Introduction

The aim of the book

This book aims to develop a sociological account of civil courage and creative behaviour. It looks at the careers, lives and works of creative and courageous public intellectuals in order to advance our understanding of the conditions that facilitate the production of public goods by intellectuals. By providing insight into the nature of the public involvement of intellectuals, the book also demonstrates the continuing importance of public intellectuals for the health of democracy. I understand the term 'public intellectuals' to include those scientists, academics in the humanities and the social and political sciences, writers, artists and journalists who articulate issues of importance in their societies to the general public. I argue that, in order to take on the role of 'democracy's helpers' (Kenny 2004: 89), public intellectuals need both creativity and courage, which are the essential building blocks of their authority to speak out on broad issues of public concern. While acknowledging that the public authority of an intellectual develops in the course of what he or she does and depends upon a variety of conditions and resources, I stress the significance of creativity and courage 'which embody the values of civil society' (Swedberg 1999: 522) as the twin major dimensions of the intellectual's reputation and standing with the public.

The tradition of the public intellectual as the guardian of universally grounded values and truths, enriched by tales of philosophers from ancient Athens, Enlightenment ideals, the Dreyfus Affair and the values of the mid-nineteenth-century Russian intelligentsia, has laid down the terms of discussion of the responsibility of intellectuals: belief in the value of science, readiness to confront repressive authority, defence of justice, reason and truth in the name of moral universalism. These narratives have also established the expectation that 'in the scientist the Greek prophecy of society governed by philosopher-kings would at last be fulfilled' (Rieff 1969: 340). It was anticipated that, in the developing scientific age, 'scientists would have duties like those of priests in the old

society – duties superior to those of warriors ... But in the twentieth century ... something went astray ... ' (Rieff 1969: 340). In the last five decades the relationship between modern science and politics – or, more generally, the relationship between the public and public intellectuals – has evolved. The institutionalisation and the specialisation of intellectual life, together with the dominance of mass culture, are seen as responsible for the disappearance of the charismatic public intellectual and the decline in the quality of the public. As displaying academic credentials steadily becomes both less important and more dubious in the eyes of the lay public, and as increasingly egalitarian attitudes, wider access to higher education and the prominence of celebrity culture lower the deference accorded to academics, many talk about the decline of public trust in the infallibility and the authority of intellectuals.

Nonetheless, there are still voices defending the importance of intellectuals' social function as the arbiters of truth. Such claims reflect the dominance of the French model of public intellectuals, which established intellectuals' 'higher calling as moral watchmen over the modern state' (Lilla 2001: 203). As one of the results of this model's dominance, the study of intellectuals has frequently taken a normative form, offering visions of how intellectuals ought to behave and pleading for intellectuals to act in particular ways. This tradition, which began with Emile Zola and has continued with Julien Benda, Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Mannheim, Russell Jacoby and Edward Said, remains alive and attractive and often affects the ways in which contemporary intellectuals think about their role and position in society. It maintains that being an intellectual entails not only engaging in creative mental activity but also taking social responsibilities and political positions. According to this moralising stance, best summarised in Vaclar Havel's (1991: 167) well-known phrase, intellectuals should 'speak the truth to power'.

These words suggest an inherent opposition between intellectuals and political rulers, yet throughout the last century there were many examples of intellectuals involved on both sides of the barricades. On the one hand, intellectuals have been deeply engaged in social and political movements that have brought about widely approved political and social change: anti-colonialism, revolution, student movements and the defeat of communism. But, on the other hand, intellectuals have also been prominent in the service of nationalism, fascism and authoritarian regimes. In the face of such diversity, it is necessary to approach the issues I discuss outside the shackles of the normative tradition. I do not assume, as that tradition has it, that being a public intellectual has to mean, by definition, speaking 'the truth to power' and generally acting as the moral consciousness of the nation. Rather, I claim that justification of

the importance of the public intellectual for democracy arises from an appreciation of the pertinence of intellectuals to free public space. This Habermasian argument needs to be supplemented, however, by 'an appreciation of the relation between such figures and the multiplicity of ''publics'' that have emerged within democratic states' (Kenny 2004: 102), as well as by an understanding that the relationship between democracy and the intellectual is an uneasy one, characterised as 'love in adversity' (Bauman 1992a) or as a 'love–hate' relationship (Goldfarb 1998). Ideally, the leading thinkers of the time should be able to 'educate and to inspire democracy' (Leonard Trelaway Hobhouse, quoted in Collini 2006: 102). While recognising that reality does not often reflect this ideal model, that there are many instabilities inherent in the role of intellectual and that the intellectual cannot be seen as 'some sort of timeless entity' (Judt 1992: 296), the special role of intellectuals is worth retaining because of their potential contribution to matters of human significance: societal well-being and democratic standards. In other words, without the intellectuals' participation in the public sphere the quality of democracy can be threatened, because a democratic polity that does not draw upon all the sources of available information and good judgement is weakened.

