

PROFESSIONALISM: A STUDY IN PROFESSIONAL DEFORMATION[†]

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The continued performance of a certain profession or trade creates in the individual a deformation of the reasoning processes and of the sane valuation of the importance of his activity in the social labor of the community to which he belongs.

First of all, such deformation is largely a matter of adaptation to environment. Certain surroundings may for the generality of the social group and under normal economic conditions be absolutely repugnant to the individual, yet, if endured long enough, they become dear through long association, like vice in the old familiar verse:

Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As to be hated needs but to be seen;
But seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

There are to be found in actual life a great many instances of such a reconciliation of the individual with decidedly bad conditions under the influence of the power of habit and the inertia generated by repetition. Certain kinds of labor are performed under such conditions that even the most pressing status of economic necessity is unable to induce the vast majority of the potential laborers to give them a trial, and yet in these works it is generally possible to meet "old-timers," men who have grown gray and old in the performance of these almost universally shunned duties. In the great majority of such cases there may be a certain amount of conceit, but very seldom will one meet with a well-characterized deformation

[†] Space is given to this paper because for several reasons it represents a type of opinion to which sociologists must give a hearing. The main theorem is an important datum of social psychology. Alleged facts and interpretations in the writer's elaboration of the datum are largely partisan opinions. The editors are in no way responsible for them beyond consenting to allow the author a medium of publication.

of the normal mind. Most generally we find a kind of dull resignation, which leads the individual to accept unthinkingly conditions to which the vast majority object.

Professionalism, in the more limited sense of the word, results in the production of certain definite idiosyncrasies, illogical in fact, which are, however, the outcome of a slow process of deformation of which the individual is not conscious. To the outside observer alone is the ultimate result of such a process painfully obvious.

Through the continued performance of a certain function and the repetitions of the various actions required by such a performance, the individual adopts an estimation of that function which is both absolutely and relatively unwarranted. The inertia of the human mind is brought into play. An exaggerated importance is attached to the systematic performance of an established sequence, and every infringement upon such an established order is not considered on the basis of its intrinsic bearing upon the result sought, but condemned as a violation of an established custom raised beyond the boundaries of admissible criticism.

Professional deformation is largely influenced by surroundings and by the initial mentality of the human element in which it is noticed. It will be especially noticeable in all the lines of activity where the labor of the individual is not separated from his life as a consumer of food, clothing, shelter, etc. In every instance where an individual can be considered always on duty, if not always at work, wherever his life is closely interwoven with his productive or unproductive activity, we find the greatest amount of professional deformation. Thus is established the "institutional type," of which the soldier, the sailor, the monk, the prisoner, the jail-keeper, and several others are the best-known examples.

For two kinds of labor performed under identical conditions the less productive socially will always entail the greatest amount of professional deformation.

The various social types react against professional deformation to the extent that they are normal. Pathological types are first and deepest affected. A class-conscious proletarian is almost impervious, while the slum-proletariat is specially remarkable for the ease and the speed with which it falls a prey to professional deformation.

The study of the most obvious and best-known cases of professional deformation will provide us with a great many of instances susceptible of leading to a general synthetical view of the subject and also to an understanding of the utility of such deformation as a factor of social dynamics.

The military establishment is perhaps the most conspicuous instance of social deformation. The continued observance of military discipline creates a reaction which leads the individual to exact from his inferiors the same unquestioning obedience which he mechanically yields to his superior officers. Such a retaliation leads in practice to cruelty and abuse. The cruelties practiced in all armies during the period of instruction of the recruits confirm this conclusion.

When such treatment is challenged in the press or in parliament by the champions of civil authority, the answer most frequently given is unintelligible to the general public, because it starts from a condition of professional bias limited to the military. Officers are in the habit of exacting from their inferiors a certain amount of callousness as an initiation to promotion. The professional deformation of the latest arrivals proves itself to be complete when students of Annapolis or West Point brought before a committee of Congress are affected by a sudden lapse of memory concerning their compulsory participation in hazing practices. Such a mental bias is the destruction of every manifestation of individuality and must perforce lead to a condition of subserviency which is only too much in evidence in all military affairs. War department reports are generally made to comply with the views of the officers to whom they are addressed, if these can be ascertained beforehand. In the Dreyfus case a general reported very favorably concerning the artillery officer when he believed that he had powerful friends at court; but when the same general was asked for a report a few months later he completely reversed himself to comply with what he now knew to be the wish of the general staff in its attempt to railroad an innocent man to jail and disgrace because he was a Jew in religion and a republican in politics.

