

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-13647-1 - Professions and Professionalization  
Edited by J. A. Jackson  
Excerpt  
[More information](#)

---

# 1 Professions and Professionalization – Editorial Introduction

JOHN A. JACKSON

## 1

## PROFESSIONS AND PROFESSIONALIZATION- EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

JOHN A. JACKSON

The development of the study of professions and professionalization by sociologists has been matched, at least in part, by the growth of professional consciousness among sociologists themselves. The last two decades have seen in both Eastern and Western Europe and in the United States the emergence of the social scientist in a role which has demanded both the authentication of his discipline (his profession) within the academic community and also, as demands increasingly have been made upon him for research and policy, in the society at large. The profession of sociology, and in particular the professional bodies of national groups of sociologists, have increasingly, and often rapidly, developed from simple associations of those 'interested in the subject' and including many journalists, social workers and school teachers, to a tight body developing at least vestigial standards of authentication and defining a code of practice and an ethical sub-committee responsible for the practice of the discipline. Students of professions and the process of professionalization have been no less subject to the broader characteristics of the process observed in longer-established professional groupings.

A recent meeting of the university teachers' section of the British Sociological Association characterized the features of development peculiarly well in the assertions that (a) the true professionals were those who had been trained specifically in sociology and had not originally been trained in other disciplines, (b) this group – all those trained since 1950 – stood in contra-distinction to those who had reached sociology by other routes, (c) the profession should be concerned by the wide dissemination of sociology being both taught and practised by those who had not received such training, and in (d) the concern expressed about the proper place of research, and finally (e) the specific attempt by the Association to define standard procedures for research projects and to develop in its ethical sub-committee a code of practice.

The rapid growth in the range and number of 'professions' and the intellectual disciplines and the *pratique* linked to them raises anew the problem of the nature of the profession as a particular kind of occupational group with characteristics apparently not shared by other occupational groups. As Parsons asserts 'professional men are neither 'capitalists' nor 'workers' nor are they typically

governmental administrators or bureaucrats'.<sup>1</sup> Parsons goes on to claim that although there may be a good deal of ambiguity at the fringes there is very little doubt about the central occupational characteristics of the professional. Such an analysis, however, rests squarely on certain assumptions regarding the characteristics of professions in the West and in particular the rise of professions since the period of the industrial revolution. That this rise is principally associated with the rise of the universities is hardly accidental. The profession as we know it – and as Parsons defines it – depends on the notion of the university as the institution of the intellectual. The modern university with its emphasis on teaching and research provides both the training and the intellectual tradition itself but in some measure incorporates also the legitimating structure of authority and competence. It is in the university that intellectual traditions have become institutionalized with these combined functions – united in British and American universities, separated but both apparent in the universities and the research institutes found on the continent of Europe.

What is the nature of the intellectual disciplines which have become institutionalized within the framework of the universities? As the curriculum of the modern university has developed and diversified it has produced new areas of competence assuring the status of profession. And yet it is not simply the universities which endow them. Some of the traditional professions – such as medicine on the continent of Europe or law in England, – have not always been found within the universities; rather they have developed a guild-like structure. The professions have needed to fulfil certain conditions of their group self-interest; the best solution has not always been to harmonize the group interests within the framework of the universities. Often the extreme emphasis on rationality stressed by the intellectual discipline has been in conflict with the practical case-law and apprenticeship methods of training favoured by those classes able to define the qualifications and standards required by aspirants to professional membership. Significantly law schools, especially on the European continent, and medical schools, especially in British universities of the nineteenth century, have formed the core disciplines around which the university grew. With earlier British universities such as Oxford and Cambridge and in many universities in the United States the core discipline was usually theology, reflecting the part played by religious bodies in founding university establishments. These three core professions found in the universities a means whereby they could perpetuate the characteristics of their professional wisdom as being based on the generalized learning of humane disciplines and in close association with them rather than simply depending on 'craft' factors in the learning of techniques and skills. The setting of the training process within the environment of an academic community with primary concerns in the dispassionate

1 T. Parsons, 'Professions', *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, 1968), p. 539.

profession of knowledge itself serves to extend the range of legitimation, to add lustre and supra-authority to the ideals of detachment, public rather than self-interest, service to an ideal and ethic. The universities have gained a legitimation of a utilitarian kind by the demonstrable needs which are met by those it certifies as competent – this allows the continued presence of many faculties whose contribution is demonstrably non-utilitarian in character.

