationally controlled training program that is associated with a university and segregated from the ordinary labor market. The contingent elements, the variables,

include the organization and policy of state agencies, the organization of the occupation itself, the dominant ideologies of the time and place, and the substance of particular bodies of knowledge and skill. One analyzes how the particular configuration of contingent variables found in one or another time and place facilitates or obstructs the creation and maintenance of professionalism. All those variables are, of course, in interaction with each other. I wish to discuss each briefly.

Type of Officially Recognized Work

However one wants to define 'profession', it is first and foremost a particular kind of specialized work located within a much larger universe of work. That universe includes a great many productive activities that are performed in the household and in the community, but that are not recognized as work, sometimes because they are not formally compensated, sometimes because they are not performed on a full-time basis, and sometimes because they are not respected. Other kinds of work are performed for pay and may often be performed on a full-time basis, although informally, outside the official economy. But the most conspicuous segment of that broad universe of work is composed of the occupations and jobs that are carried out in the officially recognized economy. This is where we find professions, which are ranked in modern official classifications as a special kind of occupation.[1]

Professions differ from other officially recognized occupations by virtue of their relatively high standing in classifications of the labor force. This is due in part to the class origins or aspirations of their members, but even more to the kind of knowledge and skill thought to be required for their work. Like all jobs and occupations, a profession is a specialization: a set of tasks that members of the same occupation or holders of the same job perform. The broad set of tasks that any normal member of an industrial society can perform without further instruction or preparation is considered to be unspecialized even though all involve specialization in a logical sense. Specialized work may be distinguished by the degree to which its activities are simple and repetitive, which anyone can learn to perform quickly and with little effort, or vary from one job to another. The former case is represented by what Karl Marx called 'the detailed division of labor', a relatively small number of simple, invariant, repetitive actions. I choose to call it **mechanical specialization**. Professional work is defined as specialized work that cannot be performed mechanically because the contingencies of its tasks vary so greatly from one another that the worker must exercise considerable discretion to adapt his knowledge and skill to each circumstance in order to work successfully.[2] Furthermore, it is believed to require abstract, theoretical knowledge. While the work of both professions and the crafts is thought to be discretionary in character, professional work is distinguished from craft work by being a **theoretically based discretionary specialization**. This may be contrasted with both unskilled work and detailed or mechanical specialization.

Occupational Determination of its Division of Labor

Insofar as we think of work as a specialization, we are forced to think of it as a **relationship**. Only by working with those who do other things as part of a larger process of production do the pin-making specializations described by Adam Smith produce pins. One kind of work is functionally related to others in a social organization of related but different specializations. However, there is rarely only

one, inevitable way by which specializations designed to accomplish some productive end need be constituted and organized: the exercise of power often determines the particular way in which work is organized to gain some productive end. Professionalism represents one logically distinct method of organizing a division of labor. The method is of occupations negotiating jurisdictional boundaries between themselves, establishing and controlling their own division of labor. This occupational method of controlling work may be contrasted with two other methods that are more often discussed—first, control of the selection and organization of workers by the choices of individual consumers in a perfectly free market, and second, by a monocratic, rational-legal administration.

Which of these three methods of constituting and organizing a division of labor will be used in any particular historical instance is determined by the exercise of political and economic power. Each method will have systematically different consequences for the relative number of different jobs and occupations, the degree of hierarchy, and the stability or persistence of specializations over time. When occupations rather than consumers or managers control the division of labor, there will be a comparatively small number of different occupations and a comparatively shallow hierarchy ordering them. Furthermore, they will be relatively stable over time so that workers are likely to have a long-term occupational career and a distinct personal and public occupational identity.

