

SKETCHES FOR A NEW SOCIOLOGY OF INTELLIGENZ: ABOUT TIZIANA FAITINI'S SHAPING THE PROFESSION

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Professional Experiences. Not a Ritual Formula

In Chapter VII of Kafka's (1925, p. 286) *Trial*, Josef K. finds himself exhausted in front of the "court painter," Titorelli, who goes on at length to explain to him how his paintings depicting moorland landscapes, all identical, are liked or disliked by buyers. In the usual vitiated air of the entire novel, sweating and anguished in the painter's small room, K., the author tells us, "did not have the head to listen to the professional experiences of the beggar-painter" (*für die beruflichen Erfahrungen des Bettelmalers*). Curiously, Kafka uses a lemma such as "professional experience" and associates it with an outcast social figure, the *Bettelmaler*, whom we would hardly identify at first glance with a "worker" capable of listing his professional background. Both roles attributed to Titorelli are, in fact, far from the ordinary conception of work framed and declared on the basis of skills and studies. Art and begging are hardly identifiable with "professions." They represent moments of *otium* rather than *negotium*. And yet Kafka, with subtle irony, connects them—pointing to a beyond of professionalism precisely in the experience of the idler, of the artist who asks, "prays", for some compensation for his street works. Perhaps it is precisely this interweaving of idleness, precariousness, and judgments on the works of those who make idleness and precariousness a way of life that can provide a starting point for tackling a reconstruction as complex as the one that Tiziana Faitini tackles on

a philosophical-political level, but armed with extensive historical documentation, of the concept of “profession,” in *Shaping the Profession: Towards a Genealogy of Professional Ethics* (Faitini, 2023).

What does it mean, in fact, to connect “professionalism” to experience, as the author asks in the introduction (Faitini, 2023, p. XIII)? What does it mean to link two self-defining terms (profession *and* experience) of our era and see one as the other? The initial effort of *Shaping the Profession* lies in restoring conceptual and historical depth, in a tone of a *Begriffsgeschichte* reread in the light of certain Foucauldian intuitions, to the actual millenary formula of professional experience. This means, first of all, that “being inside a profession” is an experience of the constitution of subjectivity, which intersects with the construction of widespread normativity —ethical and legal. Strong in the conviction that this very experience must be historicised, that is, it must be categorised according to its historical persistence and mutations (p. 21), Tiziana Faitini’s book shows the *longue durée* profile pertinent to the concept of “profession.”

A foreword is in order. In the background of the essay, of course, is Max Weber’s investigation of the *Beruf*. Weber appears several times as a model, as a support, and as a “conversational partner” (Faitini, 2023, p. xv). Nevertheless, the book’s interest is, if anything, to propose a *countermelody* to Weber, as it says twice (pp. 78, 145), that is, to carve out a specific role, and one that is substantially autonomous from the *Beruf* and the complex Weberian genealogy inscribed in the Protestant Ethics (a genealogy that is also lexical), of the *professio*, with its Roman origins: *professio* from *profiteor*, to declare officially. If the history of the profession originates as a linguistic function, more precisely declarative, the idea of “profession,” always conveyed by the Latin language and culture, evolves over the centuries to connote a binding relationship of those who “profess” with a specialised education (what in German will be called the *fachmässige Schulung*).

The Roman device of *professio* functions as the root of a subsequent ramification that always holds the declaration and the discriminating judgement together. The pater *familias*’ *professio census* was entrusted to the censors who had a dual task of assessing the economic and the ethical: It was up to them to assess properties and *mores*. To “profess” meant, in the first place, subjection to the ruling and censorious power (Faitini, 2023, p. 87).

The Economic Ethics of World Professions

Although Faitini masterfully describes a much more complex picture than what can be rendered here (see, for example, the pages on the *professio monachi*, the taking of vows of

poverty, chastity and obedience, where the *professio* “coincides with an act of inclusion in a hierarchical and salvific order”; Faitini, 2023, p. 74), one can suggest that starting from the ancient Rome, the *professio* gradually takes on a *lato sensu* cultural guise. That is, it signifies a “liberal” activity or, with several nuances, an activity remunerated not with a salary but with an honorarium, received “for the noble service freely and magnanimously rendered” (p. 77). In essence, those who receive the honorary compensation are those who teach: “teaching, in fact, was the field that united those activities in a somewhat homogeneous category” (p. 63). The officials of the imperial bureaucracy first, then the physicians, the *sacerdotes juris*, actually lay jurists, and many *clerici vagantes* are just as many examples of this intellectuality that studies and teaches, professing science and earning moderate remuneration.

