Symbols of success are not everywhere. The briefcase has become one of the most recognizable emblems of status in modern society. Every weekday, ranks of these status symbols, gripped like the leather shields of an invading army, inundate metropolitan centers. In the same metropolises, and a host of suburban office parks, these human waves are almost always smartly dressed. Even if they tread softly in running shoes, the shoes are uniformly in good taste. The briefcases and their bearers may not turn many heads, but they still emanate an alluring scent of success.

In modern life, a briefcase is more than a substitute for a backpack or paper bag. It is a sign of a certain status. A briefcase announces that its bearer holds an occupation sufficiently responsible that work is not confined to a production shift or opening hours. Carrying a briefcase advertises that its bearer commands an ample amount of the rarest form of credit: autonomy in work. The briefcase asserts that this person can be counted upon to do the job without direct supervision, out of the shop, and off hours. If asked to name this kind of highly valued, highly trusted work, most of us would likely say, "professional work." Those who do such work seem to occupy an important and enviable place in the world.

Professional is a loosely defined term. Originally, of course, it referred to the classic honorific occupations of medicine, the bar, and the clergy. These occupations certainly enjoy high status; when asked to rank the most desirable jobs, Americans have consistently placed medical doctor just below Supreme Court justice (the top-ranked job). Lawyers, clergy, dentists, college professors, and
expectations on the part of the larger society. The professions depend upon a kind of social compact of reciprocal trust and good faith between the practitioners and the publics they serve. Where profes-
sional fields are licensed, this compact may be quite explicit, but it is always presumed. This is one reason malfeasance on the part of profession-
als can excite moral outrage.

Popular moral vocabulary has come to give special prominence to professionalism. It has emerged as a widely esteemed and sought-
after virtue. Saying someone acts "professionally" is high praise in any situation, while the most damning epithet hurled at politicians, financiers, and athletes by their enemies is the charge of being "unprofessional." So seriously is it taken that even in the con-
temporary climate of moral relativism, when the substance of such
former solid terms as "indecent" and "disrespectful" have been
opened to question, few speak of professional behavior as existing
only in the eye of the beholder. Examples of the importance of pub-
lic concern about the moral health of the professions appear daily.

When an underfunded New York hospital whose patients are poor
in disproportionate numbers found its supply of medical interns was
to be cut off because fewer interns chose to train among the poor,
an anguish staff member reminisced, "If everything was per-
fant, we wouldn't need them the way we do. . . . I thought they
[physicians] took an oath."

In the case of the traditional professions of the clergy, the bar,
and medicine, clear standards affirm professional status. This is the
effect of official licensing, specialized and accredited professional
education, and codification of formalized expertise combined with
jurisdiction over vital public activities. There is more ambiguity in
the public mind about which other occupations are really profes-
sional. The picture is complicated by the increasing tendency of
managers to seek professional status; witness the explosion of the
master's of business administration degree.

There is, of course, a difference in status between the MBA-
credentialed executive of a firm and the manager of a local
McDonald's. But it is noteworthy that the latter is also likely to

architects always appear among the top twenty ranks. A profession
is typically described as an occupation characterized by three features:
specialized training in a field of codified knowledge usually acquired
by formal education and apprenticeship, public recognition of a cer-
tain autonomy on the part of the community of practitioners to re-
gulate their own standards of practice, and a commitment to provide
service to the public that goes beyond the economic welfare of the
practitioner.

Observers of modern society have repeatedly pointed out great
changes in the world of work. As farming and then manufacturing
has absorbed less of the force of their enemies in the American workforce, those occupations involving services and information have expanded enormously. In
particular, jobs classified as "professional and managerial" have
become increasingly numerous and important. The reasons are not
hard to see. As American society has shifted from a rural, local base
to an urban and technological pattern of life, expertise and coordina-
tion become increasingly essential. The complicated organization
of the modern economy has made us all far more interdependent
than in the past. Our livelihood, our health, our knowledge of the
world, the whole quality of contemporary life depend upon the inte-
grated meshing of a vast number of skills and capacities. It is this
complex interdependence that has set the great waves of brieftin
in motion across America.

Skilled professionals have become indispensable to modern soci-
ety. They furnish the specific skills that are basic to the operation of
complex modern institutions in the spheres of industry, government,
education, health care, and the law. Professionals such as therapists
and social service providers help negotiate the complexity as they
aid many in seeking direction and assistance amid the often har
accidents of life. Historian Harold Perkin has characterized British
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Similar views have been put forward about modern society generally, and the United States in particular. Because of their knowledge and the strategic importance of their
functions, professionals are frequently beneficiaries of trust and high
A professional career starts with formal education, often beyond the baccalaureate level. It typically continues through a substantial apprenticeship, either in a practice situation or as part of formal clinical education. In more established professions, the student’s craft, knowledge, and character are tested and certified by formal licensing procedures regulated by law. The goal is to develop students into practitioners who can respond capably and self-confidently to demands for professional service. At the same time, professional work—particularly higher education—has long been held up as defining ideals of middle class aspiration. In America, achieving economic well-being has been a significant and honorable aspect of a professional career. But it has always meant more than that as well. Professional licensing and grant of control over recruitment and training of practitioners are part of a social contract between the organized field and society. A profession is understood to offer a career, an opportunity for social and economic advancement, while professionalism demands the kind of dedication to purpose characteristic of a vocation or calling. Not infrequently, however, the two elements of career and calling pull against each other.