Occupational Control of its Labor Market

Of course, a division of labor cannot exist without some provision for an exchange relationship by which workers can gain a living. Occupational control of a division of labor therefore also requires control of a labor market. In an occupationally controlled labor market, individual consumers are not permitted to employ whomever they wish: they may choose only those who are properly certified members of the occupation that has jurisdiction over the tasks they wish performed. Similarly, in such a market, the managers of public or private firms (or of the society as a whole in a command economy) are not free to create and organize the jobs in their organization: rather, they must design their jobs around the particular sets of tasks that occupations perform, and can hire only certified members of those occupations to perform them. An occupationally controlled labor market thus throws up barriers to the freedom of individual consumers to employ whomever they wish, as well as the capacity of executives, personnel managers, efficiency experts, planners, and other organization personnel to rationalize tasks as they wish. The characteristics of the occupationally controlled division of labor will be mirrored in both external and internal labor markets. Furthermore, the occupation reserves the right to supervise and evaluate work, thereby stratifying the occupation into those who are employers, managers and supervisors, and those who perform the basic productive labor.

Occupational control of its labor market is accomplished by the use of what Max Weber called a social closure, which I prefer to call a labor market shelter. The shelter is sustained by enforcement of the requirement that only those with an occupationally generated **credential** testifying to their competence can be employed to perform a defined set of tasks such as cutting into the body, teaching university students, representing a client in a law court, and certifying the accuracy of a formal statement of financial assets and debits. It is, to use the term of the economist Spence (1974), a 'labor market signal': it certifies that a job candidate has

been accepted as a competent member of a closed occupation and may be employed or consulted in that capacity.

Professional Schooling

The labor market credential typical of professionalism brings to the fore the strategic importance of vocational training for professionalism. Vocational training is in fact the key to occupational control of both its place in its division of labor and its labor market. Furthermore, it is the institutional key to distinguishing between craft and professional modes of occupational control.

The **craft** method of controlling vocational training typically takes place **within** the labor market. It is carried out as on-the-job training in the ordinary places where members of the craft work. In contrast, **professional** training takes place **outside** the labor market, in classrooms and, sometimes, practice settings, both segregated from ordinary workplaces. In both cases, only members of the occupation serve as teachers, but in the craft method, teaching is a complementary activity for selected workers, while in the professional model teaching is a full-time activity.

The difference between these two patterns makes for important differences in the content of training and the nature of credentials. Insofar as teaching is carried out in a classroom that is insulated from the practical demands of particular work settings, its content and scope can be comprehensive and systematic and it can include considerable discursive material, including abstract concepts and theories. Furthermore, since the students are trained in batches in professional school, and since their instructors are limited in number and specialize at teaching, it is easier to certify that they have all been exposed to the same body of knowledge and skill.[3]

The difference between the two has its most important outcome in the **creation** and **extension** of the profession's corpus of knowledge and skill. Since the faculty in professional schools can devote itself both to teaching and to research and scholarship, it is able to justify, adapt, and expand its jurisdiction in the face of competition from other occupations, increasing sophistication of the lay population, and technological and administrative advances in rationalization. A full-time faculty has the leisure to refine, revise, and codify the received corpus of knowledge and skill, as well as to discover and create new elements. Furthermore, since it is supported by an academic rather than a commercial market, it is insulated from the practical demands of the everyday world and free to engage in 'pure' or 'basic' research, or in scholarship or reasoning that has no immediate relevance to everyday problems. This can lead to the development of new forms of knowledge and skill that are quite different from the old, and to speculation and reasoning that go beyond the status quo.

What sustains this privilege of independence from ordinary marketplace practice is the connection of distinctively professional schooling with institutions usually called universities. It is no accident that in the English language universities are often said to provide a 'higher' education. Their educational programs are literally higher in being tertiary or advanced, following primary and secondary programs of schooling, but this is also true of some technical training. University education is higher in a more important cultural sense, for unlike technical schools and institutes, it is associated with the values and concerns of high civilization. It is connected with what Max Weber, in speaking of the Chinese literati, called the 'pedagogy of cultivation' (see Weber (1946, pp. 416–444) and Grieder (1981,

pp. 1–47)) and provides its graduates with membership in an educated rather than a merely technically proficient class. As Bourdieu noted, what economists call 'human capital' is in this case composed of both cultural and vocational elements, whereas advanced technical training provides solely the latter. Furthermore, the attachment of professional training to higher education provides some of the ideological justification for basic or pure research and for the pursuit of ideas independently of the practical commercial and political world. We must not overstate this independence, because the very origins of formal higher education lay in service to the Sovereign or the ruling class and universities still depend on their support, but neither should we ignore its possibility.

