



Professional Morality and Guilty Bystanding: Merton's Conjectures and the Value of Work

By Barry L. Padgett

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Work as center of life has such an important role in our lives; it bears a standard by which we measure our success. It is a major component of self actualization and well-being. Professional life offers the hope of rewarding work, not just financially but work that is fulfilling. However, professions are also riddled with complexities and ethical conflicts that obstruct the goal of meaningful work. Our jobs are fraught with moral ambiguities and dilemmas; these become sources of frustration and alienation. What is needed is a transformation, a renewal of our professional lives and the institutional contexts in which we operate, to humanize the alienating aspects of work and professions. Thomas Merton (1915-1968), though a cloistered monk, wrote extensively on spiritual and social issues. He has been called 'a spiritual master' for contemporary times. He possessed an uncanny sense of self-awareness and moral imagination. His life and writings have inspired countless persons on life's spiritual journey. Yet, while people have looked to Merton for guidance on spiritual issues, the implications of his thought for several other areas of life are open to exploration. This book focuses on the significance of his reflections in "Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander", which offer one the confidence to embark on a journey that seeks to transcend the complexities of professional life, and courage to transform the negative features of workplaces and organizations through reasoned moral action, moral imagination, and leadership.

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- Sales Rank: #2800960 in Books
- Published on: 2009-03-01
- Format: Unabridged
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: .80" h x 5.80" w x 8.20" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 160 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

"With scholarship, style, and intriguing insight Barry Padgett makes the important point that ethics is a verb, not just a naming noun. Using Thomas Merton as his guide, Padgett argues that theory and contemplation are necessary but not sufficient. Ethics requires us to live out our values and beliefs both in our private and, most especially, in our public lives." - Al Gini, Editor, Business Ethics Quarterly "Dr. Padgett approaches Thomas Merton's classic book, Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander, in a new and highly relevant fashion. Padgett takes Merton's prophetic, frequently acerbic insights into the modern world, and teases out their application to the world of work ethics. This book challenges readers of Thomas Merton to carry his message from their heads to their daily work places." - Paul Pearson, director of the Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University.

"This book is an extended reflection on the relationship between Merton's thinking, especially as found in 'Conjectures', and the moral dilemmas of contemporary professional life. As such it is an important book, a significant, welcome and almost overdue development in Merton studies." Canon Melvyn Matthews, Chancellor Emeritus of Wells Cathedral in Merton Journal, Vol 16, No.2, 2009 "Padgett's book brings Merton's writings into timely discussions of ethics currently monopolizing media headlines, namely a global economic crisis precipitated by poor ethical judgement in the business sector and a national debate in the United States concerning health care. Padgett skillfully demonstrates how Merton's work continues to be challenging in a contemporary context." Mark C. Meade, Thomas Merton Centre, Bellarmine University, Cistercian Studies Quarterly, Vo. 45.3, 2010

About the Author

Barry L. Padgett is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky. His area of specialization is applied philosophy; he teaches Bioethics to graduate students in fields of Nursing and Physical Therapy, and a Business Ethics component of the MBA program at Bellarmine. He holds a Ph.D. from Purdue University.

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