Authentic professionalism can impart a strong sense of identity because, beyond providing a livelihood, it is a way of life with public value. It is the kind of thing one can build a life around. For the person possessing the requisite capacities and sufficient commitment, a profession can be not only a career but a calling to useful work as well. Providing counsel and care, creating illness, bringing justice, teaching, and the pursuit of knowledge, designing and building for convenience and safety—these are activities that generate more than jobs and satisfaction for individuals. By their nature, they create goods that at some time are essential for everyone, and important for society as a whole. They are activities that sustain public values.

The continuing appeal of professionalism, even amid so many complex tensions, shows that it articulates a hunger for something often missing or suppressed in contemporary work. Certainly, part of this something is a sense of dignity and public assurance that
One's talents and work deserve recognition. Another aspect, though, is engagement through one's work with common purposes that give point and value to individual effort. Purposes such as competent performance, dignity, justice, and fellowship are in the end civic goods. They make possible a civil and meaningful public realm. They are also the promise of genuine professionalism. However, these are not goods that individuals can possess or enjoy alone, or even achieve entirely by their own efforts. We can see them as the goods of self-discovery, even a satisfying kind of self-fulfillment, though this self-fulfillment is not what often goes by that name. It comes, almost paradoxically, through a kind of transcendence and change of self, gaining a wider sense of identity through engagement with technical excellence while taking responsibility for shared ends.

Among all contemporary forms of work, professional occupations stand out as examples of good work, labor that "allows the full expression of what is best in us ... activities that exhibit the highest sense of responsibility." For work to be consistently valuable to society as well as personally rewarding, however, there has to be significant alignment between personal commitment and the purposes of the larger institution of which the worker is part. Here lies the key importance of the profession as a collective enterprise. We shall see that professions cannot long make available the conditions of good work, no matter how financially lucrative they may become for some practitioners, if the absence of collective commitment to the fiduciary responsibility they hold for social purposes. Without willingness to uphold the contract with society, professional work ceases to be good, for individual practitioners or for the public.

These functions are carried on in a commercial society in which professional skills, like others, are marketed. The labor market puts pressure on professionals to behave competitively toward their peers, and to accede to the demands of profit when they conflict with professional standards of excellence. Indeed, it is in part to temper such market pressures that professional organizations exist. Yet, for a profession as organized interest, the aim at self-aggrandizement has proven to be perhaps stronger than it is for the individual. As critics of the professions stridently point out, abuse of public trust is a discouragingly familiar aspect of professional history. The situation of professional life is further complicated by the fact that today most professionals are no longer the solo practitioners of popular image, but employees of large bureaucratic organizations. The purposes of these organizations, like the profit motive of the market, do not always support service according to high professional standards.

But what exactly do professional standards entail? In several domains, this has itself long been an arena of tension in which differing views compete. For example, consider the question of professional responsibility. In law, the attorney is expected to be a zealous advocate for the client's interests—an attitude reinforced by the American adversarial system of justice. Yet at the same time, attorneys are legally "officers of the court." They share with the judiciary a responsibility to the public for maintaining the legal system as a whole. Collectively, therefore, lawyers have an interest in mediating conflict and seeing that justice is done. Yet this responsibility strains against their training in adversarial ingenuity. Accountants are similarly caught between a legal obligation to enforce public standards in auditing and reporting financial accounts on the one hand and their obvious need to demonstrate loyalty to their clients' best interests on the other. We shall see in Chapter Two that over time professional standards have changed in several fields as the balance among their several responsibilities shifts in response to changing social contexts.

Professionals are enjoined both to be competent, in the technical sense of being effective lawyers, engineers, architects, or physicians, and also to conduct themselves with due regard for their public obligations. These obligations are partly defined by the written codes of their guilds but even more strongly by the distinctive cultures that mark lawyers off from physicians and accountants from architects. In aiming at a balance between these two criteria—the technical and the moral—which should be emphasized? As between
the ethics of the guild and public accountability, which should have priority? Practically speaking, who should have primary responsibility for achieving and maintaining this balance? Is it the proper role of professional societies and organizations, or of some form of public oversight?

As we shall see, these tensions are among the chief issues raising professional life in many fields. They also help define the parameters of professional education, a critical matter we explore in detail in Chapter Six. There, it turns out that the balance in these matters depends heavily upon who has the upper hand in preparing future professionals. When the academic guild is in charge, professional training emphasizes the cognitive and technical. In a situation in which the practitioners themselves control education and licensing, performance and the culture of the guild tend to have much more importance as decisive standards of professional quality.

Finally, today's most salient challenge to professionalism comes from the increasing dominance of market thinking within professional life and organization, there are also real differences in attitude toward market forces among the sectors of the professional workforce. Teachers, academics, social workers, and other professionals heavily involved in government and public institutions are less positive toward business values than professionals in fields such as accounting and engineering, which are deeply embedded in the corporate world. This tension operates among fields at least as much as within them, as the example of accounting in the age of Enron shows.