Finally, I may note that just as the occupationally controlled labor market shelter introduces stratified relations into the organization of the profession, so also does the occupational control of vocational schooling. While the traditional craft form of training does divide members of crafts into masters, journeymen, and apprentices, the division is much sharper in professions, for some members occupy an institutionalized position of cognitive authority without engaging in everyday practice. They teach the received body of knowledge and skill to practitioners and also lay down the standards by which practitioners can be authoritatively judged. The standards they promulgate are likely to be different from those of practitioners, who are compromised by the need to satisfy consumers and work within the fluctuating, practical limits of time and place. Indeed, practitioners are likely to consider academic or scientific standards to be hopelessly and unfairly impractical, and resent those who formulate and promulgate them. Professional schooling thus creates a very sharp and problematic division between academic authorities and practitioners.

Professionalism and State Variation

I assume that professionalism, like any form of work, cannot exist without a viable economic foundation. This economic foundation, as well as essential connections to the status system, is what the fundamental institutions I have just discussed provide. I suggest that they represent the ideal typical institutions, the fundamental institutions of professionalism. What other writers have dealt with at some length as essential elements of professionalism—occupational associations, for example, and codes of ethics—are deliberately omitted from the model. I treat them as variables that condition the circumstances in which the institutions of professionalism can be established and maintained over time, and that allow us to understand why their empirically imperfect forms vary from one historic and national circumstance to another. I consider the main conditioning variables to be the state, the professional association, ideology, and the particular institutional requirements for the practice of the substance, or body of knowledge, of different professions. It is by analyzing variation in those, and their interaction, that we are able to understand the degree of professionalism and the power of discourse that historic occupations can actually attain.

The institutions of professionalism cannot be established or maintained without the exercise of powers that they themselves do not possess. The only resource intrinsic to an occupation is its body of knowledge and skill, and while that might represent the sort of power connected with human and cultural capital, it certainly does not have the power of economic or political capital. Occupational control of

its division of labor, labor market, and mode of training runs counter to the desires of both individual consumers and managers who have the economic power to provide workers with a living. Only the state has the power to establish and maintain professionalism. This is why I used its officially defined place in the labor force to distinguish professionalism from other kinds of work, and not concepts advanced by professionals themselves, or by consumers, philosophers, historians or sociologists.

What kind of state is likely to support the creation of an occupationally controlled field of work, how will that support be provided, and what role will occupations play in the process? Since not all states organize their affairs in the same way and not all advance the same policies, and since in any case they change over time, some sort of typology is essential for dealing with variation. A number of typologies have been suggested in the comparative literature on the state that has been growing rapidly over the past 10 years or so, but I have found the distinctions made by the law professor, Mirjan Damaška (1986) to be the most useful. His work suggests four types of state distinguished along two dimensions. One dimension is the way state ministries and agencies are organized to carry out state policy: the **hierarchical** mode refers to rational-legal bureaucracy staffed by qualified career civil servants; the **coordinative** mode refers to a simple, flat (i.e. non-hierarchical) structure staffed by transient amateurs. The other dimension is the broad policy guiding state exercise of its powers: the **reactive** state allows most affairs to be organized and administered by the individuals and organized groups of civil society, and merely facilitates their decisions; the **activist** state imposes its own vision of what is desirable on civil society, discouraging, if not suppressing, all civil groups that cannot be trusted to subscribe to its vision. When we combine those dimensions of administrative organization and policy orientation we can distinguish four types: state-reactive/coordinative, reactive/hierarchical, activist/hierarchical, and activist/coordinative (Table 1).

