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ACHIEVING PROFESSIONALISM

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—EDITOR.

During the past few years an increasing amount of attention has been directed by police officers toward a vague goal termed "professionalism." Some claim that it has been achieved,¹ others see it in the distant future, and still others regard it as unobtainable or undesirable. It is remarkable that although an enormous amount of interest is centered on the subject, there is very little agreement on exactly what the term denotes.

The word *profession* is derived from the Latin combination of *pro* (forth) and *fateri* (confess), meaning "to announce a belief." Hence the early use of the word concerned open or public avowals of faith or purpose. Religious orders still use the word in its original meaning. In early England "to profess" was to bind yourself by vow. Today the word and its participles are occasionally used with similar connotations, but such usage is becoming more and more restricted to formal English.

It was probably inevitable that certain occupations requiring public vows of faith or purpose should become known as professions. Originally there were three: Medicine, Law, and Theology. They were dignified by that title and set apart from other occupations because they were more than a livelihood; they represented a calling to some higher satisfaction than a commercial gain. Further, having high purpose, there was the promise of intellectual direction and occupational skill.

The early professions were built about philosophical or ethical codes. The common feature of these codes was some form of service to mankind. Although rigorous asceticism was seldom required, doctors, lawyers, and clergymen demonstrated enough selflessness down through the years to earn general respect.

In recent years usage has considerably expanded the meaning of the word *profession*. In its broadest sense it is used as an antonym of amateur; i.e., one who employs high skill in some pursuit thereby

1. See Johnson, W. W. "Law Enforcement is a Profession" *Pol. Ch. News* 17, 56-7, Nov. 1950; and Kooker, D. L. "Policing . . . A Profession," *Mich. Pol. J.* 20:13-14 Jan. 1951.

gaining a livelihood from it. We hear of professional roller skaters, professional veterans, and even professional pickpockets.

Obviously, when policemen speak of becoming professionals they employ the word in some restrictive meaning. They use the word almost reverently, as if it concerns a clearly defined, ultimate goal. However, if such a goal exists it is nowhere clearly defined.² Doubtless every progressive policeman has definite concepts in mind when he uses the term, but they are individual concepts. There is on record no concise, exact, and completely acceptable definition of professionalism to which the policeman can point, and say, "This is what we strive toward!"

To a limited extent the word still refers to the three original professions, plus those which, like the teaching profession, have earned that status. But accurate definition is somewhat complicated by the fact that many occupations have borrowed the title without earning it. There are claims of a writing profession, a burial profession, and even a hair-dressing profession.³ As a result, even among the experts, there is little agreement upon a common definition.

Carl F. Taeusch, a professor of philosophy well known for his work on professional ethics, defines a profession as ". . . a limited and clearly marked group of men who are trained by education and experience to perform certain functions better than their fellow men."⁴

Obviously, this is the broadest possible definition. Carpenters, salesmen, and tailors conceivably would qualify under this description. But while no sensible person would deny to such trades common dignity, it is apparent that they lack the philosophical direction that is commonly ascribed to professional men.

A still more restrictive definition is found in one of the recent studies of police administration which lists ten "earmarks" of a profession:⁵

1. An organized body of knowledge with definite techniques of procedure.
2. A code of ethics.
3. A group of trained men.
4. An organization drawing its membership from this group and comprising a significant part of them.
5. Definite qualifications for admission.
6. Freedom to seek employment in any state or city where such services are required.
7. Established methods of recruit training.
8. High prestige.

2. "There is no universally accepted definition which clearly marks off the professions from other occupations." Robert D. Leigh. *The Public Library in the U.S.* p. 186-7.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Professional and Business Ethics.* Henry Holt & Co., N.Y., 1926 p. 5.

5. *Municipal Police Administration.* Inter. City Mgrs. Assoc. Chicago, 1950, p. 42.

9. Merit promotions.
10. Recruitment by open competitive examinations.

While this definition serves as a guide, it concerns (as the writer undoubtedly intended when he characterized the points as "earmarks") only the outward manifestations of a profession. Again, the description is somewhat broad. Several strictly commercial occupations would qualify under this ten-point listing. Motion picture cameramen with their highly selective organizations and rigorous training methods come closer to meeting these requirements than do attorneys, yet few will argue that attorneys are not professionals while cameramen are. Further, many of the qualifications listed in this definition are relative. The exact meaning of "high" prestige, "merit" promotions, and "established" training might be argued successfully from many premises.