It is in no sense a criterion of professionalism whether certification is incorporated within a university framework but to the extent that universities have formed the primary legitimating institutions of expertise based on the manipulation of knowledge, as distinct from craft based activities, it has been usual for aspirant professions to find incorporation within the structure of universities for their training courses (e.g. veterinaries, dentists, town-planners, social workers). Normally the university's relationship is partial in that there appears within the training programme itself a tension between the abstract intellectual training (good of and for itself in terms of the liberal humane values of education and research) and the instrumental needs of developing actual practitioners involving the awkward and necessary business of allowing the 'trained' candidate to come into contact with the object of the exercise. There is already a tension here between 'medicine' and 'the treating of the sick'.<sup>1</sup> The first a pursuit of objective knowledge for its own sake; the second a lesser activity which for the pursuit has its primary function in the provision of examples and data (a laboratory) rather than the much vaunted service goal of the 'professional'.

The tension that is here exhibited is equally characteristic of other professions than medicine though it has developed in different ways in different circumstances. In law, in Britain, the primary function has been practical – few students study law for itself – there is little encouragement for the study of jurisprudence – Oxford and Belfast being exceptions (the latter for the reason, among others, that it serves the need of a relatively small population and does not need to turn out many lawyers). In France by contrast the *Faculté de Droit* assures the basis for a general academic discipline – almost the role of the Arts Faculties in Britain.

Hughes has rightly pointed out that the significant question to ask about occupations is not whether or not they are professions but to what extent they exhibit characteristics of professionalization.<sup>2</sup> The most important element in the rephrasing of this question is of course the definition of the problem in dynamic terms which recognize that in relation to the range of criteria by which a profession may be denoted, there may be considerable variation at different times and under different circumstances. This leads Denzin to suggest that professions are like social movements. 'They recruit only certain types of

1 See H. Jamous and B. Peloille, 'Professions or Self-perpetuating Systems?', pp. 127–37.

2 E. C. Hughes, 'Professions', *Daedalus* (1963).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13647-1 - Professions and Professionalization

Edited by J. A. Jackson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

6 J. A. JACKSON

persons, they develop highly elaborate ideologies and supra-individual values, they have their own mechanisms of socialization and they often attempt to proselytize and bring new persons into the fold.<sup>1</sup> Such a social movement based on occupational membership and capacity is clearly uniquely non-instrumental in the sense in which Lockwood and Goldthorpe have developed the use of this term.<sup>2</sup> By contrast to their Luton workers the true 'professional' is work-oriented to the highest possible degree – for him it is the basis of a social movement developing, the more professionalized it is; a code of ethics and ideology comprehending not merely the work situation but extending beyond this to define a status and a style of life of universal relevance, in all aspects of life. A doctor or a priest is always 'on duty' in this sense; his vocation is a twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, lifetime commitment. His occupational role is comprehensive and the implication is that membership of the occupational group confers an acceptable and comprehensive life-style. For such occupations the broader aspects of a socialization process and educational framework, which not only closely controls selection but also provides training in terms of a general tradition, is clearly particularly appropriate. A trained mind is given precedence to technical competence which it is assumed can be readily picked up once the formal education process is complete.

The idea of a scaling of professions according to the degree to which their orientation falls into a more general 'education for life' category or a specific 'education for task' category is obviously only one of a number of factors which can be used to describe a typology of professions along very similar lines to those by which one might distinguish social movements. Cults may, for instance, be distinguished from institutionalized religious churches or denominations by their highly specific individual instrumentality, whereas membership of a religious body, at least by implication, defines a wider set of assumptions – a world view – appropriate to its members as a group.<sup>3</sup> Professional status and recognition by the wider society, at least in part, would appear to relate to the extent to which the techniques and the generalized system of knowledge and ideology are held in tension with one another.

Two other aspects of the ideological orientation of the profession should be considered. The service ideal of the professional is usually taken to be one of the key characteristics of the profession. But although an objective disinterestedness may indeed be a necessary condition of task performance, it is important to ask from whence this really derives. There is no reason to assume that professionals are either more charitable or more interested in their fellow men than others.