Although intellectuals will always be caught in the tensions between specialism and generalism, engagement and withdrawal, a society can still benefit from their capacity to offer a broader perspective, as it is both necessary and desired by the public. Since, as Pierre Bourdieu (2004: 274) notes, there is no effective democracy 'without real critical counter-power', and since this power is 'the intellectual', it can be argued that intellectuals, because of their 'culture of critical discourse' (Gouldner 1979), or/and because of their 'monopoly of critical reflexivity', to use Bourdieu's (1988: 109) vocabulary, can be of crucial importance for the quality of democracy. Assuming that public intellectuals 'are particularly well equipped to bring to public view the complexities and multidimensionality of social problems and cultural differences' (Kenny 2004: 96), it can be said that the importance of public intellectuals for democracy is associated with their role in the establishment and cultivation of democratic discourse and culture. More specifically, intellectuals can help democracy to attain its potential by enhancing people's understanding, thinking and debates about political issues and actions and thus contributing to the creation of a broad public culture and the enrichment of the democratic imagination – that is, the repertoire of ideas, evaluations, skills and logics that citizens develop to inform their citizenship activities (Perrin 2006). Intellectuals also can enrich the political elite's ability to define and

articulate innovative programmes and creative alternatives. In other words, if democracy is to serve people by protecting them and developing a sustained commitment to transparency and justice, it requires the active public participation of public intellectuals in expanding the democratic imagination and civic sensitivity of citizens and their leaders alike.

Intellectuals in a democracy not only cannot be, but also must not want to be, philosopher-kings. Yet, in order to serve democracy, they need an audience, and to summon it they must lay claim to some authority, which cannot be a claim to political authority (which belongs to elected politicians) and cannot simply be a claim to the authority of expertise (which the public views as narrow and merely academic). Since the proper conduct of democratic debate needs a model of independent rationality and since public intellectuals, as people privileged in this respect, are best placed to perform this service, studying the evidence of this special role of public intellectuals should focus on sources of intellectuals' public authority. The vital question of what does in fact provide intellectuals with the authority to earn the attention of a general audience is one of the main issues addressed in this book. My proposal is that creativity and courage are the two essential conditions for the public prominence of intellectuals, and therefore for their contribution to the public sphere. Creativity, by definition the principal characteristic of the intellectual, raises scholars to the status of public intellectuals as they gain the recognition and right to intervene in the public sphere on matters for which they have competence. This elevating role of creativity, 'perceived as a primary obligation of intellectuals' (Shils 1972: 6), places intellectuals in their public role by giving them licence to address a wider public on matters of common concern.

Intellectuals' standing is also built upon public intellectuals' capacity to voice a view 'which in some way goes beyond that available to those with a merely instrumental or expert relation to the matter in question' (Collini 2006: 56). Since it requires the courage of conviction to speak up on matters of human significance, civil courage, defined very broadly as disinterested and risky – but not necessarily rebellious – action for the purposes of institutionalising social or cultural change, must be seen as the other source of authority for public intellectuals. The ability to think independently, involving a willingness to challenge prevailing opinions and not merely follow conventional wisdom, is essential for the quality of public debates. In short, when the courageous stand of an intellectual forces people to rethink the very bases of their political allegiance, to re-evaluate the political order, and provides the basis for civic initiatives that affirm human rights and dignity, it performs a vital social function.

Recognising the significance of civil courage as one of the principal elements in intellectual authority – itself the primary requirement of the intellectual's contribution to just and pluralistic dimensions of contemporary politics – means insisting that neither consensus nor rebelliousness is an exclusive characteristic of the intellectual's involvement in public affairs.