Robert D. Leigh, writing in *The Public Library in the U. S.* offers another definition:

" . . . a profession possesses specialized communicable techniques based upon: (1) prolonged intellectual training; (2) a content of training that includes generalization or principles; (3) the application of the principles in concrete professional practice; a complex process requiring the exercise of disciplined individual judgment."⁶

Leigh's definition appears to be one of the best obtainable. Even so, it does not provide a clear demarcation between the selflessness and service ordinarily associated with professionalism and the purely commercial goals of other skilled occupations. Many non-professionals such as industrial personnel administrators, public relations experts, and others, undergo prolonged intellectual training, utilize general principles, and exercise the disciplined judgment necessary to apply such principles. Like the others, this definition lists some things true professions have in common but fails to distinguish clearly between professions and highly skilled occupations.

At this point a serious advocate of police professionalism is likely to find himself in somewhat of a quandary. He is certain that there is such a thing as professionalism, but its exact nature eludes him. He reasons that it cannot be merely a thing of academic degrees, of government licenses or oaths, and personal discipline, because he has known men with those qualifications who were clearly not professionals. He reasons that it cannot merely be a thing of honesty, courtesy, dignity, and unselfishness because those attributes are not confined to any

6. Columbia U. Press, New York, 1950, p. 86-8.

single class of persons; an uneducated farm laborer will often display virtues superior to those of highly educated and skilled workers.

It is clear that professionalism, however elusive its definition, does exist. The lives of men like Pasteur, Darrow, and Schweitzer give visible proof that there are classes of endeavor clearly set aside from ordinary work-a-day trades. Nor is such endeavor limited to great names. Everyone has known simple doctors, attorneys, clergymen, educators, and even policemen, who were clearly set apart from others, and to whom the title professional is applied without second thought. This offers a clue. It appears the thing that sets these men apart is not the external features of their occupation, but the goals and reasons and beliefs found in the individuals within that occupation.

A different course of inquiry may yield more positive definition. It appears that there are two broad classifications of occupation:

1. Those men who owe contractual obligations toward employers, and
2. Those men who owe sacred obligations toward mankind in general.

In the first class are laborers, craftsmen, and most businessmen. They have the right to work or not as their personal desires and requirements dictate. They may work rapidly or slowly, build securely or shoddily, fashion cleverly or ineptly, and at all times have the right to gauge their efforts, within limits of law, solely by the amount of remuneration received.

In the second class are found workers with broad obligations toward society which have their roots in religious or ethical philosophy. These are the professionals. They violate oath, belief, and purpose if the size of their fees affects their skill in practice.⁷ This is an ideal, of course. Quacks, shysters, and racketeering evangelists bear little resemblance to the professional ideal. However, this does not erase the fact that each profession has its hard core of practical idealists who make professionalism a reality.

With this information, a new definition of profession is possible. It is not taken from dictionaries or etymologies and does not concern the outward appearances that are sometimes mistaken for professional attributes. The following definition is taken from a combination of observations: (1) the recorded opinions of professional men both

7. Adam Smith (1723-90) in his *"Wealth of Nations"* Chapter X, Part I, justifies professional fees sufficient to attract capable men to practice: "We trust our health to the physician; our fortunes and sometimes our life and reputation to the lawyer and attorney. Such confidence could not be safely reposed in people of a very mean or low condition."

living and deceased;⁸ (2) the oaths, canons, and ethical codes of professional societies;⁹ and, (3) popularly accepted principles of western religion and western philosophy.

A profession is that occupational group which practices its skills with the following basic obligations.

