

37. For a discussion of the elaboration of managerial structures as part of a response to class struggle, see Dan Clawson, *Class Struggle and the Rise of Bureaucracy*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Sociology Dept., SUNY, Stonybrook, 1978; Richards Edwards, *Contested Terrain* (New York: Basic Books, 1979); and Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State*, pp. 67 - 71.
38. To my knowledge no really good systematic data exists on changes in the degree of control of workers over the labor process over time. As should be clear from the discussion of occupation and class earlier, it is impossible to use occupational statistics to answer this question. However, some indirect measures, as discussed in Wright and J. Singlemann, "Proletarianization in Advanced Capitalist Societies," *Institute for Research on Poverty Discussion Paper*, University of Wisconsin, 1978, do indicate that within specific sectors of the economy, there seems to be a tendency for autonomy to be reduced over time.

Review Article

A discussion of Magali Sarfatti Larson's *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).

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The professions as we know them today are of nineteenth and twentieth century origin. In the pre-industrial world, as Peter Laslett has written, "all that can now be said of *professional* people . . . is that . . . there were very, very few of them."¹ But in the nineteenth century, the professions expanded. In England, the growing "educated and professional classes" became a "new type of aristocracy."² In Germany, a "noneconomic middle class" based in the universities and in the civil service gained power as the educational system became the backbone of social stratification.³ In the United States, elites based on knowledge rose to prominence, higher education developed, and professionals helped link the educational system to the occupational order.

Not surprisingly, sociologists have taken some interest in the professions. They have examined the increasing status of formal education - Talcott Parsons has gone so far as to speak of a twentieth century "educational revolution" comparable in importance to the industrial and democratic revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries⁴ - and have observed the growing reliance in government, industry, and culture on specialization and technical expertise, the growing centrality of the professions in the occupational structure, and the apparent power of professions in fixing the cultural coordinates of public discourse and private lives. In American sociology, the study of professions has often assumed an ideological cast. When Talcott Parsons wrote in 1968 that "the development and increasing strategic importance of the professions probably constitute the most important change that has occurred in the occupational system of modern societies,"⁵ he was hunting big theoretical game. He

argued that the structural significance of professions, which he saw as self-governing collegial associations, is to reduce the importance of both the market and bureaucratic organization. As self-governing collegial associations become more prevalent and powerful, the market becomes less the center of the social stage. This means, Parsons suggests, that – contrary to Marx – the antagonism of worker and capital cannot be at the heart of modernity. And, as collegial organization becomes more important, bureaucratic organization also recedes in significance – contrary to Weber's expectations. For Parsons, then, professionalization gives the lie to both Marx's dream and Weber's nightmare. This is the Parsonian version of the end of ideology: Parsons points to the decline of institutional forms which called ideology into being.

This should indicate the importance of that recurrent question in the sociological study of professions: what is the relationship between professions and bureaucracy? If the professions are absorbed into bureaucratic organizations and fail to assert independent power, Weber's gloom cannot be dismissed. If, to go further, bureaucratization itself is, along with professionalization, a twin engine of advanced capitalism – opposed to the market but not opposed to corporate capital – then marxism merits another look.

In this lies the principal significance of Magali Sarfatti Larson's *The Rise of Professionalism*. The book is important and ambitious, if exasperating. The writing is muddy, sometimes nearly impenetrable. But Sarfatti Larson provides a fresh starting point for the sociology of professions. In brief, the new beginning she convincingly offers is this: the premier profession for the sociology of professions has been medicine – not medicine as it exists today but medicine as it once existed, an occupation of independent practitioners. It is this model of the professions which sees professional associations as opposed to bureaucratic organization. In professions, the story goes, organization is democratic and authority is based on possession of knowledge and skill. In bureaucracies, organization is hierarchical and authority is based on official position. But Sarfatti Larson argues that this contrast is misleading. Typical professions today are not antithetical to bureaucracies but are dependent on incorporation into them. This includes even the once independent profession of medicine. What she calls the "professional project" – a concern with establishing high social status for individual professionals independent of their organizational affiliation – acts to reinforce dominant bourgeois ideology. It makes professionals themselves, proletarianized functionaries though they may be, believe themselves to have the autonomy that free

professionals once actually possessed. They think they have discretionary power when, in fact, they command only "powerless discretion" (237). If Sarfatti Larson is right, not only is professional organization not a solution to the ills of modernity, it is part of the problem. Not only is the sociology of professions a failure at analysis, it is a prop of bourgeois ideology. That is a powerful indictment to come from a book as careful, as dense, as scholarly as this one, and I want to discuss it at some length.