Is Professionalism Obsolete? A Test Case

It is now a commonplace that the prestige of the traditional professions is under siege. Not just their performance but their claims to distinct expertise, the very core of professional legitimacy, has come under withering fire. Skepticism is leveled particularly at professional claims to serve the public interest. Lawyers now routinely expect designation for their professional affiliation (even from other attorneys). Physicians are not only challenged by the proponents of “alternative medicine,” but face patients armed with all kinds of medical knowledge obtained through the Internet. The prevalence of “emergency” teaching credentials in school classrooms calls into question the value of professional teacher training. The list goes on. Each of these challenges is distinct and relates to the particular circumstances of one or another professional field. However, these specific challenges circulate within a larger current of thought that is deeply skeptical of the value of the professional organization of work. It questions whether any value is really added to provision of expert services by the peculiar features of the professions—their guildlike structures of corporate monopoly over esoteric knowledge within an occupational domain, particularly over recruiting, training, and licensing personnel.

As a kind of thought experiment, imagine such an elimination of professional organization in provision of expert services. Social and individual needs would be met both more efficiently and effectively, according to this line of thinking, if “knowledge workers” could compete for jobs now monopolized by licensed professionals on the basis of whatever skills and credentials consumers and employers decided were useful. This would mean the end of the monopoly of profession-specific schools in which teachers from the profession are expected to serve as gatekeepers of the field as well as contributors to its base of knowledge. If this seems odd when applied to legal counsel or medicine or teaching, consider that it is typical in fields such as journalism and business, which sometimes claim the professional aura. In nineteenth-century laissez-faire America, that was the state of affairs in health care, engineering, school teaching, religious preaching, and much else.

Now, prophets proclaim the advent of a “frictionless capitalism,” to be enabled by ever-improving information technology, which can render dependence upon professionals obsolete. In this once-and-future vision, consumers have virtually perfect access to
The "irrational exuberance" of the Roaring Nineties tested the inherent rationality of unregulated markets, both in the heartland of the "new economy" such as telecommunications and information technology and on Wall Street. The claims for a deregulated economy have been found severely wanting. Recent history gives painful yet potent indirect proof of our collective dependence upon professional integrity for the functioning of even that least sentimental domain of modern society. According to the textbooks, after all, the law of gravity in economic affairs is alleged to be self-interest. As the debacles of 2001 and 2002 illustrate all too clearly, however, the health of the investment economy depends paradoxically on regulators' willingness to resist the siren call of getting in on the main chance. As if in illustration, the story of the demise of the venerable and long-trusted auditing firm of Arthur Andersen stands as a sad emblem of professional failure and its consequences for the general welfare.

The long boom of the last decade saw the largest economic expansion in American history, outside of World War II. Nearly everyone benefited, not least American business, which became the envy of the world. By 2001, however, bursting of the overinflated stock market reduced aggregate wealth significantly. As a consequence, not only the holdings of investors but the retirement incomes of millions of workers were in real jeopardy. As part of the fallout, Enron—heralded as a model of the new economy in the recently deregulated energy industry—collapsed utterly. By 2002, the recently deregulated telecommunications industry had produced the wreckage of WorldCom, the largest bankruptcy in history. Then, as a sad coda, along with Enron, WorldCom, Global Crossing, and a line of other huge enterprises went their auditor, Arthur Andersen.

Joseph Stiglitz received the Nobel Prize in 2001 for pioneering economic analyses showing the inadequacy of market self-regulation because of imperfect information, therefore undermining the fantasies of the market utopians. He has recently presented a rare insider's view of the Nineties boom. From his experience as head of
expertise is what enabled public accounting firms such as Arthur Andersen to become multibillion-dollar enterprises of international scope.

The Andersen firm began in 1912 as a start-up. Arthur Andersen, an accounting professor and later dean at Northwestern University's fledgling business school, encouraged the best of his students to join the firm, which specialized in auditing publicly held companies in the fledgling financial center of Chicago. From the start, Andersen sought to instill high standards of probity as the hallmark of both the nascent accounting profession and his firm, insisting that it was independent and probity that would give the profession and the firm public stature and significance. Throughout its history, the firm prided itself on choosing not only the brightest accounting talent but also those most evidently committed to a high-minded view of the profession. So seriously was this aim taken that even a global organization with tens of thousands of professional employees, only partners, or human resources personnel, did the final interviewing and selecting of new hires into the firm.

Arthur Andersen was not alone. His major rival at Price Waterhouse, George May, an expatriate British-trained accountant, thought the same way.

Emphasizing the quasi-public role of accounting during this period of unregulated capitalism, May frequently stressed the 'high ethical obligations' assumed by auditors at the Price Waterhouse firm, saying that 'it is the assumption of such obligations that makes what might otherwise be a business, a profession. Of all the groups of professions which are closely allied with business, there is none in which the practitioner is under a greater ethical obligation to persons who are not his immediate clients.'