Table 1. Agents of policy by variations in state policy orientation and implementation

Policy orientation	Hierarchical	Coordinate
Reactive	Bureaucracy serves as agent of civil interest groups	Private civil interest groups formulate and implement policy
Activist	Bureaucracy formulates and implements policy of state	State approved groups formulate and implement policy

Based on Damaška (1986).

I suggest that the institutions of professionalism can be established in different ways stemming from variation in the organization and policy of the state. In a **reactive/coordinative** state, because the state is passive, self-organized professional associations can play an essential role in promoting acceptance of their special status by themselves negotiating a division of labor with other occupations, creating shelters in their labor market, and establishing schools for generating credentials. State agencies will restrict their activities to the resolution of disputes that cannot be settled privately, and once persuaded of its desirability in the case of professionalism, to enforcing occupationally controlled divisions of labor and labor markets.

In the **reactive/hierarchical** state, however, I do not believe that independent professional associations are essential for establishing the institutions of professionalism. We can conceive of a state agency itself formulating and administering labor force status, jurisdictions, market shelters, and training programs. This could be done by following the recommendations of an independent professional association, but it is also quite possible that the professionally qualified staff of a state agency undertakes to set up and administer those institutions **on behalf of** a profession, rather than following the explicitly expressed desires of a private association. In doing so, it might consult representatives of an association, or distinguished, authoritative members of a profession. Alternatively, it might choose to create a corporatist arrangement in which it selects an association to represent the profession as a whole, and draws it into binding negotiations on behalf of its members.

Insofar as corporatism is employed as a method for establishing and maintaining the institutions of professionalism, in a **reactive/hierarchical** state it will be what Schmitter (1979) called 'societal corporatism'. In an **activist/hierarchical** state, on the other hand, it would be 'state corporatism', the participating association being a creature of state policy that can express no other position than that approved by the state. But while no truly independent association is permitted to represent a profession in such a state, it would be a mistake to assume that professionalism as I have defined it could not exist. While the **content** of its institutions might differ somewhat from that in other kinds of state—its relative status in the official labor force, for example, and some of the curriculum of professional schools—we may assume that the basic **technical** substance of a profession's specialized body of knowledge and skill is left intact, as is its sheltered position in the economy. Unlike some writers who have analyzed professions in activist/hierarchical states like the erstwhile Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, I hold that they cannot be considered to have been deprofessionalized merely because they are not independent of the state and its activist policies. To argue the need for private, independent status, one must add something more to one's conception of professionalism than occupational control over a body of knowledge and skill. I shall do precisely that later in this paper.

Finally, I may mention the **activist/coordinative** state which seeks to avoid the use of centralized planning and organized bureaucratic administration but remains dedicated to realizing its vision by mobilizing civil society. Something resembling such states existed in the early stages of ostensibly egalitarian revolutionary societies. I am uncertain how to think about this kind of state, but my inclination at present is to argue that its 'coordinative' nature in juxtaposition with its activism makes it hostile to the very idea of privileged status for technical expertise, and that it will not support the establishment of professionalism.

My analysis questions the common assumption that professional associations are always necessary for **establishing** professionalism. I question this in the light of history, since in Europe at times when no associations existed we find Peter the Great of Russia and Frederick the Great of Prussia establishing professional programs in universities together with labor market shelters in the form of civil service positions for graduates. It was also the case in 19th century Germany, when many of what Siegrist (1990) called 'state professions' were created.

Things are different when it comes to reforming or adapting established professionalism, when it is convenient, if not essential, for the state to have an organized association that can represent practitioners and provide legitimacy for state policies

bearing on the use of the body of specialized knowledge and skill with which they are identified. Even then, one must remember that an association is not synonymous with a profession. A profession is composed of the entire body of its practitioners and, as I pointed out earlier, the very establishment of professionalism creates stratification by cognitive and administrative authority, as well as differentiation by specialization, practice arrangements, and the like. This compounding of differences among members means that a truly representative association can rarely reach consensus on any but the most general issues. Furthermore, a profession contains members who can wield great political and intellectual influence as individuals entirely independently of associations, and who may not at all represent the views of average practitioners. The variety of interests and intellectual positions in established professions provides the state with a fair amount of leeway to choose and support positions that are compatible with its policies while also being legitimately professional in substance.