The Argument in Context

The problem Sarfatti Larson begins with is described in her introduction. In the sixties, she wondered why college teachers on strike were accused of behaving "like longshoremen" and why architects in San Francisco resisted unionizing as "unprofessional".

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? (x)

Why Sarfatti Larson regards professionals as subordinate and powerless we shall get to. But taking her question as posed, I would say it has two likely answers. First, the answer that assumes "economic man" would be that professionals, by some means, gain greater material reward by not unionizing than by unionizing. Somehow, professionalization is an independent path to control of a market and economic resources. Second, the pure "sociological" answer would be that human beings are as eager to maximize status as to maximize wealth and that often, when the two aims conflict, people will seek to enhance status rather than to enlarge income. One traditional way of indicating status, of course, is to manifest disdain for money.

Sarfatti Larson's answer is more complicated. For the early nineteenth century, she sees professionals as "economic men" and so sides with the economist; for the late nineteenth century and since, she sees professionals as motivated by a drive for status, and so joins the sociologist. But she is a marxist sociologist here. For her, the concern with status is a kind of false consciousness. Status may offer real satisfactions, but it blinds professionals to the more basic fact that, in relation to the means of production, they share with other workers the fate of subordination and powerlessness.



Let me set this position in the context of other work in the sociology of professions. Roughly speaking, there have been three kinds of definitions of "profession" in sociology. The conventional definition seeks to distinguish professions from other occupations in terms of the character of the work itself. Typically, this kind of definition emphasizes that professional work requires "the possession of an intellectual technique acquired by special training," in the words of Carr-Saunders and Wilson.⁶

A second definition holds that it is not possible to distinguish the professions by the nature of their work or training. What is distinctive about professions is nothing intrinsic to the work of professionals but is simply the status-honor they somehow accrue. A profession, then, is any occupation which a given society regards as a profession. As in "labeling theory" in the study of deviance, this kind of definition focuses on the power of society to create reality by classifying and categorizing the world as it chooses. Social recognition is the crucial feature in defining a profession, for it affords the profession its credit, its distinctive moral authority. According to Everett Hughes, it provides the profession with a license to control a certain arena of work and with a mandate to define the meaning of that work for society at large.⁷ The focus, then, of this definition is on the claims the profession makes about itself, the fact that society acknowledges the claims, and the consequent high position in the status ordering of occupational groups the professions attain.

If this second definition may be called revisionist, the third may be termed "critical". The second argues that reality is socially constructed and that a profession is to be understood in terms of the process by which its definition comes to be agreed upon. The critical definition agrees that reality is socially constructed but emphasizes that "social construction" is not a random process but a political war. A profession is not a particular social evaluation of an occupation but a particular form of political control over work which an occupation gains. The "mandate" is not to define an area of meaning so much as to control a political-economic domain. This can mean both control over conditions in the workplace and control over market position. The emphasis in the sociology of professions is on the latter, particularly on how professions restrict access to the training and certification that provides membership. Where the conventional definition draws attention to the cognitive foundations of a profession, the revisionist definition emphasizes the moral division of labor and moral evaluation of a profession, and the critical definition focuses on the autonomy a profession possesses. This view has been argued in England by Terence Johnson in *Professions and Power* (1972).