It is, however, through the concept of *officium*, as an embodiment of the duties derived from the status one occupies in society, as a function that always aims at the common good (Faitini, 2023, p. 111), that the *professio* takes on an entirely economic guise while being ethical. The office in a tone of ethical-economic synergy serves the modern reappraisal of the *vita activa*, but at the same time, contributes to a taxonomy of professional sins, which takes hold, especially following the Counter-Reformation. If Samuel Pufendorf (1673), with his *De officio hominis et civis* marks the way for elites throughout Europe to recognise the social world as a network of duties to be performed, professionalism gradually asserts itself as a synonym of “honour”: The *Rechtschaffenheit* of which Hegel (1821) speaks in the *Grundlinien zur Philosophie des Rechts* is precisely the honesty recognised in the exercise of the profession. In general, Faitini explains, it is a moral theology that indicates and “censures” the more or less legitimate conduct in the sphere of status that functions as a prerequisite for an ethics of office intertwined with the many professional ethics. It is a “social theology” that sanctions the charitable constraints of giving advice (for doctors and jurists) and equally legitimately expecting remuneration in this regard (p. 163). One has the rank and the dignity of *doctores*, if and when one gives opinions and advice; at the same time, the *consilia* become an opportunity to exchange information and scientific data. Later, in early modernity, this entanglement of morality and economics will emerge on the Puritan and Protestant side in the concept of “calling” as a choice of a “status vitae”: Moral duty coincides with economic fulfilment.

Precisely from the recognition of the link between ethics and economics, Faitini's study feels the need to descend along the branches of the contemporary proliferation of the lemma in ethics between individuals and society (or meso-ethics), applied ethics that open deontological strands, that substantiate codes of *berufsethisches* shape. Codes

and applied ethics all seem to feed on ideological food, on an underlying assumption that sees in Talcott Parsons a coherent source with a functionalist sociology's tone of a (vague, and often distorted) Weberian matrix: the organisation of work is the central element of the human being (Faitini, 2023, p. 34), but at its summit are the specialised professional classes, at the same time “resolute defenders of the privileged status” (p. 38). For Parsons, the “professional” is the one who possesses skills that place him in an asymmetrical position in relation to his fellow citizens. In his vision, a sort of professional charisma is created, which endows those who possess it with authority over those who lack it. The culture certified by being a professional is disseminated in society and requires a specific ethic. More ethics.

Certainly, despite the different degrees of formalisation, professional ethics still show traces of the intertwining of ethics and economics highlighted as early as the subtitle of Weber's sociological-religious research: “the economic ethics of the *Weltreligionen*.” Nonetheless, the Weberian perspective needs to be supplemented, deepened, and sometimes corrected, in Faitini's vision.

Work for Work's Sake and *art pour l'art*

At the heart of Faitini's investigation is actually a further, necessary, main instance: to reread the political, inclusive-exclusive slant that the concept of “profession” has held since Latin times, and which returns, more or less surprisingly, even in the contemporary. Work functions as the social “great integrator,” and profession is its first agent. To work in order to be a citizen is the formula, the precept, the quasi-dogma that accompanies the not-always-simple path of professional integration. Our “work-democracies” (Faitini, 2023, p. xvii) more or less lazily settle on these foundations whereby “work is considered valuable for its own sake” (p. 4), but the next step, the “glorification of work” (so says Arendt (1958), in *Human Condition*) in theory and its constitutional value has to be historically determined.

Not to be underestimated in this respect is the focus of 19th- and 20th-century Catholic thought and doctrine on work as an ennobling instance, from Leo XIII to John Paul II. Conversely, the sacredness of work was contrasted with the ethical unsustainability of idleness: “idleness was the foundation of every moral decay” (Faitini, 2023, p. 30). This happened while on the German and Protestant side, a notable fringe of theologians (from Holl to Barth to Bonhoeffer) —not by chance lined up in opposition to the Nazi regime— began to blur the *Arbeitsfreude* as the keystone of innerworldly action, undermining the plasticity of the idea of the *Beruf*. And it is

precisely on the ethics (or amorality) of idleness and its connection to intellectuals and artists that some concluding reflections must be made.

