

The Relation of Police Work to Scientific Scholarship

Egon Bittner

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It is often said that the *sine qua non* of a modern profession is that it be founded on a body of technical, scholarly knowledge.¹ That is, the public trust in the efficacy of professional practices is based in part on the assumption that what a practitioner decides to do is related to information contained in books and taught in classrooms. Such knowledge is arcane, at least in the sense that it is not accessible to lay people, its acquisition involves protracted and assiduous study, and its validity is determined by scientific criteria, rather than by standards of common sense reasonableness.

In our times the connection between this kind of arcane information and professional practice is justified entirely on the basis of secular and pragmatic considerations. But it is a matter of some importance that the tie between professional knowing and professional doing antedates this understanding of its significance. At their beginnings, the great professions of healing and teaching were founded on sacred knowledge and their procedures were closely related to religious ritual and priestly functions. Thus, their intellectual, or more properly perhaps, spiritual character is not a modern invention. Instead, they have from the time of their outset been, so to speak, inspired vocations. But modern physicians and modern teachers have become what they are today only after they turned into an exhaustively secular “priesthood”. The conversion of these professions from their archaic to their contemporary form involved a complete emancipation from the sources of their origin. The turn to secular-scientific scholarship, in lieu of earlier recourse to divination and revelation, was in large measure due to the fact that the former is superior to the latter in the attainment of worldly purposes. But the archaic sense of the connection between arcane knowledge and professional

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practice did not disappear entirely. Science merely took the place of sacred knowledge. For this to be possible it is necessary to claim more on behalf of science than can be actually justified. Thus, though everyone knows that as a merely technical resource available scientific information is often not adequate to handle many specific problems, its use is nevertheless attended by the hopeful belief that somehow, in yet unknown ways, science cannot fail. Consequently, to claim for some professional procedure that it is scientific constitutes an ambiguous claim, or, at least, as ambiguous a claim as to invoke divine sanction in its favor. In this framework the belief in the connection between scientific truth and professional practice can remain intact even though specific justifications are often lacking and for the rest only of passing merit. In sum, the professionalization of modern medicine and teaching involved the severance of ties with their beginning, i.e., the transfer from sacred to secular knowledge, *and* a hefty dose of faith in the ultimate value of scientific scholarship.

Not all the modern professions trace their origins to associations with religious wisdom and priestly functions, however, and hence not all begin with arcane knowledge. Engineering, for example, springs from the other end of the sacred-secular spectrum. It was from the outset geared to the mundane objectives of converting forms of work from lower to higher input-output ratios, and to changing matter from worthless to valued forms. The practitioners of this craft remained shop craftsmen roughly up to the end of the last century. Despite notable achievement the craft did not attain professional status until it became emancipated from exclusive concerns with situational work problems and from apprenticeship methods of training and turned to bookish knowledge and to academic instruction.² Similarly, social work arose out of humanitarian and political motives. But its helping functions remained a lay pursuit until it became dissociated from these inspirations and went on to basing its practices on a body of information and precepts that at least aspire to recognition as scientific.

In an earlier section of this report we have criticized at length the quasi-military character of modern American police forces. We can now put this critique in yet another perspective. In some inchoate sense all police forces trace their origin to the role of men of arms, as is, indeed, still reflected in the term *gendarme*. Certainly this is the guiding sense of the occupational self-conception of many policemen. Now, in abandoning this conception, and the entire framework of militaristic associations that come with it, the police would move along the path of development of all the professions which received recognition only after severing connections with their respective sources of origin and gained new public trust and legitimacy on the basis of association with secular scientific scholarship.

The transformation of the conception of policing from the model of the man of arms to the model of the trained professional, whose training stands in some relationship to scientific scholarship, naturally involves the mobilization of scientifically delineated programs of study and instruction. The development of such programs requires decisions of what should be studied and what should be taught. But the consideration of these questions can go on indefinitely. The only way out of this situation is to form some institutions that can assume at least provisional jurisdiction over the solution of these problems. Drawing on analogies with the existing professions, such institutions are the post graduate professional schools.