Ideologies and Values

What I called the policy orientation of the state may also be called the ideology of the state. This is most explicitly the case for the activist state, but it is true also for the reactive state, which may be guided, for example, by a laissez-faire or an anarcho-syndicalist ideology. The process of establishing and maintaining professionalism is in fact permeated with ideological conflict, and requires for its success the neutralization of opposing ideologies. The issues are much too complex to deal with briefly, so let me focus here solely on the ideologies surrounding the valuation of expertise and specialization.

Perhaps the most influential exponent of specialization in modern times was Adam Smith, who considered specialization, or 'the division of labor', to be one of the two major sources of increase in the standard of living, or wealth, of nations. He praised the productive consequences of specialization not only in the case of the mechanical specialization involved in pin making, but also in the case of the discretionary specializations of the crafts, or 'artificers', and of intellectual trades like 'philosophy, or speculation'. But while he praised the value of specialization in general, he recognized a dark side to mechanical specializations: the person whose entire working life is spent at such work 'generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become'. It is important to remember, though, that Smith did not seem to think that specializing in other kinds of work—philosophy, for example, or medicine—was equally destructive. Karl Marx, on the other hand, argued that devoting oneself full-time to any specialization, no matter how challenging, prevents cultivating the full, multifaceted potential intrinsic to humanity. In his characteristically polemical style he claimed that whether one specializes in making the heads of pins or in doing sociology, specialization produces a kind of 'craft idiocy'.

The underlying ideal expressed by Marx is of people who cultivate a variety of skills (see Ollman (1976/7)). In the West, the source of that ideal was the Greek philosophers, who argued the value of a broad range of knowledge for the privileged citizens of the polis while denigrating the specialized (and manual) skills of the crafts. This ideal is closely related to a number of historic conceptions of education that were expressed by such terms as 'humane learning' and 'liberal education' in England and the USA, '**Bildung**' in Germany, and perhaps '**nauk**' in Russia. Implicit in them is the idea that specialists lack the perspective necessary

for dealing with issues that lie outside their field, that, in the philosopher Whitehead's (1963) words, specialization produces 'the restraint of serious thought within a groove. The remainder of life is treated superficially, with the imperfect categories of thought derived from one profession'.

It is but one step from there to advance, as did the English Socialist Harold Laski (1931), the traditional 'gentlemanly' view that specialists are not fit to govern because they lack broadly informed views and wide knowledge. Those qualities are gained from an education that conveys the tastes, general ideas and theories advanced by the great thinkers, moralists, and artists of the past in addition to information and technique. Such an education produces cultivated people who are equipped to deal flexibly and intelligently with a wide variety of problems—people who are in some sense amateurs, generalists rather than specialists. As Suleiman (1977, p. 141) put it in discussing the myth of technical expertise that surrounds graduates of the French **grandes écoles**, their education is not in fact technical, but instead 'credited with instilling as much as possible a general capacity to grasp any problem, a quality that is considered essential for leadership'.

These conceptions of advanced, cultivated generalism are important for professionalism in two quite different ways. They represent above all an argument **against** allowing technical specialists the freedom to control the work they do and to determine the policies connected with it, let alone control state policy as technocrats. Insofar as professionals are labeled mere technical specialists, they are likely to be given little autonomy or authority beyond the confines of their specialty. On the other hand, these conceptions explain in part why ideal typical professionalism requires that 'liberal studies' precede vocational training and that its vocational schools be associated with universities, the seats of cultivation and higher learning. When general ideas and high culture are a prerequisite for professional training, and when training itself emphasizes abstract concepts and theories, one may plausibly claim a form of specialization that is capable of the flexibility, depth, and insight required by discretionary work, and that is more than merely technical, having cultural as well as technical authority.