For Johnson, a profession is not a kind of occupation but a means of controlling an occupation. Professionalization is not a process of upgrading the essential character of a kind of work but a political process of gaining greater control over work.⁸

While this critical position is typically understood as a "radical" analysis in its emphasis on power, it has little in common with Sarfatti Larson's position. Where radical critics of professions attack the mammoth powers of the A.M.A. or corporate lawyers, Sarfatti Larson emphasizes instead that most professions and professionals have very little power. Her position is nearer the revisionist stance: what professionals seek and gain is status. But status, for Sarfatti Larson, is a mirage. Typically in modern societies, professions fail to translate their status into power or autonomy. Further, professional status becomes a barrier to a just and equal society – not because professions have usurped power from clients but because the ideology of professionalism seduces professionals, and others, into believing in bourgeois institutions.

Clearly, this is an area where Sarfatti Larson may be challenged. Do professionals have power or not? Sarfatti Larson's neglect of the usual radical critics of professions is unfortunate. I believe she is at odds with most of the critics of professions who will be turning to her book for support. I do not think they will find comfort, for two reasons. First, most critics of professions emphasize the plight of the client in the face of professional power – think, for instance, of feminist criticism of the medical profession's usurpation of women's control over their own bodies.⁹ Sarfatti Larson, in contrast, devotes just two pages to the relations of professionals and clients. There she argues that professionals may have any of four orientations to their clients: they may be (1) manipulative, (2) indifferent, (3) hostile, or (4) partisan, redefining the professional ideal of service as one of advocacy of the client in the interest of social change. But all this is largely irrelevant to Sarfatti Larson. She urges us to think of "technobureaucratic" professions, like engineering, rather than the independent professions, like nineteenth century medicine, in arriving at an understanding of professionalism. And, as she writes, "the typical technobureaucratic professions cannot even be considered indifferent to their clients: *they simply do not have any autonomous orientation toward the clients, except indirectly*" (189). Their orientation to the client is mediated entirely by the corporations they serve. Where most critics of professions examine the presumption of professionals in relation to clients, Sarfatti Larson concentrates on the subordination of professionals in relation to the larger institutional complex of corporate capitalism.

Second, most critics of professions attend to the ideological role of specific professions in defining social reality – medicine and law teach us to seek individual solutions to structurally-induced distress while social scientists try to make us believe that political issues are technical ones that only experts can handle.¹⁰ Sarfatti Larson has some astute comments on this topic herself (225), but her emphasis is unusual. Most critics attend to the ways specific professions shape public discourse and the private lives of ordinary citizens. In this context, engineering is of negligible importance while medicine commands preeminent cultural authority.¹¹ A medical model of social reality has directly influenced not only how we understand bodily ills but how we fathom the ills of the body politic. As Christopher Lasch has argued, beginning early in this century educators, psychiatrists, social workers, penologists, and others in the helping professions came to see themselves as “doctors to a sick society” and they demanded “the broadest possible delegation of medical authority in order to heal it.”¹² But Sarfatti Larson is interested only in passing in how *specific professional ideologies* control the public; her central concern is in how the *general ideology of professionalism* pacifies professionals themselves. While this is a vital matter, it is largely independent of the questions which normally exercise both reformers and revilers of the professions

The Argument in Detail

Sarfatti Larson argues that there exists something she calls a professional “project”. This means, she explains, that one can find “coherence and consistence” in a variety of apparently unconnected acts. No sociologist would quarrel with this. Argument comes, of course, over where one sees a coherent pattern. Conventionally, in the sociology of professions, coherence is seen in a pattern of professionalization based on the medical model. In contrast, Sarfatti Larson sees coherence in a pattern of incorporation and subordination of professions to bureaucratic organizations, approximating the model of engineering. She observes that “project” also means a “planned undertaking,” and the word cannot be extricated from the idea of conscious, planned activity. Also, she holds that professionals have goals and strategies even though these may not be “entirely clear or deliberate for all the members.” Her book tries to define these goals and strategies. Simply, there are two in the modern history of professions.