It may seem preposterous to suggest the formation of post-graduate professional schools of police work – graduation from which will ultimately be a condition of employment for all licensed policemen – at a time when most of those who practise the occupation have no more than a high school education. Worse yet, it may seem cynical to suggest that such schools be formed prior to the time the field of study can be defined or even adumbrated. But if these objections are taken at their face value then none of the existing professional schools could have been founded in the first place, and some might lose their right to existence even today. The presumption that the research programs and curricula of the existing schools have unexceptionally well founded relevance to professional practice is simply a presumption.³ A good deal of what physicians, lawyers, teachers, social workers, etc., study in their respective institutions is of no sensible use and is either simply forgotten or abandoned because it is dated before the hard won knowledge can be applied. Moreover, in some professions, such as engineering or social work, practitioners without educational credentials still abound and the possession of a degree is not yet an enforceable condition of employment. None of this, however, alters the fact that professional schools in these occupations function as legitimizing institutions of the professional status of the occupations as a whole.

Though it is not true of all professional schools, in some it matters less that they have a well defined field of study and a well justified program of instruction than that they be the foci of scholarly pursuits oriented to some field practice. As far as the students of these schools are concerned it is less important that they learn a body of specific facts and specific techniques, than that they acquire a complex of generalized methods and approaches to facts and problem solving. Preferably professional education should be as rich in substance as medicine and engineering are. But in the absence of knowledge of such richness and complexity, the education is valuable even if it merely imparts studiousness and the habits of inquisitively dispassionate reasoning. Above all, however, the importance of professional schools resides in that they constitute links between occupations and

scientific scholarship. It is difficult to overestimate the practical and symbolic significance of this fact. For better or for worse, in our society occupations progress in efficiency, sophistication, importance and dignity proportionately to the strength of the connections they maintain with scientific scholarship.

It is important to emphasize that the transformation of meaning to which we refer – from gendarme to professional policemen – cannot be accomplished by merely infusing police work with some fruits of scientific research or by requiring policemen to secure academic degrees within the existing programs of instruction. Thus, for example, the various existing programs of instruction for policemen offered in association with college departments of social science will almost certainly not produce the desired result. Such programs are valuable only as temporary expedients and because they might help some persons who are active in the police establishment to acquire the stature and the interest to lay the foundations for independent policework-education. But even this much is perhaps too much to expect. For in the existing programs the students are taught by academicians and left to their own resources to establish the connection between what they learn and what they must do. Often such instruction causes resentment rather than enlightenment. Furthermore, student-policemen are the recipients of watered-down wisdom because instructors tend to assume that men who joined the police are probably not very desirous of learning. The depressing effect of this assumption is augmented by the belief instructors and students share that taking courses will make but a slight and uncertain impact on the student's standing in the police department. Finally, the existing programs are generally designed to service existing police systems. Though they are greatly superior to what is offered in departmental police academies, they turn out men who are neither prepared nor equipped to oppose the soldier-bureaucrat role that awaits them.

It is clearly not for lawyers, sociologists, or psychologists to develop an intellectually credible version of what police work should look like. This must be left to scholarly policemen, just as the analogous task is left to scholarly physicians, social workers, or engineers. Of course, lawyers, sociologists, and psychologists will retain a role in the professional police work curriculum; but it will be an auxiliary role of the kind that chemists, physiologists, and psychologists now have in medical schools. For the main reason for having professional schools of police work is to make a home for police work-study. It must be their own home, or the enterprise will be dispirited and doomed to failure. The development of a fully reasoned meaning of the police role in society, that might give rise to a range of rationally methodical work procedures, must be worked out from within the occupation, it cannot be imparted to it by outsiders.⁴ Outsiders can help in this task, but they cannot take it over. The main reason for this is not that outsiders are not adequately informed but that supplying knowledge from external sources

would leave police work intellectually inert. The main purpose of having professional schools of police work (and it is not a matter of great importance whether they be of a postgraduate nature as was argued above and is the case for Schools of Social Work, or of an undergraduate nature as is the case for Schools of Engineering) is not to produce educated policemen but to make *specific education*, and the range of meaning associated with it, part of the conception of the occupation.⁵ This can only be achieved by independent degree granting institutions functioning within the framework of existing universities, in the maintenance of which the practicing profession will have a realistic interest.