Naturally, the scope of the courage required differs according to the nature of the particular socio-political context. A study of recurrent patterns in the courageous activities and types of public engagement of intellectuals therefore demands an investigation of the making of careers within specific historical contexts. Consequently, I move still further away from a merely normative approach by describing and analysing concrete empirical cases, which have not been selected on the basis of a specific ideological commitment or the personal qualities of the intellectuals concerned but, rather, on their distinctive achievements within national and international structures. Placing examples of civil courage and creative imagination within their social and historical contexts is the first step towards an adequate social analysis in the shape of the construction of a taxonomy of public intellectuals' courageous actions. I argue that the nature of contexts shapes the level of autonomy and the kinds of audience and media available to public intellectuals and therefore expands or constrains the ways in which public intellectuals can take a courageous stance. My analysis is built around the identification of courageous conduct by just four types of public intellectuals; to these types I have given the names of pioneer, dissident, hero and champion.

To provide these categories with life I illustrate them by reference to the careers of public intellectuals who have enjoyed international recognition. Since it is not easy to find good empirical material for studies of public intellectuals who have been widely recognised as having significantly contributed to the strengthening of the democratic values of their societies, I have decided to use the laureates of the Nobel Peace Prize as the catchment area from which my sample of public intellectuals is drawn. This prize, the best-known and most highly respected international peace prize, provides probably the most significant impartial validation of accomplishment (with a few notorious exceptions). The prize provides recognition of individuals who have made outstanding efforts to transform their respective societies to accept the idea of international peace and justice; and the laureates have received an extraordinary degree of attention as a result of the iconic status of the award. Since awakening and educating public opinion is necessarily a slow and complex process, some awards have been retrospective and honorific. Indeed, in the case of intellectuals in particular, it

is often difficult to point to immediate tangible results of their actions or to particular events in public life with which their names may be associated, and recognition is thus more likely to come retrospectively. Awards have also been made to figures still heavily involved in the activities that have earned them recognition. My sample contains members from both categories.

In the more than 100-year history of the Nobel Peace Prize, alongside the activists, politicians, diplomats and leaders of international humanitarian organisations who constitute the majority of the winners, there appear several recipients who can be classified as public intellectuals. By scrutinising the biographical characteristics of these prize-winners, I have constructed a sample of the Nobel Peace laureates who worked in or around academia, journalism or related cultural fields, while also devoting themselves with great courage to changing the social and intellectual conditions of their own societies and, on occasion, of the entire international community. My sample therefore consists of twelve Nobel Peace Prize laureates who were (or are) writers, journalists, academics or scientists and who have spoken on important social, political or cultural issues to the general non-specialist public. The common characteristics of these public intellectuals therefore are, by definition, both creativity (which earns them recognition in their respective professional fields and helps them to legitimise their creative social initiatives and programmes) and courage (as, according to the formal criteria for the award, the Nobel Peace Prize is granted for brave and disinterested public involvement and for courageous action to defend and spread civic values, human rights, peace and democracy).

In summary, I shall examine intellectuals' real public involvement and recurrent patterns in the activities of my sample in order both to demonstrate that intellectuals can make a difference to societal well-being and to suggest that we can learn from what they have done. I am interested in the recognised cases of creativity and civil courage in which public intellectuals, those producers of ideas who take their ideas outside their professional fields to the general public, have managed to earn recognition for their contributions to social improvement. In other words, the focus of this book is on the successful achievement by intellectuals of their goals of spreading a specific message and winning people over to their point of view. It is not a book about the pre-eminence of intellectuals nor a nostalgic call for the return of the intellectual as the moral consciousness of the nation. Rather, it is, in the first place, a contribution to the understanding of intellectuals who have been the subject of many puzzling claims and contradictory

evaluations. Second, despite the compelling reasons for attaching primary importance to creativity and courage, there is no major study of either from a sociological perspective. I therefore aim to fill this gap and to increase our awareness of the importance of both features for the enrichment of democracy. If, as Zygmunt Bauman (2002) suggests, one of the main tasks of contemporary sociology is to inform people about the social forces that threaten to reduce freedom and political democracy, it is essential to study the role of creative imagination in the elaboration of political goals and in the resistance to symbolic domination. It is similarly vital to explore the difference that civil courage makes to the functioning of institutions and to the scope and quality of civil society.