In this regard, a preparatory note by Aby Warburg needs to be quoted. The note stems from his studies on the 1907 essay on Francesco Sassetti, which he sent to Max Weber and which was publicly praised by him in one of the *Antikritiken* to the *Protestant Ethics*—albeit without quoting the author's name (Warburg was only mentioned as “a very gifted art historian”).

Sassetti, a merchant in the second half of the 15th century, who commissioned a family sepulchral chapel frescoed by Ghirlandaio in Florence, is studied by Warburg, through his requests to the artist, as a typical representative of an era of transition from the Middle Ages to the figure of the bourgeois worker (it should be noted that “bourgeois” is a term that appears only fleetingly in Faitini's book). A faithful bourgeois who finds a balance by giving art the task of representing the labour energy that was developing

with the emancipation of the modern individual from the oppression of the past, and with his impulse to divest himself of what is traditional by developing work energy (thanks to the influence of the Ancient); work for work's sake does not tolerate *art pour l'art*. Work and despair not. (Appunto WIA, 69.7, as cited in Ghelardi, 2022, p. 113)

As we have seen, Kafka, Warburg's contemporary, speaking of the professional experiences of a beggar-painter, places himself at the opposite focus of the ellipse of the modern, when the line framed by Sassetti's aspirations to find art that expresses the tension of work seems to break. Kafka's singular formula—the professional experiences of an artist-beggar—is a further nuance of that moment when “professional” becomes the antonym of dilettante, and the “professeur” gets opposed to the “amateur,” as Faitini (2023, p. 197) explains. That is the moment when bourgeois society explicitly begins to stigmatise, sometimes to expel, to exclude, the practitioners of inoperativeness. But it is useful to remember that the division of social labour, specialisation, the partition of the knowable and practicable into autonomous, compartmentalised sections, as Emile Durkheim (1897) teaches, should be studied at exactly the same time as suicide, that is, the tension towards anomie, the deviation from the social norm.

And if so much has been recently said about inoperosity, about *désœuvrement*, in the wake of Bataille and then Nancy, and finally Agamben, if we ask ourselves what the role of the negative is at the end of history, when it is unemployed (*sans emploi*), it is appropriate to ask, with Faitini, whether *during* history there has been negativity without employment.

And the answer is positive, though admittedly very nuanced because there have been eras of *loisirs*, of *Freizeit*, of recognised idleness, of *scholé* identified as a specific sphere of intellectual existence. There have been moments in which Fichte could determine the vocation of the scholar in a universalist key, and others instead, closer to our era, in which this existence has once again been framed in a status grid, with its contour of probity, *cursus honorum*, and tight lists of “professional experiences.”

It is possible then, as Faitini does, to write a historical sociology of the intellectual, to clothe it in the most serious garb of political genealogy, and to move through historical semantics in a Foucauldian garb. And one can ask oneself, together with the author, when and how it happened that the economic-acquisitive-lucrative activity became morally normative, and the other, the less lucrative yet certainly “official” one—in the long-term historical lexicon that Faitini studies—turned out to be disqualifying, even idle. The theme of recognition thus emerges subterraneously: What stood behind the Mannheimian formula of the “sociology of *Intelligenz*” was the “penultimate” outcome whose history Tiziana Faitini narrated and problematised. The vicissitudes of the *professio* could be somehow interpreted as the prehistory of present-day cognitive capitalism and the precarious intellectual, which is the ultimate outcome. If the medieval ideology was the dissemination of culture through *professiones*, if teaching was the lowest common denominator of the *profession*—hence the beginning of universities after the year 1000—today *Geistliche Arbeit* is almost entirely professionalised, contractualised, or silently made for free. The intellectual, the specialist in “intermediate knowledge,” must to, all intents and purposes, show themselves to be industrious, active, someone involved in *negotia*. They must show themselves as such, *Bettelmalers*, while begging for compensation by displaying their works.

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