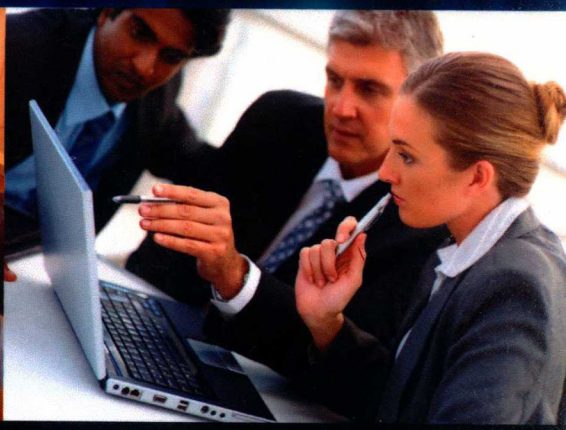
THE RISE OF PROFESSIONALISM

Monopolies of Competence and Sheltered Markets



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With a new introduction by the author

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To my parents,

Amedeo and Pierangela Sarfatti

Acknowledgments

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M. S. L.

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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