The professional deformation in the individual leads to *esprit de corps* or clannishness in the group. Military and naval officers

consider themselves a superior class or caste in society, inaugurate their own ethics and traditions, and aim to exercise upon the destinies of nations an influence which is out of alignment with the original purpose of national defense which justifies their existence.

To witness the *esprit de corps* of the military, one has only to be present at army maneuvers in European countries. Deep-seated comradeships between potential adversaries on the battlefields of tomorrow spring up which in military history have had real influence upon the outcome of military operations. The headquarters of the foreign attachés are regular market-places where new military devices are exhibited and peddled to the highest bidder and there is laid the technical foundation of that international war trust, with its galaxy of gold-braided officers as stockholders, whose participation and material interest in war President David Starr Jordan has so convincingly exposed.

In the navies of the world the fellowship of professional navy officers has been consecrated by a code of rules enforced in every seaport on the face of the earth, and nobody has ever witnessed this exchange of visits, with their character of familiarity and comradeship, without gaining the impression that they impaired the value of the navy as an agent of national defense.

Similar scenes are enacted on land, though less frequently, when troops are drilling near the boundary lines of their respective countries and officers meet and toast each other. In the course of such gatherings there is abroad a general if tacit approval of the theory that armies or navies are first of all an end in themselves and as such have interests different from, and superior to, those of the nations which have created them. In its accentuated form, such a notion leads to the contempt of civil government.

In the midst of the dramatic non-essentials of the Dreyfus affair the public lost sight of the fundamental principles involved. After her defeat in 1870-71, France felt the necessity of a strong army. So pressing was the necessity that even the republic's civilian war-ministers were willing to overlook the political opinions of her officers and the danger to the nation of the deranged mentality of her professional military. As a consequence, the general

staff of the army became an asylum for the partisans of the fallen monarchy and the overthrown empire, a point of vantage from which they could with alarming efficiency threaten republican institutions. Besides, the professionalism of the military became a danger for the country as a civil democracy. France found herself in the position of a farmer who has paid big money for a blooded watchdog only to wake up to the fact that the fierceness of the animal is a danger to his family.

Germany is in practically the same condition. German officers talk to and of civilians with unconcealed contempt. Strangers who had, through mere ignorance of local customs, taken seats habitually occupied in a café by army officers have frequently been insulted. Assumed military superiority asserts itself in the streets of German cities by army men claiming the use of the inside of a walk, which is by common courtesy granted to ladies. The vote of no confidence of the Reichstag, as a result of the Zabern incidents, proves that all democratic elements of the population are aware of the dangers of such a situation, while all reactionary parties uphold it, not on account of the intimate nature of the incidents, but on account of the usefulness of such a mentality in the general framework of an autocratic form of government.

Military professionalism was unconsciously upheld in the Reichstag by the imperial chancellor and the minister of war when they declared during the debate that, at all costs, the dignity of the military uniform must be upheld. We must here take into consideration the military code of professional ethics, which has become mixed with the survival of the privileges of the mediaeval nobility. These traditions required that, if the aggressor be an individual of low degree, disqualified by his birth or station in life from crossing swords or exchanging pistol-shots with a gentleman, nobleman, or professional officer, the latter had no alternative but to cut or shoot him down on the spot, regardless of the question whether he was armed or defenseless, strong or weak, large or small, able-bodied or crippled.

Military professionalism is not limited to commissioned officers. It permeates, although in a minor degree, even to the privates in the ranks. In national armies recruited through conscription this

deformation is diluted by the return of the soldier to the civil life of the nation after his period of active service has expired. Nevertheless, many German writers on social psychology agree that military professionalism leaves indelible marks and creates a predisposition in the individual to become influenced by the professional deformations resulting from the continuous practice of other forms of activity. In England, criminologists and magistrates have repeatedly pointed out the utter worthlessness of ex-soldiers for the productive activities of life. The British army is a volunteer army and its rank and file are not renewed with the periodical regularity of continental armies, and, besides, the authorities are anxious to see the men re-enlist and they foster their professional spirit accordingly.

In all armies, professional deformation is developed in the non-commissioned staff and even in the rank and file, because with the latter categories we do not find the resistance generated by intellectual discipline and training which may be expected from commissioned officers on account of the academic training required to pass the entrance examination to a special school.