The ideology of cultivated generalism is not the only enemy of professionalism that must be coopted or neutralized. So too are the ideologies of liberal economics and communism, both of which oppose granting privileged status to technical expertise, however tempered and deepened by a liberal education. Both argue, although in different ways, that as long as human beings are committed to some goal—whether that be to material gain or the creation of a new society—they are capable of reaching that goal without reliance on experts. Their intrinsic human capacities, mobilized by rational self-interest, or by love of humanity, or by commitment to a great cause, are all that are needed to assure their Great Leap Forward to either capitalism's promise of universal opulence or the Manifesto's promise of universal brotherhood. Another, quite different but equally hostile ideology might be called **managerialism**. Its assumption is that productive goals are best reached by eliminating the unpredictable consequences of discretion and substituting managerial authority, which rationalizes tasks, organizes them by formal rules, and carefully supervises their performance by the institution of hierarchical authority.

The proponents of professionalism attempt to neutralize hostile ideologies in a number of ways. It is a truism in the literature that they claim their work is of critical importance to the good of either the public at large or some important elite, and that it can be performed reliably and well only by those with a particular kind

of training. They claim further that they deal with problems so complex and esoteric that lay people cannot be expected to make choices in their best interest: only certified members of the profession should be allowed to choose what is best for them. This is the basic ideology of expertise. It cannot prevail, however, unless it is connected with an ideology of service, for restricting the market to the credentialed leaves consumers vulnerable to exploitation. The monopoly provided by a labor market shelter could be used to advance the economic interests of the protected occupation while providing no guarantee of competent work. **Trust** in the profession must be created as well. Many writers have noted the rhetorical and institutional devices designed to create such trust—claims of commitment to service rather than personal advancement which Karpik (1989) has recently analyzed as disinterestedness, formal oaths of service taken upon entering the profession, codes of ethics, and the formation of professional committees to police performance and discipline deviants when necessary.

Perhaps more important than those devices for establishing professionalism as a very special form of expertise is the claim of **independence** from its immediate clientele and patrons. Mere technical specialists are those who make skillful use of their knowledge and skill for any purpose, serving whoever has the power or capital to support them. They are **condottieri**, 'freelances', or 'hired guns', mercenaries with no personal values beyond doing their work skillfully. By contrast, part of professionalism's claim to special status includes a claim of allegiance to some **transcendent** value, whether that be Truth, Beauty, Enlightenment, Justice, Salvation, Health, or Prosperity. This allegiance, reinforced by the connection of training with higher learning, can be invoked to justify a stance that is independent of, even opposed to, the demands of a particular political regime or client.[4] Significantly, it is only when we take this claim seriously, expecting professionals to serve some transcendent value of their discipline rather than merely do the work asked of them, that we are able to say that professions which were subservient to activist states like Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union were 'deprofessionalized'.

Variation in Knowledge and Skill

When we come to the final variable that has critical bearing on the process of establishing and maintaining the institutions of professionalism we are back to where I started—with the body of knowledge and skill over which an occupation claims jurisdiction. But now the issue is not the abstract properties of knowledge and skill that rise to the fore as they did earlier, but rather their **concrete substance**—the substantive differences between various disciplines. A number of writers, Larson (1977) and Abbott (1988) most prominent among them, have discussed how variation in the knowledge of different professions and the social and economic circumstances in which their knowledge can be practiced have important bearing on the degree to which they can exercise independence from control by consumers, capital, or even the state.

Halliday (1987, pp. 28–55), has conceptualized the issues as a profession's problem of gaining what he calls a 'knowledge mandate'. A knowledge mandate represents the capacity of a profession to exercise influence by virtue of its body of knowledge and skill rather than, for example, the wealth or political connections of its members. This capacity is conditioned by variation, first, in the **epistemological basis** of a discipline's body of knowledge and skill (that is, whether it has a scientific or normative foundation), second, in the **sphere of its authority** (that

is, whether it has technical, moral, or, I would add, cultural authority), and, third, in the **institutional spheres** where the discipline can be practiced (that is, in law courts, hospitals, universities, or industrial firms, for example, and under circumstances of employment or self-employment).