1) First, there is the effort to control markets, which dominated the early organizing of free professionals. Second, there is the “collective mobility project” to gain status, of greater weight in professions of the late nineteenth century and since. There is a third meaning of “project” which

Larson does not elaborate but which, in other terms, she makes a major point of her book. This would be the Freudian meaning of “project”. As Sarfatti Larson writes:

While economic interests moved the bulk of each class’ armies into position, what shaped the battles was the striving for hegemony within each class – that is, the striving for an idealized and organizing image of itself and the social order that each class both consciously and unconsciously projected. (91)

An important aspect of professions is that they do *project* an image of themselves or, in other words, they have an ideology. Indeed, whatever the real or material contributions of professionals may be to a social system in building bridges or curing diseases, as a whole the professions serve an indispensable ideological function: “Today, individualized service becomes an ideological remedy for the ills of a social situation, a screen for the social problems caused by the bureaucratic systems through which services are delivered – most notably in the medical and teaching professions” (236).

I want to take up each meaning of “project” in turn. First, is the process of professionalization in the past two centuries “coherent and consistent” on the model of engineering? Second, has professionalization been a more or less conscious strategy of occupational groups? Third, can it truly be said that the images professionals project serve central ideological functions in advanced capitalism?

Is there a coherent professional project? Here the crucial argument is in chapter three, the case study of the professional success of medicine in England and in the United States since the early nineteenth century. Sarfatti Larson’s strategy is to show that the case of medicine is unique and therefore a poor choice as the basic profession on which to hang an entire sociology. Medicine, she indicates, is unlike other professions in that it controls a complex organization, the hospital; it serves sacred values more clearly than other professions; it has an organic connection to science which has enabled it to operate from a secure cognitive base; its clientele is unorganized and unspecialized and hence weak in the face of the profession; its market is potentially limitless; and, historically, the severe competition in the medical market propelled a successful drive for professional organization. Other professions have some of these features but no other has all of them. The lesson for sociology is clear: do not expect other professions to behave like medicine.

For Sarfatti Larson, engineering rather than medicine is the typical profession and the one more appropriate as the sociologists' model for professions in general. This point, made early in the volume, culminates in the book's next to last chapter on the growth of organizational professions. One set of such professions has grown out of corporate capitalism's concentrated management - hospital administrators and management professionals of all sorts. A second set has grown out of the expansion of state functions - all levels of teaching, social work, librarianship, city planning, and others. The point of the chapter is persuasive: "In a bureaucratized world, professions can no longer be interpreted as inherently antibureaucratic. Both professions and bureaucracy belong to the same historical matrix: they consolidate in the early 20th century as distinct but nevertheless complementary modes of work organization" (199). Even traditional professions come increasingly to operate within bureaucracies. All professionals enter the world of work with a name, rank, and serial number acquired during training at a large bureaucratic organization, a university. The university becomes the central bureaucratic apparatus for determining stratification within professions.

I think Sarfatti Larson is right to demonstrate the failings of a sociology of professions based on the model of nineteenth century medicine. She makes a good case that the history of the free professions - law and medicine - is unique. Their early search for market control "represented a necessary but nevertheless provisional and temporary stage in the status project that is generally called 'professionalization'" (216). The history of the free professions has little to do with the history of the clergy or the military, which never entered a market sphere (219). It has little to do with organizational or technobureaucratic professions. The extent to which, in engineering, for example, even the so-called technical "knowledge base" of engineering is intimately tied to norms of capitalist production is convincingly demonstrated in David Noble's recent study, but nowhere dreamed of in the conventional sociology of professions.¹³ If Sarfatti Larson is right, the project of the free or classic professions around which the sociology of professions has been built was "only a brief episode in the story of professionalization." The conflict between bureaucracy and professions, then, so dear to the heart of mainstream sociology, is "not so much a conflict between two different structures as it is a contrast between the structure of bureaucratic organizations and an ideology promoted by some of their members" (219).

This is a crucial point, made more forcefully by Sarfatti Larson than by anyone else. But it comes perilously close to explaining away, rather than

explaining, the phenomenon of professionalism Sarfatti Larson wanted to understand in the first place. The argument reduces professions to professionalism, occupational roles or functions to the ideology about them. As the book's title says, this is an account of "professionalism," not of professions. Its focus is on the *idea* of the profession which "professionals" use as a "last-ditch defense against subordination" (219). It is the one thing, Sarfatti Larson writes, that all professionals have in common - not knowledge, not autonomy, but an ideology (219). This is an odd position. Its peculiarity is that it tends to eliminate the very phenomenon most observers, of all political persuasions, wondered about in the first place - the rise of occupations based on systematic or scientific knowledge, occupations with cultural rather than monetary capital. For Sarfatti Larson, these people do not represent, in Alvin Gouldner's terms, a "new class."¹⁴ They are just bureaucrats with the funny notion that they have and should have the freedom of a nineteenth century physician. Sarfatti Larson sees this as ideology; with but slight caricature, the portrait can be viewed as one not of ideology, but of folly, an occupational disease of mental workers.