This phenomenon is illustrated in the American army. The two main sources from which the army of the United States is recruited are: (a) the farmers' sons and agricultural laborers of the southeastern part of the United States, where agricultural wages are inferior to the army pay; (b) the unemployed. The first class belongs to the social category generally known as "crackers" or "poor whites." They are to the middle class of competitive individual farmers, local merchants, and small manufacturers what the slum-proletariat is to the wage-workers, a kind of social residuum. As a rule they are submissive, with a mentality naturally adapted to the acceptance of metaphysical quantities reduced to their simplest expression. Generally, they indulge in a lot of in-petto grumbling, but lack the necessary self-reliance to pool their grievances and to express them constructively. Their resistance to professional deformation is very low. As far as the unemployed are concerned, we may divide them in two very distinct categories. The slum-proletariat with its low resistance considers professional deformation as one of the attractions of the service. The opposite is true for

the normal wage-worker. To him the practical manifestations of professional deformation are irksome and repugnant. As soon as the lure of improved economic conditions and better opportunities for employment in civil life is added to this repugnance he begins to fret under the yoke of military discipline and, following the individualistic mode of protest of the American wage-earner, he finally deserts.

The least resisting elements to professional deformation are thus left to constitute the bulk of the rank and file and among such a class of men professionalism finds a favorable soil. Hundreds of instances could be quoted; a typical one will do.

No standing army in the world receives from its government the enjoyment of a higher grade of accommodations and quarters than the American army. As a matter of fact, these are not actually used, the men do not derive any benefits from them. The weekly inspections prevent their use. By the privates they are not considered as being primarily erected for use, but to be regularly inspected; and so great is the fear of these inspections that as soon as they are over all accommodations are locked up till the eve of the following inspection day, when they are cleaned and polished for the ceremony of the following morning. Inspections are the nightmare of the American soldier. The inspecting officer is described as a man "going around looking for trouble," and when reviews and inspections are over men behave as if they felt relieved from a great impending danger. On inspection days all other activities are suspended and hasty lunches are substituted for regular meals.

Munson, an army surgeon, has mentioned in his standard work on military hygiene the fallacy of a perfunctory cleanliness during a few ceremonial minutes on inspection day as a substitute for a reasonable degree of cleanliness during the remainder of the week, but without understanding the origin of the effect noticed.

Professionalism among the commissioned officers of this country's military establishment has been both increased and decreased by the original features which the American army has developed under the influence of special national conditions. It has been increased by the mode of living created under the system of army

posts, an inheritance from the days when the army was mainly used as a police force against the Indians. Under the post system the officer, even when at home in his private quarters, may be considered as being, to a certain extent, on duty. He never mingles with the civil life of the nation like the European officer, who, after his day's work, lives away from his barracks and becomes an everyday citizen. The social life of the American officer is based upon the use and frequently the abuse of government buildings, bands, supplies, conveyances, etc.

On the contrary, professional deformation is decreased by the wise disposition which makes appointments to Annapolis and West Point dependent upon the choice of the civil authorities. There can be no doubt that such a system has prevented the growth of military and naval families in which professional deformation is transmitted by heredity and whose existence is a menace to civil society.

Let us now consider the effect of professional deformation upon the liberal professions. The medical profession in the United States has recently adopted a code of medical ethics which has met in many quarters with a good deal of criticism on account of what certain people called an ultra-altruistic character. This character and its criticism can only remotely, if at all, be connected with the deforming influence of professional practice. The attitude of the medical profession in England after the vote of the Lloyd-George insurance bills, the many conflicts in all countries between the friendly societies and their medical staff, the differences of opinion between the New Zealand government and its medical practitioners, have all one common trait: a more or less openly expressed antipathy for preventive medicine, a feeling that there should be a modicum of disease in order that doctors may live. Some three years ago Mr. Bernard Shaw assailed the medical profession in his most vigorous manner. He stated that medical ethics and etiquette were only the cloaks for a huge conspiracy of silence against the public, professional etiquette in particular having for its object, not the health of the patient or of the community, but the concealment of the doctor's blunders and the protection of his livelihood.

The legal profession, both bench and bar, is not free from the inroads of professionalism. It was a favorite saying of Tolstoi that every man could always find good reasons to justify the way in which he made his living. When a man is conscious of being an unproductive laborer, he has a tendency to become reconciled to the defective institutions upon whose defects he thrives. The lawyer fighting the private battles of competing business-men becomes from a social point of view an agent of economic waste, just as the soldier who fights the public battles of competing nations. A long practice of his profession will cause him to overlook the social point of view and to consider the conflicts from which he derives his living as at least necessary and often unavoidable evils.

As for the judge, a long term spent on the bench will endow him, perhaps in a degree a little less forcibly expressed, with the mental condition of the jailer who asked: "If there were no more criminals, what would become of the jail-keepers?" Many old judges share the substance of such an opinion. The appointive prosecutors of European countries frequently see in every accused person a guilty person and they are not always very scrupulous in their efforts to convict or in the choice of the means which they use to influence the collective mentality of the jury.