Like the lawyer who is supposed to balance serving a client with the role of officer of the court, the public accountant was to serve the particular interests of the client by auditing corporate accounts, while protecting the public interest in having sound financial information. The most visible manifestation of this were nearly legendary anecdotes of Arthur Andersen, George May, and
their peers refusing to acquiesce to the demands of influential clients that they overlook accounting irregularities for the sake of profit. Another was the push toward GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles), which could give accountants a clear basis upon which to state their claim to independence. Accountants wanted to establish themselves as a profession, and their leaders knew that the key to this purpose was winning and keeping the public trust.

In 2002, the Securities Exchange Commission charged Enron with fraud for overstating earnings while concealing vast indebtedness. Enron's auditors at the Andersen firm were by that time, like the public accounting field as a whole, part of a domain that George May (or Arthur Andersen) would hardly have recognized.

For decades before the crash, selling business consulting services had overshadowed auditing on Andersen's bottom line. Although auditing was a form of civic regulation in the public interest, rooted in a professional culture of rigor, and licensed and regulated, consulting was a freewheeling, innovative trade with few formal rules and little government oversight.

As consulting grew in the deregulated economic environment of the 1980s and 1990s, the clash between the flashy and vastly profitable consulting business and the traditional audit culture of the firm produced internal tensions.

By the booming nineties, auditing had become the subordinate player, seen by many consulting partners as simply providing "appointment clients" to be carefully cultivated over the years in the interest of selling them any number of highly profitable consulting services. Thanks to consulting, Andersen partners could expect not merely a comfortable living in a respected profession at a firm with a good name, but personal wealth. By the time the consulting business had spun off on its own as Accenture, Andersen was already mired in the accounting fraud of Enron and was soon to be joined by its other notorious clients: WorldCom, Global Crossing, Quest, and more. By the time the federal indictment for obstruction of justice (the famous Andersen shredding of documents) came down in 2002, the compromised culture of the firm had left little of its old reputation intact.

Throughout the painful aftermath, the persistent cry on both Wall Street and Main Street has been, "Where were the auditors?" Auditors are only as efficient in deploying resources as the information upon which they are based is accurate. In the American economy, share prices of publicly traded stocks are a key signal for investment. It was this share price that auditors were expected to certify as justified by company performance. Without effective regulation, however, competitive economic interest leads not to the utopia of the free marketers' dreams but to disastrous market failure. Real economies depend upon noneconomic values in order to function; good faith remains the necessary condition for all contracts, the very foundation of commerce. So when auditors began to act as enablers of corporate fraud, they abandoned their loyalty to the public value of accurate financial knowledge. Once the fraud came to light, the result was loss of faith on the part of investors, precipitating the ruin of hordes of massively overextended corporate behemoths. The response was much tighter federal regulations, in the form of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002, which among other measures insisted upon splitting most consulting activity from auditing firms. It has also largely removed self-regulation from the accounting profession.

But what is effective regulation? Since its establishment in the 1930s, the Securities and Exchange Commission has wrestled with the organized accounting profession over the sufficiency of rules and enforcement to furnish effective regulation of capital markets. Regulators, spurred by political pressure, have at times pressed to remove professional discretion in auditing so as to ensure uniform results. The profession has countered with the claim that high-stakes auditing of publicly traded corporations requires fine judgment calls and thus trust in professional discretion.

In the wake of the Andersen disaster, the public mood has supported increased reliance upon official regulation more than trust in the profession's probity. Yet the viability of investor capitalism
aimed at virtually all established organizations. As we have seen, despite their history of good repute the professions are now no exception. But the prevalent tone of scrutiny and skepticism, encouraged through popular journalism—important as it is for understanding—cannot do much to address the problem of conserving the essential purposes and moral resources of professionalism.

Our need is for a broad view of how the various aspects and tensions of the professional enterprise hang together. In other words, we need a theoretical perspective to illuminate and try to explain events such as the self-undermining of accounting's public trust. But our purpose in doing so is ultimately practical. It is because we want to rescue and renew the positive potential of professionalism that it is important to assimilate the work of historians and social scientists, philosophers, and educational researchers on the problems of professional life and education. These efforts can amount to tools for understanding and thereby the means for deliberation about what is to be done.

Among students of the professions, there is general agreement about the story of the rise to prominence in America. In outline, this trajectory begins in a nineteenth-century United States in which all forms of closed groups were suspect as undemocratic. Out of this unpromising social context, the modern professions began to establish themselves in the decades after the Civil War. Even more than today, organizing work through professions was then an uncertain and disputed matter. In the United States, professions have always been dependent upon myriad complex relationships with other groups and forces beyond their occupational group. In this sense, they are inherently social, cultural, indeed civic and political entities and not simply categories of specialized labor. To grasp this complexity, we need a perspective enabling us to appreciate and learn from the critiques of professional pretension developed by social scientists, not so as to abandon the professional project but to reformulate its ideals and purposes to better fit the demands of civic engagement in a pluralistic society. For this we need to approach history and the social sciences to learn from them.

