

INTRODUCTORY

The professions, particularly those based on private practice, have been under close scrutiny during the past few years; many would say they have been under attack. They have been dissected by sociologists and criticised by economists. They have been referred to public inquisitorial bodies like the Monopolies Commission and the Prices and Incomes Board. They have been told that they have no business to fix their own scales of charges, but should let someone else do it for them. They have been accused of inefficiency, complacency and worse. They have been subjected to a novel form of taxation, the Selective Employment Tax, based on the proposition that the services they provide are in the nature of a luxury which people should learn to do without, or to do with less of. In much public comment they are regarded, indulgently or not, as anachronisms in need of radical overhaul. Phrases like "closed shop", "monopoly" and "restrictive practices" are freely bandied about.

Little has been done to combat these attacks. Many professional people disdain to answer them, shrinking from self-praise and the statement of what to them is the obvious. Outsiders know little and care less for the traditional values and rules of the professions. Their code, as it applies in Britain, has not been extensively examined in any published work. The terrain, as one commentator has said, is virgin and difficult.

In this situation and climate of opinion the present book has been written. It attempts to show in detail how the various rules of the professional code fit into an ordered pattern and embody a coherent philosophy. From this philosophy springs the peculiar value to the community of professional services, particularly those undertaken by private practitioners. Being human institutions, the professions have their imperfections. They exhibit, however, virtues of humanity, independence and incorruptibility which are much needed in the world today. Those who appreciate them should spring to their defence. Otherwise there may well, in a few years, be nothing left to defend. Private practice will have been blotted out by economic and other pressures and the citizen will go for advice to one source only — an all-beneficent state.