- 1 N. K. Denzin, 'Pharmacy – Incomplete Professionalization', *Social Forces*, 46, 3 (1968), 376.
- 2 J. H. Goldthorpe, D. Lockwood *et al.*, *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour* (Cambridge, 1968).
- 3 J. A. Jackson and R. G. Jobling, 'Towards a Definition of the Cult', in D. Martin (ed.), *The Sociology Yearbook of Religion in Britain* (London, 1968), pp. 102–4.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13647-1 - Professions and Professionalization

Edited by J. A. Jackson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION 7

What, rather, is significant, is that their occupational niche is defined around problems of universal, or at least widely experienced, social concern. In each case they encompass specialized areas of knowledge which affect all individuals but where only a few can become expert. By virtue of their character these areas of knowledge assume a mystery a quality of the sacred whereby they take on a distinct mystique which distinguishes them from more mundane matters. The professional becomes necessarily the high priest of that area of knowledge in which he is acknowledged to be competent. The normative framework of his training assumes that he will engage in activity normally taboo (the cutting up of cadavers by medical students; the drawing of nudes in a life class by the artist; the probing of inner secrets by the psychiatrist; the examination of the body by the doctor). His training thus represents an initiation into mysteries; the processes of initiation may be more or less institutionalized but one of the factors of an analysis may well need to be 'degree of contact with elements given a highly charged (sacred) place in the central value system of the society'. The church, medicine and law all embrace such religious, physical and property elements to a high degree.

If one views professions along the lines of the more cynical approach enjoined by Schumpeter it is helpful to see them in terms of their monopoly over certain resources (knowledge) which are appropriate to certain social needs.<sup>1</sup> The niche which they have established as the basis of their exploitation of these resources and the activities which derive from them will clearly vary in the extent to which they allow a development of the area – and one will see a tension developing between a process of *mystification* (neologisms, research, creation of knowledge, etc.) and *demythologization*. Clearly some professions are better able to exploit their monopoly in these terms than others. Normally they are those better able to exploit the legitimation of their exclusive position derived from the general propositions of their practice – ethical, scientific, sacrificing, etc. all-embracing and therefore humane. Life and death of all men is in these terms a better bet than houses (long-term concerns); general medicine than dentistry (a man can get along without teeth); writing than broadcasting, and so on.

To extend this discussion in these terms would clearly be beyond the capacity of this introduction. Several of the contributions to this volume have expressed a plea for a more central concern with the sociology of occupations rather than taking for granted assumptions implying a distinction between occupation and profession. Turner and Hodge, for instance, believe in placing their discussion of occupations and professions clearly in terms of the division of labour stating that any occupation is capable of acquiring those elements, or aspects of them which

<sup>1</sup> J. A. Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (Oxford, 1951), pp. 133-221. It is also useful to note here the development of the notion of 'entrepreneurial niche' by writers such as F. Barth, 'Economic Spheres in Darfur' in R. Firth (ed.), *Themes in Economic Anthropology* (London, 1967), and *The Role of the Entrepreneur in Northern Norway* (Bergen, 1964).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13647-1 - Professions and Professionalization

Edited by J. A. Jackson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## 8 J. A. JACKSON

we have come to associate with professions. All occupations develop a culture, a terminology, a set of rules of craft, learning modes and dispositions. Many develop protective associations or guilds, organized associations or trade unions which act to institutionalize a given position in the occupational structure and further serve to define the relationship to the wider social structure. In a recent study of qualifying associations in Britain Hickson and Thomas have indicated that the older the association the more likely it is to yield a high score on those factors which they take to characterize professions.<sup>1</sup> Wilensky in his important article 'The Professionalization of Everyone?' points to the phenomenon of professionalization as increasingly affecting every occupation.<sup>2</sup> Significantly in socialist societies in Eastern Europe the word profession is used interchangeably with occupation and the distinction is not preserved.

