

for a varied audience: lay readers, those who are relatively new to Merton, Merton enthusiasts, Merton scholars, and anyone else who longs for Merton's accompaniment in prayer and contemplation. Often when someone asks me for a recommendation of a book by Merton, I am at a loss to narrow the options down to only one. I think I have now found it.

Matthew Emile Vaughan

PADGETT, Barry L., *Professional Morality and Guilty Bystanding: Merton's Conjectures and the Value of Work* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), pp. xii + 142. ISBN: 978-1-4438-0245-1 (cloth) £34.99.

This is a good book, and a challenging one. I found it challenging because of its dense writing style, and its long expositions of a number of approaches to philosophical ethics, unfamiliar to me, but not something to wonder at, given that the author is a philosopher with a strong interest in the ethics of the professions and of business.

The book originated in a conference on "Merton and Moral Reflection in the Professions" co-sponsored by Bellarmine University's Ethics and Social Justice Center and the Thomas Merton Center in March 2006, which explored Merton's *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (1966) as a launch-pad for reflecting on professional morality. Interestingly, the event was inspired by the real-world story of Dr. Linda Peeno, "whose experience as a medical reviewer for a major health insurance corporation is depicted in the movie *Damaged Care*" (vii), in which she quotes Merton. Her experience as an ethically-challenged professional was also picked up by Michael Moore in his film *Sicko*.

Padgett's foundational assertion in the book is that contemplation, "as Merton understands it, facilitates the maturation of character and lays the foundation for wisdom" (viii), two dimensions of personality which he finds (as do I) in short supply in our culture. He does not define Merton's view of contemplation, but in various ways he points to it. Contemplation, in Merton's view and practice, involves "cultivating a deep inner spirituality from which one [can] critically encounter the world" (4). It requires meditation on one's "profound recognition of a unity of the self with others" (37). It serves "as a safeguard against over-identification of self with work" (74). Sometimes Padgett identifies "dialectic" as a

companion activity to contemplation, and sometimes he presents it as a feature of contemplation: in neither case is his use of the term clear, to me at least. In relation to morally-informed leadership, contemplation becomes "an extended call to action" (99); and all of these dimensions are nourished and integrated by the commitment to solitude and silence which is its matrix.

A new thought to me was the author's assertion that the concept of a profession, and of its members as professionals, is comparatively recent: he gives the time-frame for this as the past 70 years. A profession, he says, requires specific training, gives personal autonomy to its members, involves its members in public service, and is characterized by adherence to an ethical code. I find this framing a little stretched, since for centuries we have had lawyers and doctors and so on; but I take his time-frame to refer not so much to the existence of the professions as to their professionalization, so to speak, through the creation of professional associations and their adoption of ethical codes. (I note that he does not refer to the clergy as a profession, not that I would argue with him about this, inasmuch as among the clergy are found both those to whom his fourfold pattern does apply and those to whose ministries of a charismatic kind it does not. The clerical cohort is too much of a wild animal to fit into this particular corral!)

Padgett summarizes for us the ethical theories of the big-name theorists: Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Bentham, Kant, Nietzsche, Ayn Rand, Sartre and MacIntyre. Not surprisingly, he discovers that although Merton holds certain positions which some of these writers hold, he withholds allegiance from any one of them. Rather, Merton advocates the centrality of love as it is understood in the Christian tradition as the keystone of his contemplative ethics. In particular, he rejects the "heresy of individualism" (27; *Conjectures* 143), which isolates the self from its essential oneness with all other selves, God included, and which results in the vulnerability of the fragile individual self to fragmentation. Conversely, Merton holds up the ideal of a unity with others realized in an unsentimental love which proceeds to action (32-33).

