

## Introduction

### The Guest Editors

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Upon receiving his PhD from Yale University in 1959, Richard T. De George accepted the position of Assistant Professor at the University of Kansas (KU). He rose quickly through the ranks, becoming Associate Professor in 1962, Full professor in 1964, and a University Distinguished Professor in 1972, a position he held until May of 2012 when he retired. This special issue is devoted to the substantial body of work that Richard produced in those 53 years. We celebrate and honor his work in the best way we know how, by engaging with it. We challenge his claims, take inspiration from them, critique fine points, look for mistaken underlying assumptions, and poke and prod in a variety of ways, always recognizing the value of his clear and straightforward thinking.

A significant portion of Richard's large body of work has an international dimension, and the foundation for this was set before he began studying philosophy. As an undergraduate at Fordham University, he was interested in the Foreign Service and international relations. He learned Russian and French. Through a study abroad program offered at Fordham, he studied in France, followed by a year in Belgium as a Fulbright Fellow. Returning from Belgium, Richard finished his undergraduate degree and entered the graduate program in Philosophy at Yale. His international bent manifested itself early on in an interest in Marxism and Soviet and East European philosophy. After studying at the Institute of East European Studies in Fribourg, Switzerland for a year (1962–1963), Richard began teaching a course on Marxism and he continued to teach that course until a year before his retirement. He also published quite a lot in this area, including *Patterns of*

*Soviet Thought* (The University of Michigan Press, 1966), *Science and Ideology in Soviet Society* (co-authored with G. Fischer, L. Graham, and H. S. Levine, Atherton Press, 1967), *Soviet Ethics and Morality* (The University of Michigan Press, 1969), *The New Marxism* (Pegasus, 1968), and *Marxism and Religion in Eastern Europe*, co-edited with James P. Scanlan (Springer, 1975).

Richard's interest in business ethics began to take shape in the mid 1970s when he, together with Joseph Pichler, then Dean of the Business School at KU, obtained \$25,000 from Peat, Marwick, and Mitchell, an accounting firm, for the first conference on business ethics. This began a series of activities that cascaded into Richard becoming a central figure in the field of business ethics. Interestingly, at the beginning, it was his work on Marxism that provided a bridge to business ethics. Marxism offered the quintessential critique of business, and Richard took it upon himself to articulate the critique as it applied to the current business environment. Of course, since the 1970s, Richard's work in business ethics has extended well beyond Marxism.

That first conference on business ethics led to an NEH grant and under the grant, Richard began teaching a course on business ethics. Others were anxious to know what that looked like and sought help in developing their own courses, so Richard decided to write a textbook. His *Business Ethics*, first published in 1982, was the first single-authored textbook in the field. The book is now in its seventh edition and has been translated into Japanese, Russian, and Chinese.

Richard joined others in wanting to see the field of business ethics develop and in 1980 when the Society for Business Ethics was started, he served as one of three members of the executive committee. Through his activities in the World Congress of Philosophy, he was also

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instrumental in starting the International Society for Business Economics and Ethics, and became its first President.

The field flourished and with it Richard's work. In addition to the seven editions of *Business Ethics*, he wrote several other books on business ethics, most notably, *Competing with Integrity in International Business* (Oxford University Press, 1993) and *The Ethics of Information Technology and Business* (Wiley, 2008).

Over the years Richard has been enormously prolific; he lists over 200 articles and 20 books on his CV. His curiosity has led him beyond business ethics and Marxism and Soviet and East European Philosophy. He has authored or edited books on academic freedom and the tenure system, the nature and limits of authority, semiotics, and structuralism. Within the field of business ethics, his writing has also been wide ranging. In the last decade alone, he has tackled topics such as war, information technology and the Internet, globalization, intellectual property, the pharmaceutical industry, and the history of business ethics.

Richard has received much recognition for his work. Most recently, he received two Lifetime Achievement Awards from the Society for Business Ethics, one in recognition of Distinguished Service (2009) and another for Outstanding Contribution to Scholarship (2011). In 2011 he also received KU's Chancellor's Club Career Teaching Award. One honor that he has been known to speak about fondly is the honorary degree he received from the University of Nijenrode in the Netherlands in 1996. Here he shared the stage with Bill Gates who was also receiving an honorary degree; Nelson Mandela was supposed to be there, as well, to receive a degree but he was unable to attend.