The Need for a Broader View: Understanding the Professions

This is a time of scrutiny for all the institutions of American society. It is also a time of widespread disaffection, alienation, and resentment depends upon professional integrity in carrying out functions essential to the functioning of the system as a whole. Because of the complexity of accounting, there is in the end a need for professional good faith. Without professional honor, as recent events demonstrate, the arena within which pursuit of self-interest can produce socially positive results implodes. At its end, many in the Andersen firm still could not imagine collective responsibility for the failure. The firm and its professional leaders seemed to have lost their sense of professional purpose amid the heady atmosphere of this new economy from which so many of the old rules and constraints appeared to have melted away.

Looking back, it seems clear that there is indeed important value added in professional services by a professional commitment to the public interest beyond service to the particular client. It is also evident that professionalism in its honorific sense depends upon supportive institutions if it is to thrive. Healthy institutions make maintenance of high standards of competence and an orientation toward serving the public standard operating procedures. They also set the protective social context within which the goods of professionalism can be nurtured, understood, and passed on as a collective asset that defines a sense of common purpose within an occupation. When this larger institutional context is missing, or allowed to decay, the result is nearly textbook anomie: loss of morale and purpose that leaves individuals, and groups such as professional firms, highly vulnerable to the opportunistic path of least resistance. Such outcomes represent institutional failure as much as individual corruption. They also raise the difficult question of how the essential purposes of professional work can be sustained amid the conflicting pressures of the contemporary environment.
how to be wiser and more constructive participants in the complex context of contemporary professional work.

The traditional learned professions distantly echo, in culture and organizational form, those medieval guilds rooted in the universities. In the medieval university, the bachelor of arts degree was the essential prerequisite of beginning study for the guilds of law and medicine as well as for the higher clergy. Part of the status and mystique of those guilds, like the clerical order itself, derived from possession of this prestigious cultural heritage, not the least fluency in the Latin language. Part of their prestige also stemmed from the inlucry nature of their services. That is, priests, lawyers, and physicians (who could be the same person) possessed knowledge of the mysteries and complexities of this world and the next that were believed to be beyond what a typical layperson could pretend to. It was widely accepted that the work of the traditional learned professions required a significant degree of discretion in how they conducted their practice. Such work was accordingly thought to require a stronger sense of moral dedication than most occupations did.

Unexpectedly, aspects of this traditional professional culture were revived and acquired new currency from proponents of professionalism in the late nineteenth-century United States. The development of professionalized fields modified the laissez-faire pattern of American occupational life. Successful efforts to professionalize occupations, as happened in medicine and law, gave their members a degree of economic security as well as hope of collective mobility toward improved social and economic status. The key to this process became, as it had been in the Middle Ages, possession of educational credentials. The cultural prestige represented by the venerable traditions of law, medicine, and divinity, along with the new model university focused on specialized scholarship and sciences, resonated sufficiently among the politically connected "better classes" to enable these fields to establish something resembling a guild monopoly. Thus the rise of the modern professions in America has been organically intertwined with the elaboration of a vast and decentralized system of higher education.

In this process, once ill-defined means of training practitioners for the law, medicine, and the Protestant clergy moved from informal apprenticeship toward education in professional schools. These schools (together with a few others such as college teaching) were able to establish effective control over entry into the occupation and therefore over the training process and size of the labor force. Fields less successful in their efforts at professionalization (such as engineering, nursing, and teaching) never succeeded in gaining such power. They were correspondingly less able to bestow on their members "market shelter," leaving those members unable to escape economically precarious positions. There were many paths to entry into school teaching or engineering, but the portals to medicine, law, architecture, and the like narrowed and all finally came under the control of the guild itself. These increasingly self-sustained occupational domains thereby became the model case of what it meant to be a profession.

These early efforts at establishing professional authority were bolstered, notes sociologist Steven Heit, by the emergence of an understanding of professionals as "trustees of the community." Ministers, lawyers, physicians, and teachers were a small fraction of the population of any community in those days; along with local businessmen, they often found themselves selected for leadership within community organizations. Business leaders brought resources of wealth and connections; professionals brought education and cultural links with a world beyond the local community. With little in the way of government institutions, professionals' involvement in such organizations as school boards, charity societies, libraries, and associations of all kinds formed a strong link in the public understanding between professional knowledge and service in the interest of the local community.

This history is essential for understanding even why professions are characterized as they are. As we have already seen in the Introduction, the aspects of professions most often used to classify an occupation as a profession are actually the result of particular history. In the main, Americans came to accept first the ministry, then law, and finally academic teaching and medicine as embodying a
true professional ideal. That is, the professional came to be defined first of all as learned and formally educated, publicly licensed, and supported by a collegial organization of peers committed to an ethic of service to clients and the public.

Security of career and socioeconomic mobility, in other words, were directly dependent upon the authority and prestige a given field was able to achieve. A number of historians have detailed how various professional groups sought "authority and honor," in Samuel Habel's phrase, within a highly competitive society deeply suspicious of claims of special privilege. Unlike Europe, where professions were often associated with a powerful national government or a superior social class, in the United States the professions had to struggle for status in a distinctly American context. They strived for honor, guaranteed by legally enforced privileges, in exchange for service and community leadership. This social contract became the moral basis of professionalism in America, giving American professions a civic orientation. Professions evolved into entities much like such legally chartered corporations as universities and colleges, which were granted autonomy and special status for a public purpose.