The ideology of professionalism is insanity in professionals only if (a) it does not represent the actual condition of professionals and (b) it gets them no closer to the conditions they aspire to. Is this the case? Are professionals as powerless as Sarfatti Larson suggests? Is a professional incorporated in a bureaucracy a professional without power? In some key instances, clearly not. As Sarfatti Larson acknowledges, medicine in bureaucracy is *not* powerless; the medical profession controls its major institutional complex, the hospitals (38). This is not typical, of course, but medicine is a rather weighty exception to leave aside in arriving at a new view of professions. Engineers, as a corporate body, do not have control comparable to the medical profession's. But does this mean that engineers are subordinate within the corporations they work in? David Noble observes that between 1904 and 1929 more than two thirds of engineering school graduates became managers in industry fifteen years after graduation. In the 1920s, not only did an engineer become President, but engineering classmates at M.I.T. were the chief executives of General Motors, Singer Sewing Machine, General Electric, Du Pont, and Goodyear.¹⁵ It is possible, of course, to overestimate the importance of the "managerial revolution," but it is not prudent to ignore it. Sarfatti Larson is right to argue that professions are not antithetical to bureaucracy, but she is mistaken to suggest that they are altogether swallowed by bureaucracies. She acknowledges a range of relationships of professionals to bureaucracies but does not develop this very far. The job for a

sociology of professions, it would appear, is not to jump at one relationship or another as the key relationship but to describe and analyze the range.

Is professionalization a conscious strategy? This issue Sarfatti Larson handles least well. All of her historical material comes to the same conclusion: in both England and the United States, in every period from the early nineteenth century on, in every profession, the "professional project" of seeking market control or social status has been carried out. This is most unsatisfying. Sarfatti Larson here is not asking questions of historical materials but scavenging through history to support a theoretical position which is a good deal less interesting than it at first appears.

It is true, as Sarfatti Larson argues, that professions have sought market control or status or both. So does a sociologist who writes a book on the rise of professionalism. So does a sociologist who reviews a book on professionalism. So does a journal which publishes the review. The sociologists and the journal may have other aims, as well, but we are not exempt in our act of publication from trying to consolidate positions in an economically competitive field or to raise our status in the eyes of relevant publics. It seems to me far-fetched to imagine professional activity which *cannot* be reasonably regarded in some manner as an effort at gaining market control or social status. Then to assimilate the entire modern history of the professions to this "project" is to paper over practically all of the interesting historical questions.

Let me offer just one example, using information which Sarfatti Larson herself provides. In chapters seven and eight, she compares the professional projects in England and the United States in the nineteenth century. She argues that the main difference was that American professions had fewer traditional supports for status than did British professions (113). Consequently, American professionals focused on the quest for market monopoly where they had some chance for success rather than on the quest for status, where possibilities for successfully gaining status were slim. Sarfatti Larson is sensitive here to the different contexts in which professionalization occurs and the different resources and strategies available to professions in different historical situations. Despite this sensitivity, she is still insistent that the professional project itself can be understood as invariant and that, in both England and the United States, the professional project did not attack but legitimated the larger class structure.