B. Barber distinguishes the four essential attributes of professional behaviour as: (a) generalized knowledge, (b) primary orientation to the community interest, (c) internalized code of ethics, (d) rewards which primarily symbolize work achievement.<sup>3</sup>

It will have been noted that what has been stated so far in this paper would lead to some questioning of the assumptions implied in this essentially functionalist account. Ben-David, it seems to me, in his discussion of professions in relation to the class system, gives a more useful emphasis. It is the only appropriate perspective for the consideration of occupational groups and the status attributes that are proper to them. In Schumpeter's terms 'the place of professions in the social stratification of modern societies becomes easily discernible. They are a group of newly-created roles, carrying out novel and most rapidly expanding social functions . . . They have taken in these respects the place of the self-made *entrepreneur*, which in its turn had replaced the nobleman-landlord and the knight as the occupational ideal of Western societies.'<sup>4</sup> Ben-David goes on to point out that it is a characteristic of present-day societies to find the professional assume a central place in the class system though its locus varies according to the class system of the society. He makes clear the basic point in his view that:

Even the adherence of these professional classes to the socialist policies of their post-revolutionary countries does not differ so much from the liberalism of the rising *bourgeoisie* in the last century. Certainly the socialist middle classes are not more equalitarian in practice than their liberal predecessors used to be. Their emphasis on welfare policies, such as the provision of educational and health services, scientific research or technological show-pieces, is no less a

1 D. J. Hickson and M. W. Thomas, 'Professionalization in Britain: a Preliminary Measurement', *Sociology*, 3, 1 (January 1969), 48.

2 H. L. Wilensky, 'The Professionalization of Everyone?', *American Journal of Sociology*, 70 (1964), 137-58.

3 B. Barber, 'Some Problems in the Sociology of Professions', *Daedalus*, 92, 4 (1963).

4 J. Ben-David, 'Professions in the Class System of Present-day Societies', *Current Sociology*, 12, 3 (1963-4), 296-7.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13647-1 - Professions and Professionalization

Edited by J. A. Jackson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION 9

matter of self-interest for the professional person than industrial production and the distribution of consumer goods is for the *bourgeois*. Professional middle classes are interested in social conditions which are optimal for the efficient performance of their activities, just as businessmen are interested in conditions necessary for theirs.<sup>1</sup>

## II

The association of the professions in their development through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the universities and higher education generally has demonstrated the relation of the professions to some branch of learning and science. It is worth developing a little further the organizational framework of the professions and their articulation with their respective publics and the world to demonstrate a further dimension.

The fields of knowledge as we have already indicated revolve around areas which we have defined as mysteries – they involve essentially sacred elements access to which is the privilege of the *cognoscenti* – the professionals. In part they acquire their power from the formal academic training – the study of the objective and descriptive elements; combined with this are the elements of socialization and initiation into the wider class ideology of the professional group. Within the framework of increasing specialization, and indoctrination into the professional mystique is a combination of experience, apprenticeship and most importantly sets of attitudes appropriate to the different audiences of laymen and other professionals, assistants and competitors. In terms of all these elements the full role-set of the professional is defined.

This assertion does not cover the further problem of how it is that this authority is recognized by the society at large – and in particular by those whom the profession ‘serves’. The discussion in this volume by Harries-Jenkins on the relationship between professions and organizations demonstrates that the authority base of the profession is not derived from the legitimation of rationality implied in Weber’s model of bureaucratic organizations. Nor, if we are to follow Weber, is it to be found in the ideal-type formulations of either traditional or charismatic authority. In a recent introduction to a study of town-planning and housing policy Halsey has suggested that we need to define a fourth type of legitimation for the authority of the professionals in the modern world. Professional authority is that enjoyed ‘by those who have been appointed to “a sphere of competence” on the basis of qualifications attested by a professional group of peers’. Halsey goes on to point out that while many of the claims of a technical nature made by professionals will not differ from those of a bureaucratic organization it is also possible for their claims to derive from what he calls ‘a kind of group charisma’. In these cases the judgements of the professionals ‘may be quite opaque to those outside the profession. The professional, by definition, is absolved from justifying his decision; he does not need to reveal

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 297-8.



his basis in theory or fact or value.<sup>1</sup>

Again one is dealing with the element of mystification referred to earlier; the craft and the ideology and learning that go with it must be guarded from the uninitiated. The process of professionalization can thus be seen, in part, as a process of increasingly protective measures to define the boundaries between the sacred company of those within the walled garden and those outside. Feld, in developing a model of 'primitive' military organizations suggests that: 'By definition . . . a primitive armed force confines its activities to the body of its actual members . . . The organization regards itself as the state of nature, and the outside world as the possibility of corruption and the fall of man . . . The primitivist approach systematically includes an image of the outside world which is essentially negative in nature.'<sup>2</sup> Feld contrasts his primitive type of military organization with a competitively oriented model which accepts equally rational competitors in the same field located outside the organization.