Halliday's distinctions allow us to connect the knowledge of a field or discipline with the material conditions necessary for its gainful practice. With them we can analyze systematically the interaction between variation in the **substantive knowledge** of various disciplines or fields (all of which may be theoretically based, discretionary specializations nominally qualified for special status in the official economy) and variation in the **economic and political agents** who have the power to determine whether or not disciplines will be able to control and organize the division of labor and labor market in which they work. If, as is the case for engineers in most capitalist nations, they work in private firms concerned with the production of profitable goods, we can understand why the jurisdictional boundaries of their work are often not clear, the division of labor in which they work fragmented, and their labor market shelters incomplete. While their disciplines have the authority of a scientific foundation, they can claim only narrow technical authority. The degree of professionalism permitted them is almost entirely a function of the executive staff of the private or public firms that employ them.

Engineering is a very useful foil for this kind of analysis because, like nursing for example, its disciplines are in some sense derivative and cannot persuasively claim, like those of 'basic' science and, for that matter, scholarship, independence based on its own transcendent goal. It is bound into realizing the practical goals of either private entrepreneurs or the state, and its appraisal of those goals is limited to assessing their feasibility. It is different with medicine, whose discipline is increasingly derived from basic sciences but which can claim not only greater indeterminacy than engineering, but perhaps more important, the almost infinitely expansive goal of health and relief from suffering, a goal that is of transcendent importance to the public at large. Furthermore, medicine directly serves individual members of the public rather than firms, which provides it with a considerably broader constituency. While its members may ultimately depend for their living on the state in some nations, or on private capital, as is increasingly the case today in the USA, its relationship to the public can provide it with potentially broader political support that is unavailable to engineering.

Recapitulation

The intention of this paper has been to sketch the framework of a theory that specifies both the topics and the theoretical issues which I believe must be confronted by any systematic analysis of professions. Furthermore, it has tried to show how those topics are related to one another and why analysis must deal with issues in both the sociology of work and the sociology of knowledge. The topics themselves and the issues they address should be familiar, for the literature has analyzed them all, although seldom all together and often in different ways. Unlike most other analysts, however, I have tried to define and connect those topics theoretically rather than abstract their essence from empirical cases. Disinfected of their national and historical origins they can be used as a neutral point of reference for analyzing the position of a wide variety of occupations in a wide variety of times and places. Furthermore, they are defined in an institutional form so they can serve as stable templates or models for collecting and organizing data. And while that

fixed form is essentially fictional, reality being process, flux, and change, more social movement than organization, it provides us with the intellectual tools by which we may step in and out of the stream of reality as many times as we wish, return to Babel and resume the construction of our tower.

Notes

1. No theorizing about professions (let alone other kinds of work) can address officially recognized work without also considering officially unacknowledged work in the informal economy, if only because many professions have their origin in the informal economy and only later become recognized officially (e.g. Levine, 1986). Furthermore, here, as elsewhere, one must remember that concepts artificially fix what is in reality a social process. Recent work by Trépos (1996) explores the process by which expertise becomes socially recognized and established.
2. Entirely discretionary behavior is more often than not a fiction. See the analyses of the way the social and administrative context of decision-making creates routines for the exercise of discretion in Hawkins (1992).
3. In the craft system of training on the job in the labor market, the instructors or masters can vary greatly in particular skills, the capacity to communicate them, and their conscientiousness in trying to teach them, so the content of training may differ considerably on different kinds of jobs, with different instructors. In consequence, the reliability of the craft credential is more subject to question and more likely to be evaluated on the basis of the personal reputation of the particular instructor.
4. The distinction that Brint (1994) makes between 'social trustee professionalism' and 'expert professionalism' contrasts traditional professional ideology with the service ideology of those professionals whose public and state support have been seriously weakened and who may be moving toward becoming mere technical experts, albeit of high social rank and income.

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