1. A duty to serve mankind generally rather than self, individuals, or groups.
2. A duty to prepare as fully as practicable for service before entering active practice.
3. A duty to work continually to improve skills by all means available and to freely communicate professional information gained.
4. A duty to employ full skill at all times regardless of considerations of personal gain, comfort, or safety, and to at all times assist fellow professionals upon demand.
5. A duty to regulate practice by the franchising of practitioners, setting the highest practicable intellectual and technical minimums; to accept and upgrade fellow professionals solely upon considerations of merit; to be constantly alert to protect society from fraudulent, substandard, or unethical practice through ready and swift disfranchisement.
6. A duty to zealously guard the honor of the profession by living exemplary lives publicly and privately, recognizing that injury to a group serving society, injures society.
7. A duty to give constant attention to the improvement of self-discipline, recognizing that the individual must be the master of himself to be the servant of others.

By these standards it is clear police work is not a profession. While tremendous strides have been made in late years toward improving its technology and further strides may develop a science of law enforcement, it must be borne in mind that the terms *science* and *profession* are not synonymous. For example, the fact that a science of medicine exists does not guarantee professional application of its principles. Professionalism is a subjective theory, concerned with the philosophy that directs the application of the body of knowledge. For this reason practical policemen must recognize that philosophy is a practical thing, not something only to dreamers and theorists; and if professionalism is to be achieved, attention must be directed as much to police philosophy as to police techniques. As one well-known writer states: "The police have had a certain morale for a generation or more, but it has been a pride in physical courage. It must come to be a pride in police work as a useful profession contributing to social

8. See: "Ethical Standards in American Public Life" *The American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 280 March 1952; also "Ethics in Police Service" *J. C. Law and Criminology* 33:61-74 and 172-186, May and July 1947; "The F.B.I. Code for Law Enforcement Officers"; and others.

9. *Ibid.*

welfare."¹⁰ Another writer notes that standards by which to live and work are basic problems by commenting: "Practical men of affairs are groping about sincerely for help in their endeavors to secure some philosophical orientation of life."¹¹

At least one question is unanswered: Should police work be a profession? A report from the National Occupation Council states: "The entire governmental structure is built upon a foundation of law and order, which, in turn, is entirely dependent upon efficient and honest police administration."¹² In other words, order is dependent upon law, and law is dependent upon enforcement. If this is true, police work has deep significance. The policeman shirks fundamental obligations if he considers himself mere contracted labor with freedom to prefer private advantage to public welfare. Woodrow Wilson, commenting upon the place of policemen in society, characterizes their obligations as "sacred and direct."¹³

It is more than remotely possible that the present drive toward police professionalism reflects a deep social need and that serious weaknesses in our political and social structure can be remedied by the emergence of a new profession. Certainly the obstacles are tremendous but probably no more formidable than those met by the early practitioners who faced fear, prejudice, and superstition in their forging of the medical profession. Moreover, the policeman has many guideposts in his march set by men such as Peel and Vollmer who demonstrated that obstacles, however difficult, can be overcome. The greatest problems that lie ahead will be borne of the type of false reasoning which confuses difficulty with impossibility.

Few will disagree that society needs honest and efficient law enforcement of the highest type. Few will disagree that police work could attain a position equal with the most respected occupations if sincere and devoted effort were directed toward that goal. It is possible that this can be accomplished if the policeman felt pride in his place in the scheme of things. A final quotation indicates that such pride is justifiable and may lie dormant, needing only an awakening.

"To face alone, calmly and unflinchingly, all that is unspeakable in horror and tragedy in the varied community life of the streets of the towns; to risk, unhesitating, life and limb, and to offer ready sacrifice of self whenever the safety of the public demands it; and not

10. Edwin Sutherland, *Principles of Criminology*.

11. Carl F. Taeusch, *Professional and Business Ethics*, Henry Holt & Co., N.Y. 1926, P.S.

12. Virgil E. Dickson, *The Occupation of the Police Officer*, N.Y.

13. Public Statement, 1919, during Boston Police Strike.

only to dare, but to do as a simple daily and hourly duty 'all that becomes a man,' from comforting a lost child to facing alone the violence of dangerous criminals and the frenzied insane, represent, surely, in peace-time and in war, an ideal of citizenship and practical religion as perfect as any that is available . . .'¹⁴

14. Charles Reith, *British Police and the Democratic Ideal*. Oxford University Press, N.Y., 1943.