It takes little imagination to anticipate the formidable difficulties that will attend the formation of a connection between police work and scientific scholarship by means of independently functioning professional schools. The universities will undoubtedly balk at having such schools in their midst, as they have in the past opposed the establishment of other such schools. Even after a foothold is gained the relations will remain strained, as they are generally between academicians and professionals. But all this is a relatively minor difficulty. Professional police schools can buy their way into the university as was done by others who brought financial endowments with them. That this is possible may be sad, but it is true. No matter how painful it is to admit it, the modern university is no longer a bastion of pure learning; the ivory tower is merely its *inner sanctum*. A more serious difficulty is created by the need to staff the schools with faculties drawn from within the occupation. Though the number of persons who are capable of taking such positions is not great, it is quite probable that there are more of them than is generally known. The only possible solution of this problem is for some groups of policemen with respectable credentials to get together, work out some program jointly with some interested scholars and lawyers, and approach a university with a request for acceptance. In this way, schools will be created as viable prospects for them emerge. But the greatest problem of all is to mobilize, in the existing police establishment, the conviction that the development proposed here is absolutely necessary and will not abide any delays. Since we do not propose to run out of solutions in this study, and because the proposed solution requires a background argument, we will deal with it in the next section.

NOTES

1. H. M. Volmer and D. L. Mills (eds.) *Professionalization*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1966.

2. Professionalization of engineering is a fascinating story; see B. M. Fisher, *Industrial Education: American Ideals and Institutions*, Madison, Wisc: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967, pp. 60-71, where at p. 62, F. A. Walker, who took over the presidency of MIT

in 1875, is quoted as having stated, “We assert that the disinterestedness of study does not depend on the immediate usefulness or uselessness of the subject matter, but upon the spirit with which the student takes up and pursues his work. If there be zeal in investigation, if there be delight in discovery, if there be fidelity to truth as it is discerned, nothing more can be asked by the educator of highest aims.”

3. Schools of medicine are a possible exception in this respect. Law schools were certainly not founded to answer needs of professional practice: W. F. Murphy and C. Pritchett report about admission standards to legal practice that, as late as 1953, “Only twenty states demanded a law degree; three required merely a high-school education and two set no minimal standards whatever” *Courts, Judges, and Politics: An Introduction to the Judicial Process*, New York: Random House, 1961, p. 125. It is also a well known fact that law schools have a long history of struggles in attempting to bring curricula into some sort of functional relationship with practice; see Erwin Griswold, *Law and Lawyers in the United States*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964. The problems of defining the field of academic study and its relevance to practice are even more acute in schools of education and in schools of social work.

4. Thus, for example, the definition of the role of police in modern society offered in the foregoing remarks, even if it appeals to social scientists, will be of no practical value unless the practitioners recognize it, and elaborate it further, as the leading maxim of their methods.

5. The leading example of how unimportant “mere” education can be, as opposed to specific professional education, is diplomacy. It appears that even though most members of the foreign service have academic credentials, they are scandalously unprepared for their assignments. Smith Simpson writes, “Diplomacy and foreign policy, like the law involve justice and order. Like medicine, they involve people’s lives, and on a very large scale. Diplomacy, therefore, should demand the most thorough, the most grueling professional preparation. Yet the State Department moseys along, requiring no more than was required fifty or sixty years ago. It takes the position that any adult, aged twenty-one, can make a good diplomatic officer if he has but personality, character, a high IQ and a smattering of a liberal arts education” in his *Anatomy of the State Department*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1967, p. 10.