Let us look at the American case. Sarfatti Larson's main evidence that

American professions in the Jacksonian era did not undermine stratification is her assertion that there was internal stratification in the professions. If professionals in America made some concessions to popular democracy, it was "because the *internal stratification* of the professions was not threatened" (134). Thus she is inclined to minimize the importance of the repeal, in state after state, of licensing requirements for law and medicine during the 1830s and 1840s - this did not really matter very much, she argues, because informal mechanisms still preserved stratification within the professions. But, in fact, medicine in Jacksonian America was in such internal disarray that any ranking of physicians in a system of "internal stratification" was well nigh impossible. True, physicians from the upper class treated the upper class and practitioners from the lower class served the lower class. But a "profession" as a whole composed of self-conscious "professionals" with a common "project" did not exist. Not only did "regular" doctors differ from various sects, but many regular doctors became homeopaths. The A.M.A. organized in part to combat homeopathy, but in its early years the A.M.A., "which was not much more than another sect itself," according to Sarfatti Larson, did not have the power to impose its views on medicine at large. Sarfatti Larson casually refers to differences between "elites" and "rank-and-file" in the professions, but she offers no evidence of what that distinction could have meant at the time. We know there is sharp internal stratification in the professions today, but it is a mistake to read this back into an earlier era. To the extent that the profession was self-conscious, the main distinctions within it were ideological - what therapeutic ideology and practice one followed provided the main line of identification and division in the profession. Medicine was sectarian, not hierarchical.¹⁶

Now, if there was little internal stratification to protect, perhaps the compromises of the professions with popular democracy were not so meaningless after all. Perhaps we need to take seriously the kind of evidence Gary Nash presents on the Philadelphia bar, that the proportion of college-educated lawyers *declined* between 1800 and 1860 from more than two-thirds of the bar to less than half.¹⁷ And perhaps the tearing down of licensing laws, the movements to democratize both legal theory and practice (through codification of the common law), and the movements to found medical therapies on grounds accessible to the ordinary citizen all need more careful attention.

I do not want to quarrel over historical details in a book that quite legitimately seeks to use historiography rather than to write it. My point is simply that Sarfatti Larson stands too far removed from her materials.

Even when she documents the complexity of history, which she often does, she fails to genuinely use the complexity. Her argument is built on, but not of, her evidence. Thus, while the historical sections of the book are the most concrete, they are the most difficult to read. The historical materials serve as foundation for the argument, but not as scaffolding. They offer grounding, not a shape or structure. The design of the argument, then, in relation to the historical evidence, seem too often arbitrary.

Finally, what of Sarfatti Larson's argument that professions serve a central ideological function for the capitalist order? She comes to this question in the last and longest chapter of the book, "Monopolies of Competence and Bourgeois Ideology." She has set the stage well, particularly in her chapter on the growth of the corporation, the state, and the modern university in the Progressive era. In that chapter, she elaborates an important distinction: when professions affirm their collective worth, they provide their members support for individual dignity and individual careers. This distinguishes them from unions. In professions, "individual differentiation, even though it must be attained within a collectivity and by collective means," is a goal and a promise; in labor unions, this is not so. This answers the book's original question: the reason professionals resist unionization is that professional association promises attention to the individual and the individual's autonomous career and personal worth. This is reminiscent of the argument Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb make in *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, and Sarfatti Larson makes good use of their work here. The power of the ideology of professionalism, she holds, is that people regard professionals as morally superior. "The hierarchy of competence is presented and lived, from early childhood on, as coincident with a *moral* hierarchy of intelligence, effort, dignity, and freedom" (241). Professionals expect and get deference. "Is this because of their ability, because of their capacity to help a person in need, because of their credentials, or because of the symbols of their class and status position?" Sarfatti Larson asks the question and answers that "it is impossible to say, and it does not really matter" (242). The point for her is that the ideology, whatever its roots, legitimates an unjust society. As she writes, "even the purest and worthiest of professional behaviors cannot help legitimizing inequality and elitism by their factual demonstration that knowledge is beneficent power" (243).

The argument is well made. The last chapter is the most passionately and ably written in the book. I think she is persuasive in arguing that the idea of professions in the twentieth century legitimates social inequality. Just

as, in another era, Horatio Alger's heroes worked hard, got some lucky breaks, or found nurturing guardians and so got ahead, today's paragon of mobility works hard, gets into a professional school, and gets ahead. As Sarfatti Larson suggests, this masks the fact that most professionals have little autonomy in their work and it covers over the steep internal stratification within professions – not even all lawyers, doctors, or M.B.A.s find income, security, or autonomy in their careers.