To the extent that professions develop their organizational structures and their attempt to maximize access to and control over resources in a given sector of knowledge and practice, they correspond in some measure to Feld's first type. The key dimension in Feld's primitive organizational type, of course, is that distinguishing the sacred from the profane. Outsiders are irrational, dangerous and potentially corrupting to the purity of the rational *cognoscenti*. The threat of corruption is ever present, however, in the form of the competitive forces in society at large – rival organizations, sub-professions, the dissemination of hitherto reserved knowledge through mass media.

Although this sacred-profane typology cannot be carried too far in relation to the analysis of the professions it is tempting to indicate ways in which it might suggest hypotheses in relation to the status attributes of given professions and the ranking structure within as well as outside professions. In the case of the military it is notable that status tends to be distributed in direct relation to the degree to which the activity corresponds most closely to behaviour defined as purely military. Infantry and cavalry regiments have higher status *because* they have no utility at all outside the military sphere. They are at the centre of the professional circle, those others in the organization, engineers, doctors, paymasters, etc. are defined as nearer to the periphery. They are contaminated to the degree that they perform tasks which are *also* performed outside the military organization based on a rationality which is not defined *solely* by the military.

In the case of medicine one may again suggest that this analysis applies to the specialist who enjoys high status and the general practitioner whose status is relatively lower. Although primarily a technologist, the specialist's technology is defined purely in terms of the rationality of his profession. It can have no

1 A. H. Halsey, 'Introduction' to N. Dennis, *People and Planning; the sociology of housing in Sunderland* (London, 1970), p. 25.

2 M. D. Feld, 'The Military Self-image in a Technological Environment', in M. Janowitz (ed.), *The New Military* (New York, 1964), pp. 164–5.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-13647-1 - Professions and Professionalization

Edited by J. A. Jackson

Excerpt

[More information](#)

## INTRODUCTION 11

function outside it. The general practitioner and the nursing staff enjoy lower status because firstly they must deal more directly with the profane world (patients not cases) and also because many of their healing functions differ little from those practised by non-professionals in the general domestic care of the sick. Their professional mystique is thus compromised by the contact they must make with the profane world.

In the case of teaching similar gradations can be observed. The high status enjoyed by those who teach in universities rests in part on the uniqueness of their position, in relation to facilities for research. They are high priests of the temple of learning, making some contribution to knowledge itself; in addition they enjoy the advantage of teaching only those already carefully selected (the extent will vary from country to country) as able to benefit from their wisdom. The ideal is a pure research function and this is expressed in the fact that those who tend to enjoy highest status in the universities are those who teach *only* graduate students. Prestige is distributed throughout the profession of learning according to the twin qualities of the esoteric value of what is taught and the consequent difficulties involved in attaining it *and* the audience to whom it is communicated. Lowest status is thus reserved for teachers in the primary schools to which *everyone goes* to learn *what everyone knows*.

It is not possible in this brief introduction to carry this analysis further. Much of the substance of the argument is in any case developed in the other papers in the volume. It is, however, useful to note how reforms in the more established professions have been actively resisted in terms of just such criteria of 'unique rationality' or 'group charisma' enjoyed by the professional elite. Jamous and Peloille make the point in their paper that those appointed to make proposals for change were exactly those whose self-interest inevitably led them to oppose change. 'And it was demanded of them that they change the very system which was the source of their own authority and privilege and which had given them the power to bring about reform.'<sup>1</sup>

The case of law has not been dissimilar. The bulk of the literature on the legal profession and the practice of law has consisted of writing by lawyers about lawyers for lawyers. Twining has noted in relation to recent deliberations in Britain about lawyers' fees: 'It would appear that neither academic lawyers nor economists were involved in the preparation of the Law Society's submission to the P.I.B. [Prices and Incomes Board] and what is more significant, this is almost certainly considered to be entirely natural.'<sup>2</sup>

If, as the argument of some of the papers which follow suggest, our attention should be addressed to the sociology of occupations rather than the distinction between occupations and professions, then it is probable that increasingly a

1 Jamous and Peloille, *op. cit.* p. 137.

2 W. L. Twining, 'Lawyers under the Microscope', quoted with permission from a Public Lecture delivered at The Queen's University, Belfast in February 1968, p. 7.