

# The Growth of Modern Professions

HIDDEN HIERARCHIES by CORINNE LATHROP GILB

New York and London: Harper and Row, 1966, 307 pages, \$5.95

Reviewed by BERTRAM M. GROSS

In an era of increasing fragmentation, it is refreshing, enlightening, and inspiring to find a book about professional specialization, especially one written by a generalist who has risen far above the ordinary limitations of discipline and period.

Professor Gilb—whose career encompasses an unusual amount of discipline-hopping—uses the most relevant concepts of political science, sociology, and law to analyze the growth of modern professions and professional associations. A perceptive historian, she takes us back to the medieval guilds and escorts us through the 17th century (viewed as a period of transition), the 18th century and its atomism, and the growth of the new industrial order in the 19th century. Against this background, she concentrates on certain major professions in the United States during this century—particularly medicine, nursing, law, education, and engineering. While identifying formal patterns of organization, she goes behind them to dissect informal groupings and operations. Usually graceful and never glib, Professor Gilb intersperses sober exposition with bold generalizations clad in forceful language and subtly shaded qualifications. Students will long appreciate and scholars often quote her expositions of "bread and butter professionalism," "freedom through conformity," the growth of consumer demand for professional services, decentralization with centralization, "self-government through the public legislature," and "progressive consent" as a characteristic of "lawmaking within and between organizations" as well as of public legislatures.

Perhaps the most germinal idea in *Hidden Hierarchies* is the suggestion

that, with growing professionalization, we are moving into a "status society." The new professional associations, with their licensing requirements and other forms of credentialism, tend to resemble medieval social forms. "The medieval guilds determined who should learn the craft skills. . . . They set and enforced standards for craft performance. . . . They provided fellowship, brotherhood, and security for those within the fold. . . . In turn, their right to self-regulation was recognized and sanctioned by the community. The net effect of their activities was to help freeze the status quo. And so it is today."

On the other hand, "professional work has been moving away from the prototypes of the later Middle Ages—when free men worked individually, guided by self-governing guilds—and more toward something resembling the earlier medieval model, when most professional work was done through the Church." Professor Gilb then focuses attention on the question, "What is there in the contemporary American scene different in kind or degree from anything that has gone before?" She calls upon American social scientists to recognize the "signs that a new order is already emerging—a new antithesis."

There are many weaknesses, many sins of omission, in *Hidden Hierarchies*. One is the author's failure to deal directly, in clear conceptual terms, with the great leap from "profession" (in the older sense of doctor-lawyer-teacher-engineer) to the much broader concept that goes far beyond the so-called liberal professions. As a result, the book understates the role of the scientific professions—and ignores the work of Derek de Solla Price in uncovering the hundreds of "invisible colleges" through

which the scientific and technological professionals operate. The fouled-up subject of "professional management" is neatly ignored. No mention is made of the "tangential" professions (as in the case of the scientist-manager or the doctor-teacher), the layered professions (as in the physician-psychiatrist-psychologist ladder), or the powerful Pearl-Reissman concept of "subprofessional" careers. Perhaps unduly influenced by such outmoded books as *The Legislative Struggle*, the author sometimes gives the false impression that the bulk of lobbying and logrolling occurs in legislatures, rather than in the administrative agencies of government. The felt and unfelt interests of interest groups are touched upon (something rare in so-called interest-group analysis), but without attention to the theoretical implications. Above all, one gets the uncomfortable impression that the author had written twice as much, but that some economy-minded editor had issued an arbitrary instruction to cut the text in half by knocking out every other chapter.

At times *Hidden Hierarchies* looks like a series of double exposures, produced by the author's taking pictures from different viewpoints without moving the film. At other times we see a clear snapshot taken in brilliant sunlight—but with an overlay of X-rays. Yet this is the author's strength, not weakness. Having the capacity to open up ten new avenues of thought, she will not stay long enough to explore one thoroughly. The reader is given a headstart, plus an incentive to go ahead on his own. Thus *Hidden Hierarchies* is a cool "McLuhanesque." But it is much more than that. It is the first installment—given to us by a humanist-scientist already on her way to recognition as one of the most powerful thinkers of the 1970s—in a holistic view of man and his values in periods of revolutionary change.

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