The outline of the book

As the book has both theoretical-analytic and empirical components, it is divided into two parts. The first part, Theoretical framework, is devoted to elaborating the conceptualisation of the main ideas, in particular the authority of intellectuals, creativity and courage. This part also contains the elaboration of a typology of intellectual engagements based on the categories of pioneer, dissident, hero and champion. In the first chapter I examine the debates on the definition of and change in the role and the authority of intellectuals. After a brief presentation of various ways of understanding the role of public intellectual, I address the question of what gives intellectuals the authority to speak to non-specialised audiences on matters of general concern. Chapter 1 develops the argument that, in order to establish a reputation for being likely to have important contributions to make to their societies and for having the capacity and courage to do so, intellectuals need to evince creativity and civil courage. Such a conceptualisation of public intellectual authority focuses our attention on the contemporary convergence of knowledge and public voice as the basis of intellectuals' public authority.

In chapter 2 I move on to analyse the notion of creativity, a topic long debated within a number of different research paradigms and traditions. I note its evolution from the aura of elusiveness, enigma and myth through being a mirror of modernity to its status today as both 'the weapon of the weak' (Lofgren 2001: 73) and a fashionable commercial strategy. I argue that, as both social and natural sciences shift towards stressing the conceptual centrality of contingency and context dependency, any account of different forms of creativity should incorporate the permanent reality of risk and of multiple relationships between the formal and the informal. I conclude by identifying forms of creativity

and arguing that public intellectuals' engagement in shared projects of imagining a better democratic future concentrates our attention on one specific type of creativity, namely 'civic creativity', conceived of as a creativity that provides us with ideas on how to democratise and humanise the workings of modern societies.

Chapter 3 discusses what the social sciences, in general, can tell us about the complex phenomenon of courage and looks for answers to such questions as what is courage? And what are the relations between courage and risk, courage and loyalty to the group and courage and nonconformity? Starting with a classical view of courage as the greatest of all virtues, I construct a sociological account of civil courage as disinterested, nonconformist and dealing with difficulties and risky actions that are motivated by the ideals of civil society.

In the final chapter of part I, I develop a sociological approach to creativity and courage by proposing a general typology of intellectuals' public involvement. As the study of intellectual authority needs to be 'the study of the making of careers' (Collini 2006: 56), the first step towards the construction of a taxonomy of public intellectuals' courageous actions requires the analysis of recurrent patterns of intellectuals' activities in the public sphere. In the next step towards a typology of the involvement of intellectuals in the public sphere, the links between the configurations of social relationships and civil courage displayed by intellectuals are discussed. This discussion starts with debates as to the nature of the socio-political contexts that shape intellectual autonomy, and therefore the audiences and media available to public intellectuals.

Part II, Public intellectuals: the case of the Nobel Peace Prize laureates, consists of five chapters, each of which comes with notes that enrich our knowledge of the studied cases. In this part, I offer extensive material on a sample of those Nobel Peace Prize laureates who can be classified as public intellectuals. Detailed examination of their lives, creative achievements, courageous behaviour and disinterested contributions to public life illustrates the concepts and typology developed in part I. I present a compact history of the Nobel Peace Prize and its objectives, followed by a summary introduction to the public intellectuals to whom it has been awarded. The successive chapters provide both an illustration and a validation of my typology of the involvement of intellectuals in the public sphere. Chapter 6 presents three portraits of heroes. It describes the careers, works and lives of Jane Addams, Fridtjof Nansen and Elie Wiesel, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1933, 1922 and 1968 respectively. Chapter 7 offers the characterisation of the dissident, by examining the cases of three intellectuals who were politicised: Carl von Ossietzky (awarded the prize in 1935), Andrei Sakharov (1975) and

Adolfo Pérez Esquivel (1980). Chapter 8 depicts instances of the third category, champions. It portrays Norman Angell (1933), Emily Greene Balch (1946) and Alva Myrdal (1982) in their roles as campaigners for various kinds of social and political reform. Chapter 9, which is devoted to the presentation of the pioneer, examines the careers, works and lives of three scientists, John Boyd Orr (1949), Linus Pauling (1962) and Norman Borlaug (1970), who addressed some of the perennial problems affecting humanity at large, in particular hunger and war.

In the conclusion I revisit some earlier themes in the light of my analysis of the twelve individual cases and restate the case for the vital role of creativity and courage in the sustainable development of any democracy. If this case is accepted, it will be clear that the enhancement of civic sensitivity requires the deliberate cultivation of opportunities for civil courage and use of the creative imagination.

Part I

Theoretical framework