The last lesson from this history is that it took more than demonstration of functional skill to establish a strong professional niche in the modern labor market. Political connections, effective organization, and especially the ability to establish and mobilize cultural significance were all essential. Professions are thus historically emergent social groups who share common educational experiences and a resulting outlook on themselves and the world. They are, in Randall Collins's phrase, "consciousness communities" with a sense of boundaries and interest in defining situations in a way consistent with a distinct viewpoint. Yet professions depend for their form and economic position upon a process of social negotiation with those outside the domain and ultimately upon political recognition and support.

One important implication is that a true professional ideal becomes socially real only through its embodiment in a social contract between the professional group and the larger public. A second implication is the ambiguous position professions occupy in a democratic society. On the one hand, as groups able to control entry to a domain, they manifest the proclivity of the traditional guild toward monopolizing economic opportunity and social prestige for self-aggrandizement. On the other hand, as organized around important public values, professions can promote the spirit of corps necessary to maintain and advance standards of practice.

Sociologists and historians are divided over the importance one should give to one or the other tendency. A chronologically earlier group of analysts focused upon the emergence of professionalism as a paradigm of modern work, adding a generally positive assessment of its significance as an alternative to competitive economic laissez-faire. They shirked for honor, guaranteed by legally enforced privileges, in exchange for service and community leadership. This social contract became the moral basis of professionalism in America, giving American professions a civic orientation. Professions evolved into entities much like such legally chartered corporations as universities and colleges, which were granted autonomy and special status for a public purpose.

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Sociologists and historians are divided over the importance one should give to one or the other tendency. A chronologically earlier group of analysts focused upon the emergence of professionalism as a paradigm of modern work, adding a generally positive assessment of its significance as an alternative to competitive economic laissez-faire. They shirked for honor, guaranteed by legally enforced privileges, in exchange for service and community leadership. This social contract became the moral basis of professionalism in America, giving American professions a civic orientation. Professions evolved into entities much like such legally chartered corporations as universities and colleges, which were granted autonomy and special status for a public purpose.

The last lesson from this history is that it took more than demonstration of functional skill to establish a strong professional niche in the modern labor market. Political connections, effective organization, and especially the ability to establish and mobilize cultural significance were all essential. Professions are thus historically emergent social groups who share common educational experiences and a resulting outlook on themselves and the world. They are, in Randall Collins's phrase, "consciousness communities" with a sense of boundaries and interest in defining situations in a way consistent with a distinct viewpoint. Yet professions depend for their form and economic position upon a process of social negotiation with those outside the domain and ultimately upon political recognition and support.

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work: strong, guildlike organization can improve the standards of knowledge and skill, linking education and training closely to practice. Unfortunately, the same history also underscores how easily privileges granted for public purposes can be appropriated for private advantage. However, the story also points toward an answer to the question of how professionalism can be renewed as a positive force. The answer is both strengthened accountability and a professional leadership attentive to public needs as well as attuned to practitioner wants, one concerned to improve standards and also to strengthen links between the profession and the public.

The most informed account of American medicine and what is called the health care industry in the twentieth century is still Paul Starr's The Social Transformation of American Medicine. Its major points have recently been illustrated in Kenneth Ludmerer's detailed study of American medical education. Starr presents the career of medicine as a long, ascending curve toward achieving the autonomy of a well-established "sovereign profession," followed by a time of internal conflict and descent. At the same time, Starr's account also calls attention to how much the history of medicine's professionalism has always intersected the shifting alliances among competing social interests in American politics.

In Starr's narrative, American medicine successfully developed itself into a uniquely sovereign profession by tight organization and insistence that physicians, not third parties of any kind, control how medical services are provided and paid for. Remarkably, and unlike the story in most other industrial nations, American medicine harnessed scientific and technological advances to a model of practice in which the individual physician remained at the center. As private practitioners, doctors worked within a cartel administered by the local medical society and based in the community hospital, which the local physicians controlled. By early in the twentieth century, organized medicine achieved guildlike monopoly over its sphere of interest. Aided by the fledgling Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's famous Flexner Report, the American Medical Association was able to establish control over medical education and licensing throughout the country. This linked medical training and credentials to the university system, allaying elite practitioners with academic teaching hospitals.

The decline in medicine's professional sovereignty began, paradoxically, with its greatest expansion during the burst of national enthusiasm for scientific progress that followed victory in World War II. In that era for the first time, organized medicine accepted government as a partner. The federal government became massively involved through support for both research and the growth of medical schools and teaching hospitals. By the 1960s, an increasingly prestigious and confident academic medical establishment became sympathetic to what emerged as the federal initiatives of Medicare and Medicaid. This led to a break in the medical ranks. Although willing to accept government funding for education and research, the AMA maintained force and longstanding opposition to any encroachment by "socialized medicine" upon the autonomy of practice. With the support of most practitioners, the organization opposed the federal initiatives.