There is a great deal of analogy between the psychology of the jailer and that of the professional charity-worker. In one of her books Miss Jane Addams, with the insight derived from long years of practical acquaintance with settlement work, insists upon the fact that the average charity-worker or paid agent of a relief institution is most always the scion of a family of the middle class or of a father who belongs to the liberal professions or is a social servant. The college training of these workers does not change the mentality which they have derived from the atmosphere in which they have been raised. Their reasoning runs in the metaphysical channels so dear to the contemporaries of the era of individual competition. Such a mentality makes a person unable to understand the mind processes of the working classes, whose existence is spent in connection with the closely regulated activities of machine-production.

From the point of view of the class-conscious worker, the acceptance of any form of charity brands one a slum-proletarian. The slum-proletariat is essentially predatory; and trickery, misrepresentation, and simulation are the means it uses to realize its parasitic tendencies. As a result of long years of dealing with this stratum of society, the charity-worker builds up for his personal use a scheme of social interrelations wherein all applicants are considered as frauds or approximations of frauds. The intricacy of statistical details and the minuteness of bureaucratic routine, quite frequently devoid of the slightest intrinsic value, cause the average charity agent to lose every bond of human affinity with the applicants.

Thus is produced that atmosphere of chilled sympathy and rough questioning in current use in every office of a charity organization. To a considerable part of the working class our actual organized charity seems inferior to the chaotic charity of old, when every bit of a gift was wrapped up in the personal kindness born out of a strong religious sentiment. The self-supporting worker can see no justification for the huge overhead expenses of organized charity, especially because the professional deformation of the employees of organized charity is to him exceedingly obvious.

Neither is this the worst count in his indictment. The co-existence of charity work with our social system develops in the professional a tendency to uphold such a system as a permanent one on account of the necessity of the corrective, which provides him with his means of livelihood. Hence the same professional has no sympathy for preventive charity or for any form of society which would automatically dispense with the necessity of an eleemosynary corrective.

In the case of ministers of the gospel, the professional deformation corresponding to the lengthy performance of the duties of the ministry is ritualism. It causes the minister to lose sight of the higher nature of religion and sometimes to overlook it entirely, while placing a correspondingly higher stress upon the use of religion as a means of social restraint and the mechanical observance of church practices.

In common with ministers of religion, teachers suffer from the fact that they give *ex cathedra* instructions which are as a rule uncontradicted. The average listener in any audience can readily detect men or women teachers on the lecture platform by the finality of their statements and the self-satisfaction displayed in their argumentation, caused by the atmosphere of the classroom. This is probably the cause which prevented our educators from taking a larger share in the parliamentary work of the nation and from bringing to representative government a little of that capacity and prestige of which it is so sorely in need.

When the British royal commission on secondary education was at the beginning of its work, I remember Mr. Bryce saying how struck he was at the growth of professional feeling among all classes of teachers in England. On every side he found societies which had been formed partly for professional protection, partly under the stimulus of a real interest in their calling. This tendency, upon which the practiced eye of Mr. Bryce fell at once, has been growing during the last ten years. It has now culminated in the success of the attempt to frame a teachers' register. The teachers' registration council ought to be a real center for the experience of teachers of all kinds throughout the country. It ought to give the profession that sense of unity which necessary sectional and administrative subdivision tends to blur. But it ought not to become a super-trade-union. Still less ought it to have any ambition to control the educational system of the country. For just as education is itself many-sided, so is the responsibility for it divided among several co-workers in a great enterprise. The nation as a whole is concerned in the training of the nation's youth. The teachers are concerned about it, because—if anybody—they ought to know most about it.

The connection between professionalism and the material status of the teacher is duplicated in the nursing profession. The great majority of the American states have now boards of examination for nurses, composed not of doctors but of members of the nursing profession themselves, appointed by political office-holders. The reasons offered to justify the restricted exercise of the nursing

profession resulting from the existence of such a registry are generally summed up in a statement concerning the necessity of protecting the public. Several state courts have held, in the case of the barbers', plumbers', and undertakers' registry laws, that taken at its face value such a purpose had no reason for existence in fact; that even the exercise of such a profession by incompetents would not work a sufficiently well-defined injury upon the community to justify the limitation of the number of those belonging to it and the relative monopoly which is the result of such a regulation.