This contemplative position is what Padgett takes as Merton's most important contribution to professional ethics. Because in contemplation we find ourselves standing before the mystery of the self, we must acknowledge that we cannot absolutize or privilege that self, which we will never fully comprehend, as any ultimate criterion of value or judgment. It is this relativization of our own

importance, combined with our recognition of our unity with others, that makes it possible for the professional both to work within professional structures and strictures, *and*, when necessary, to resist the "forced systematization" (53) which professional involvements can inflict upon the individual. Here he brings into the discussion Merton's writings about Eichmann, who practiced what Padgett calls a "role morality" (57) rather than the free, loving and autonomous morality available to the mature contemplative.

A very engaging section of the book offers Padgett's presentation of the work of some Harvard researchers on three "professions" – journalism, genetics and the theater: I enclose "professions" here in quotation marks, because I have to question (which Padgett does not) the inclusion of the theater among the professions investigated. The relatively low and uncertain financial remuneration received by most actors, for one, sets it apart from the commonly recognized professions. Again, although there is a strong sense of vocation among theater people, something which brings theater close to religion (some actors refer to their life in the theater as "church" [63]), I'm not aware that there exists a professional code of ethics comparable to that of the standard professions.

Padgett concludes the book with reflections on different models of leadership ("transformative" and "quiet" [100-104]), and finds in Merton three qualities which he sees as essential for effective leadership (he sees Merton's successful work as Master of Scholastics and Master of Novices as examples of his "managerial" or leadership capacity). These are self-knowledge, the ability to see the "big picture," and a unified sense of purpose (106). Manifestly, Merton adverts to all three of these qualities time and time again in *Conjectures*. All three of them rise out of his commitment to the contemplative life, which provides all its practitioners with the "moral imagination from which to understand one's self and the world in which one lives, [and to] call persons to recognize a unity of purpose that binds all of humanity" (106-107).

Two quibbles to end. First, I question whether, as Padgett states, Merton had contempt for politics and business (7). Certainly there is an ample supply of *contemptus mundi* in *The Seven Storey Mountain*. But by the time of *Conjectures*, Merton was largely if not completely past the self-indulgence which such contempt involves. Certainly Merton engaged in a trenchant critique of politics and business (and of the Church, for that matter); but contempt and critique are two different things. Second, let us restore Patricia Burton's

surname to her: Morton is a fine old name – it just isn't Patricia's (130 n. 25); and in the same note, let us restore Christine M. Bochen to the editorial team which gave us *Cold War Letters*.

The prime value which I see in this book is its location in the disciplines of philosophy and ethics, areas of enquiry in which Merton up to this point has not been strongly present. Indeed, I would take the book as evidence for an argument that to the many other descriptors we have used for Merton we may appropriately add that of social philosopher (I'm thinking here of Joanna Macy as someone to whom this term is commonly applied). We can be grateful to Barry Padgett for enabling us to do so.

Donald Grayston

CONNER, James, OCSO, David Scott and Bonnie Thurston, *The Voice of the Stranger: Three Papers and a Homily from the Seventh General Meeting & Conference of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (Stratton-on-the-Fosse, Somerset, UK: Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 2008), pp. 58. ISBN 978-0-9551571-2-7 (paper) £3.00.

This short and very worthwhile collection might be read as a multi-layered commentary on Merton's "A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra Concerning Giants." While the latter gives us one of Merton's fiercest denunciations of Western and American imperialism – and its bedfellow, the "Christianity of Magog" – it also delivers one of his most haunting and unequivocally *theological* defenses of "the other," the one whom Merton calls, with the Hebrew Bible, "the stranger." Here, as in so many of his classic texts, Merton presses home the discomfiting insight that the violence that we decry "out there" is symptomatic of a more primordial war within ourselves. Who is the stranger? The stranger is the one who problematizes and punctures our solipsistic bubble, coming unbidden from "out of the forest" to reveal, unpredictably, the face of the incarnate God. The stranger confronts us at once with our own sinful and hallowed humanity.

In the first of these papers (1-16), Fr. Jim Conner details with characteristic clarity and passion what he aptly calls Merton's "Manifesto for the 21st Century" (1, 4), a call to our essential unity in God that comprises the very "heart" of Jesus' own life and ministry. Taking the "Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra" as his launching point, Conner weaves together Merton's most penetrating writings

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