Richard held many leadership roles both at KU and in national and international professional communities. Too numerous to list, the highlights of his leadership roles at KU include a term as Chair of the Philosophy Department (1966–1972), a term as Co-Director of the International Center for Ethics in Business (from 1991 until retirement), and terms as Co-Director (1977–1982) and Director (1982–1983) of the Center for Humanistic Studies. He had an active role in the creation of both of these centers. Professionally, Richard has been active in a dozen professional associations. Again too numerous to list, the highlights include President of the International Society of Business, Economics, and Ethics (1996–2000); President of the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association (1989–1990) and President of the Metaphysical Society of America (1982–1983). He served as President of the American Section of the International Association for Philosophy of Law and Social Philosophy (1977–1979) and Chaired the XXth World Congress of Philosophy Planning Committee (1988–1993).

Although the papers in this volume cover a wide range of topics, they address only a small portion of Richard's bountiful work.

In pursuing his intellectual interests, Richard followed an unusual path. His choice of methods and topics is reminiscent of the American poet Robert Frost's famous quote:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference

While enjoying a celebrated career as a professor of philosophy, and as noted above, being elected to the post of President of the Central Division of the American Philosophical Association, Richard chose not to become a garden-variety philosopher. He abandoned the reigning career template in philosophy early; instead, he charted a unique course, one that ended up achieving a remarkable but different kind of success. Instead of adopting the dominant research paradigm implicit in "Anglo American" philosophy, he crafted one that relied upon his own facile curiosity and intuition to identify topics of contemporary intellectual relevance. In the latter half of the twentieth century, a standard career recipe for the upwardly mobile philosophy professor was to pick an acknowledged area, say, philosophy of mind, ethical theory, epistemology, or the writings of a particular philosopher such as Plato or Rawls, then pursue a tiny aspect of that focus doggedly. Deviating from one's narrow specialty, or even worse, choosing topics that had not already become journal favorites, risked irrelevance and career disaster.

With a confidence that became his hallmark, Richard defied the norms of his day. He began by choosing, in effect, a reigning regional philosophical school, namely Soviet Marxism, and began to unpack that philosophical school's history and presuppositions. It was eye-opening for many. His illuminations were especially significant in an era shadowed by the challenge of the US-Soviet Cold War. To pursue his study of the school of Soviet Marxism, he was forced to bootstrap his own skills, a task that required a knowledge of history, the ability to speak Russian (which he taught himself), and ongoing communication with existing scholars on the other side of the globe. All of this he did with style and passion.

By cutting the cord with the narrow technical literature popular in philosophy, he was thus freed to approach the novel topic of Soviet Marxism, one with clear intellectual significance and practical salience. But Act II of the drama was yet to come: the same strategy that allowed him to analyze Soviet Marxism proved equally powerful in his efforts to help launch the field of business ethics, yet another unexplored topic of intellectual significance and practical salience.

Richard's methods fit the needs of his subject matter. While existing work in ethical theory dealt with abstract topics such as utilitarianism, metaethics, and moral reasoning, the prospect of serious academic work on questions of business ethics demanded an issue-centric approach. Instead of a traditional philosophical topic such as "moral objectivism," the topics relevant to business ethics were clothed in historic and institutional contexts, e.g., whistle blowing, bribery, intellectual property, and corporate responsibility. The topic of business ethics was like Soviet Marxism in this sense: it was not a timeless philosophical conundrum; rather, it was a context-specific, institution-specific, historically specific bundle of challenges.

Understanding Richard's intellectual evolution helps explain why he adopted another cross-paradigmatic

approach. As he notes in his "A Response to My Critics" in this volume, he refused to commit himself to a particular ethical system or school. He never committed himself to a utilitarian approach, a Kantian approach, a virtue ethics approach, or a Rawlsian approach, for the simple reason that the subject matter at hand, namely, individual ethical challenges that arose in a bewildering diversity of forms, demanded different approaches. Different jobs, he saw clearly, required different tools.

For all these reasons, in this special issue of the *Journal of Business Ethics*, we three editors, Norman Bowie, Thomas Donaldson, and Deborah Johnson, take pride in celebrating the work of our remarkable teacher, colleague, and friend, Richard De George.