Professional deformation has combined with sex-consciousness to exclude men from the nursing profession. Eminent practitioners have defended the theory that nursing was a woman's calling by citing sentimental reasons unworthy of the scientific standing of their advocates. As a matter of fact, nursing is not a woman's calling. Hospital efficiency today is greatly hampered by the lack of competent orderlies. Nobody can blame men for refusing to enter a calling which is no calling, but just a blind alley. Still, decent ward management is as much dependent upon a capable orderly as upon a capable nurse. From the point of view of women themselves and in order that they may derive from their economic independence all the benefits it holds in store for them, it becomes more than necessary that they should discourage every attempt to commercialize womanliness. Nursing is a useful and honorable profession. For its own sake it ought to be freed from any morbid character with which professionalism and other considerations may try to burden it.

There is another social condition remotely connected with such callings as teaching, social service, and nursing which has been seriously attacked by professional deformation, viz., the labor leaders. We may consider as fairly accurate the statement that the reasons which influence the members of a union in the selection of their officers are zeal and capacity. That a man who owes his elevation to office to such considerations should become a victim of professional deformation seems at first sight almost improbable. Still, it can no longer be denied, since professionalism of the labor leaders has been one of the most potent if

not the principal cause leading to the creation in the United States of a dual organization of labor in the economic field. Institutions which have remained in existence for a long time acquire thus an element of strength which is independent of their intrinsic value and helps them to monopolize a certain sphere of human activity. The American Federation of Labor is now in such a position. In the birth of a rival group, the I.W.W., professional deformation of the actual personnel of the Federation has played a most important part. Many workers, inside as well as outside the Federation, state that professionalism rules the Federation today. This is true to such an extent that the element in control of the Federation did not hesitate, to save its existence, to refuse to elect the Federation's officials through a referendum of the membership, while the political program of the Federation strongly advocates direct government in the state and nation.

After several years in office the primary reason for his existence is no longer obvious to the trade-union official. He considers himself as the owner of a business and the membership as a kind of compulsory customers. Professional deformation brings about a consciousness of his private interests sometimes directly opposed to the sane and logical conception of the interests of the membership. Like the charity-worker, he is very prone to consider our actual social system as permanent, because it requires the corrective of unions in the process of collective bargaining and of officials to lead the unions.

If a transformation in the mode of production requires that the framework of economic organization be discarded to make room for a new and more efficient form of organization, the professional labor leader will oppose the change, because in the ensuing reorganization he is liable to suffer the loss of his position.

Labor leaders frequently become parliamentarians. Labor parliamentarians and legislators in general suffer from their own kinds of professional deformation. Zola, who could not be called a sociologist, but who was an observer of an uncommon acuity of vision for psychological details, has drawn a vivid picture of the work of professional deformation in shaping the mentality of the peoples' representatives. In *Germinal* he introduces Lantier, a

labor leader, and proves how his vision is slowly altered from that of a fighting strike-leader to that of a middle-class intellectual, snugly reclining in an arm-chair, with a tableful of books and magazines at his elbow, while a bright and warm fire flames up gaily before his outstretched feet. How long will it be before this middle-class complacency will influence his ideas and his principles without his knowledge?

The development of anarchistic syndicalism in France was largely due to the dissatisfaction caused within the ranks of the working class by the professional deformation of several labor politicians, whom the brilliancy of the personality of Jaurès had attracted in a movement which they did not understand. Such a deformation is not limited to the immature intellectual who strays into the collectivist camp. John Burns of Battersea is another instance, whose purely proletarian origin cannot be disputed.

No matter how close an office-holder may have been to the sod when he broke into public life, it requires but a short time to warp his view when he gets to Washington. There the politics of the nation crystallize. Small groups of men, because of their herding in one place, their intimate interchange of ideas, and their power to legislate, get to think their view is the prevalent view—not because it really is, but because their vision has become restricted to the narrow circle of their official actions. Professionalism is a sort of introspective egoism. Insiders remain inside, looking out, instead of going occasionally outside to look in.

From the point of view of a progressive party, professionalism decreases the efficiency of the representative, while in the case of a conservative or a reactionist, professionalism helps to increase his efficiency.

Social phenomena should never be separated from their social usefulness. They are not static, but essentially dynamic. From this angle we may extend to all the forms of professional deformation what we have said about the adaptability of the nature of parliamentary professionalism to the purposes of democracy. Professional deformation always acts as an auxiliary force to human inertia. Hence a progressive society must react against it, destroy it. The

value of a trade-union convention to the workers, for instance, will depend largely on the success with which they eliminate from their deliberations the influence of their professionals.

If such a defense may rightfully be considered as preliminary to the very existence of a democracy, it must also be remarked that every step in democracy will decrease the amount of professionalism with which society has to contend in the course of its development.