In the long term, these developments transformed medical practice; they also increased the divergence between the elite of academic medicine and the practitioner base of the AMA, such that medicine could no longer speak with a single voice. By involving government as a third-party payer as well as dispenser of largesse for expansion, medicine had less room for autonomous maneuver. Expansion and technological developments together fueled a steady rise in health care expenditures, which now showed up in the federal budget and on corporate balance sheets as insurance costs. In this way the huge expansion of medicine during the postwar period, though initially greatly enhancing the wealth, power, and prestige of the profession, also fatally entangled medicine with economic and political developments that it was able to exploit temporarily but not finally control.

This is the context of the "health care crisis" that has enveloped all the health care professions during the past two decades. As Starr summarized the trajectory: "the underlying
tension between a medical care system poised toward expansion and a society that trusts in the control over medical care. [A redrawn of the 'contract' between the medical profession and society, subjecting medical care to the discipline of politics or markets, or organizing its basic institutional structure. 28] At a more concrete level, as Ludwig notes, individual physicians face increasingly in conflict to their fiduciary responsibilities by: with the needs of patients or with insurance companies, health care systems, and investors. 29 After an unsuccessful effort by the Clinton administration to develop a form of joint federal-private insurer-provided national health insurance system, the denouement has been the takeover of much of health care by for-profit managed care, with a high likelihood of some degree of government oversight and regulation as yet to be determined. However it is finally decided, it seems clear that physicians will never again be the primary force determining how health care is delivered in the United States.

In this 'redrawing' of the contract between the medical profession and society, the stronger interests have prevailed, with the public reduced to bystander status and medicine itself more passive than active. Was this outcome inevitable? Here the differences among various analysts' theoretical perspectives show up forcefully. To those who view the professions as essentially "collective mobility projects" aiming at maximum autonomy, 30 it may seem so. Krause has described the rising cost in terms of American medicine as part of a general social tendency to subordinate professional organizations more effectively to the control of state and business (frequently acting together). This transformation is the final "death of the guild," a process Krause finds proceeding space in all industrial nations. 31 From this perspective, professionalism—as least when understood as primarily an ideological defense of guild powers—can mean only a losing rear-guard action against the inevitable advance of the Darwinian efficiency of the market, whose end the modern state exists to serve.

For historians such as Harold Perkin, on the other hand, the situation is more complex and outside causes less wholly determinate. Perkin argues that the spread of the idea of professionalism and its public legitimacy are inexplicable unless it answers in some way to real social needs that have become ever more pressing as the postindustrial or knowledge society develops. "The whole point and purpose of professional society," writes Perkin, "is to apply knowledge and expertise to the production of enough sophisticated goods and services so that for the first time in human history the economy is capable of producing enough 'created assets' to give everyone... access to the full range of satisfactions once open only to the rich and powerful. 32 In this context the integrity of professional services becomes a key public good. Thus, realizing the potential of such a new kind of society depends on institutionalizing an understanding of society as a body politic rooted in an ethos of equity and cooperation among different functional interests. For Perkin, this was summed up in the "professional social ideal," a blending of social justice and economic efficiency that he finds at the core of the twentieth-century social reform. 33

These themes resonate with the early-twentieth-century formulations of professionalism as an ideology of civic reform. As Brink and others have described it, that period saw not just the rise of the guild power of medicine but also the efforts of professionals to draw a contract with the public, in which professional social responsibility played a featured role. By contrast, the eclipse of that earlier civically-oriented notion of professionalism by a conception of the professional as simply a technical expert has made professionalism less effective. The very success of the professions turned later-twentieth-century professional leadership toward building its own organizations and prestige. Claims to professional expertise displaced community trusteeship as the coin of legitimacy for most professional groups. This long-term development pushed toward "the transformation of professionalism from an ideology
The British understanding of the new professionalism, as described by Sir Donald Irvine, recent president of the General Medical Council, has three features: first, maintaining knowledge and skills needed for good patient care; second, fostering respect, communication, and patient-guided care, including promotion of access to quality health care for all; and third, accountability, both personally on the part of individual physicians and collectively through professional self-monitoring in cooperation with public regulation. The British new professionalism emphasizes individual physician responsibility and the collective accountability of the profession. "In future as doctors," concludes Irvine, "we must take our professionalism—and with it professional regulation—as our basic professional asset... as a living thing, the contemporary embodiment of medical culture."

The Charter on Medical Professionalism was produced by the American Board of Internal Medicine Foundation and the American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine Foundation of the United States, together with the European Federation of Internal Medicine. The Preamble to the charter sets out the notion that medicine’s contract with society is based upon three things first, placing the interests of patients in the highest priority; second, "setting and maintaining standards of [physician] competence and integrity," third, "providing expert advice to society on matters of health." The charter emphasizes not only patient welfare but patient autonomy as well, suggesting more participatory relationships between doctors and patients. Finally, the charter's Preamble notes that the contract depends upon "public trust in physicians," which in turn rests upon "the integrity of both individual physicians and the whole profession" (my emphasis). Distinguishing a living culture, in Irvine’s words, from a merely inert concept of professionalism, these developments reach not to the public by beginning to open up professional practice, and especially professional self-government, to scrutiny and evaluation. The point of all this, however, is ultimately partnership for the greater good of the whole society.
The future of the professions may increasingly hinge on how professionalism is understood and practiced. It is once again a serious question whether or not a profession can secure public recognition of its claims to traditional professional prerogatives on the basis of the marketability of its technical skills alone. Or will public support and legal recognition for a profession increasingly require that it demonstrate significant contributions to advancing civic welfare? Historically, the legitimacy, authority, and legal privileges of the most prestigious professions have depended heavily on their claims (and finally their demonstration) of civic performance, especially social leadership in the public interest. As fields such as medicine come under the sway of large market-driven organizations, it is far from clear that these fields will be able to sustain their social importance without reengaging the public over the value of their work to the society at large. If the professions are to have a future, they may need to make their case from a civic understanding, rather than a wholly technical one, of what it is that professionals are about.