While the idea of professionalism serves an important ideological function, I wonder if this has been a very significant aspect of American ideology until the last generation. As Sarfatti Larson shows, the professional project in this country was well established during and soon after the Progressive era. Yet in 1910, only 5% of college-aged young people were enrolled in higher education. Even in 1940 only 14.5% of 18 to 21 year olds were in college.¹⁸ Whether the idea of professionalism mattered very much to very many people before the development of mass higher education after World War II is a question one could empirically investigate. My hunch is that the idea of professionalism was an insignificant support of the social order until college and then professional credentials came to be viewed as nearly indispensable for advancement in the world. This did not happen until the 1950s. Until then, American ideology of individualism and self-fulfillment seemed to manage quite handily without help from the idea of profession.

Thus, if the ideological function of professionalism helps describe its current status, it does little to help us understand the sources of the ideology. Further, even if the idea of professionalism does have some role in maintaining the social system, this does not by any means preclude its having some subversive power as well. It just won't do to point to one meaning of an ideology or set of symbols and assume one has located *the* meaning. Symbols or ideologies rarely have single sources or simple functions. They have multiple meanings and they can be used for multiple, even contradictory, ends. If the notion that professions are oriented to service can be a shield for self-interest, it can also be a weapon in the hands of some professional segments for reform of a profession – and it was used precisely in this way in any number of professions in the sixties. Sarfatti Larson's observations on the ideological function of professionalism are excellent, but they fail to establish just how important the function she points to has been and they fail to indicate that an ideology of such broad sweep will have many uses and many meanings.

It is not easy to understand the place of the professions in modern soci-

ety. There is not even agreement on what phenomena we are referring to when we talk about professions. Sarfatti Larson offers a new direction here: look at engineering, she tells us, rather than medicine. That's an engaging and provocative idea. But then, I wonder, why not engineering and medicine? Can't we keep two things in our sociological heads at once? But that would open another question: what do medicine and engineering have in common? That they are both "mental work"? That doctors and engineers both have cultural capital? That they are both occupations regarded as professions? That doctors and engineers are both deferred to as morally superior beings? In this manner, we wind our way back to the beginning, wondering what we are to mean by "profession" anyway. Sarfatti Larson's effort to sort this out tries to set a becalmed sociology of professions on a new tack. If, in the end, we are still not sailing in open seas, this may have less to do with her considerable skills at the rudder than with the nature of the craft.

NOTES

1. Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 52.
2. G. Kitson Clark, *The Making of Victorian England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 274.
3. Fritz Ringer, *Decline of the German Mandarins* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 15-16.
4. Talcott Parsons, *The System of Modern Societies* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 94.
5. Talcott Parsons, "Professions," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1968).
6. A.M. Carr-Saunders and P.A. Wilson, "Professions," *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1933).
7. Everett C. Hughes, "The Study of Occupations," in Robert K. Merton, Leonard Broom, and Leonard S. Cottrell, eds., *Sociology Today* (New York: Basic Books, 1959), p. 447.
8. Terence Johnson, *Professions and Power* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 45.
9. Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Complaints and Disorders: The Sexual Politics of Sickness* (Old Westbury, N.Y.: The Feminist Press, 1973).
10. Both points have been frequently made. For a key text on individualistic definitions of structural problems, see C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959). For a text on the ideology of expertise, see Jürgen Habermas, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology,'" in *Toward a Rational Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970).
11. I borrow the apt phrase "cultural authority" from Paul Starr.
12. Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p. 15.
13. David Noble, *America by Design* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977).
14. Alvin Gouldner, *The Rise of Intellectuals and the Future of the New Class* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979).
15. David Noble, p. 310.

16. See, for instance, Richard Shryock, *Medicine and Society in America: 1660-1860* (New York: New York University Press, 1960) and Charles Rosenberg, *The Cholera Years* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
17. Gary Nash, "The Philadelphia Bar and Bench, 1800-1861," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 7 (January, 1965), 203-220.
18. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington, D.C., 1960).

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