The entropy of professional legitimacy and the concomitant need to rethink the basis of its social contract are not unique to medicine. Law, the other old and highly successful field, has been experiencing its own sort of professional malaise. The error of the legal profession too points to the need for renewed professionalism. Deborah Rhode, an astute insider observer and critic of the American legal profession, has directly linked the profession’s current ills to failure to understand and practice professionalism in the full, active, civic sense under discussion in medicine.

Rhode makes a strong case that law has been losing public confidence largely because as a profession it fails to live up to its fiduciary responsibility to make the system of justice function well and equitably. “The central challenge for the legal profession,” Rhode writes, “is how to strengthen a sense of ethical obligation and to inspire a richer sense of what it demands in practice.” However, Rhode argues that this is not easy, even with plenty of good will. Like medicine, the professional has evolved into what is in many ways a series of fragments rather than a unified professional field. This makes acting together as a profession a rare and difficult achievement. Rhode sums up the situation by saying: “Commercialism and incivility are increasing; collegiality and collective responsibility are in decline. The priority of profits and the resulting sweatshop schedules have squeezed out time for public service and family commitments. . . .”

The public is deliberately kept at arm’s length and denied input into professional decision making and self-disciplining. The consequence, the emphasis is, the paradox of a prominent and influential profession whose members feel powerless in the face of the profession’s most crippling ills.

The upshot of this analysis is that the use of manure among legal practitioners leaves the profession strongly unable to address and solve its own most pressing problems. The reason for this sense of powerlessness lies not in weakness of character on the part of individual lawyers. It stems from weak professional solidarity, manifested in the failure of the organized bar to take leadership in reform. This is an important lesson. Individual practitioners cannot long or effectively confront the deforming pressures that analysts such as Rhode catalogue without strong support from an organized profession that is trying to meet its public obligations. There is an important reminder here that professionalism is rooted in a professional social contract. Professions are collegial organizations that carry a grant of public privilege and responsibility in exchange for accountability to the public. In the absence of the exercise of professional responsibility at the level of collective organization, individual practitioners are simply not able to function effectively.

What is needed, then, is collective empowerment of practitioners, guided by accountability to the public. Taken together, the experience of medicine and law suggest that professionalism flourishes only if key players within a profession take leadership in enforcing high standards of practice, while inviting public response and involvement in the profession’s efforts to clarify its mission and responsibilities. This is the practical import of civic professionalism today. It should be the goal of efforts to understand and criticize the
professions' existing state and the implications of their histories. This effort is the substance of the chapters on the evolution of the professions that follow.

The approach of the next chapters also makes it easier to grasp both the limitations and the potential of the various types of profession for responding to the challenges of the present. The aim is to shed light on the crucial cultural dimension of the professional enterprise. Reconstructing the socioeconomic and political contexts that gave rise to the particular professional types helps to clarify how and why the meaning of professional life remains a contested issue. Hence the qualities of autonomy, personal probity, and social leadership associated with professionalism derive from the early learned professions, which formed around themselves the aura of social responsibility and leadership. In a parallel way, the ascendancy of confidence in learned expertise, specialization, and the applicability of science and technology to human problems indicates the continuing currency of values that launched the later technologically oriented professions such as engineering.

Tracing the conflicts and innovations through which the various types of profession arose also indicates their close association with characteristic institutions and influential currents in American culture. The most constant tension, as we have seen, is between a technical emphasis stressing specialization—broadly linked to a utilitarian conception of society as a project for enhancing efficiency and individual satisfaction—and a sense of professional mission that insists upon the prominence of the ethical and civic dimensions of the enterprise. This conflict within professionalism has at times mirrored a wider conflict within American society, while at other times the direction taken by the culture of professionalism has led a leading part in the larger drama of cultural change.

This framework of analysis makes no pretense to neutrality in the ongoing contest of the identity and destiny of the professional enterprise. It seeks to reclaim and continue a tradition of civic professionalism. This is a tradition that, although acknowledging the genuine importance of technical proficiency in every field, views the professional enterprise as humanly engaged practices generating values of great significance for a modern society. The burden of the several chapters that follow is to show how the civic orientation in professionalism has been eclipsed by a more narrowly technical understanding, often to the detriment of professional life and the social compact that links professionals to the larger society. The latter part of the book attempts to make constructive use of this analysis in order to discern and explore the possibilities for renewed civic professionalism built on for American democracy. These conflicts have repeatedly been focused on the central bases of how professionals should be trained. Hence, professional education becomes an important theme in these later chapters, to diagnose past and present conflicts and to envision renewal.