

# From the Editor

With this issue, my five years as editor in chief of *BEQ* comes to a close. In this final editorial on my watch, I'd like to offer a few parting observations and also recap this year's journal awards, which were announced a few months ago.

## *Parting Thoughts*

In an editorial in this space at the outset of my term, I made three commitments to the journal's stakeholders: that we would continue to publish work that is first-rate in both execution and contribution; that we would serve the profession with review processes that are efficient, collegial, and developmental; and that we would do these things with integrity, so that authors and reviewers experience our processes as procedurally fair, reasonable, and (to the extent possible) transparent. There is always room for improvement, but I feel comfortable saying (with appropriate humility) that I believe these commitments have been kept. In my judgment, the quality of the work we are publishing continues to be very high, and the functioning and integrity of our processes remain on solid footing.

The role of editor is all-consuming at times, and in these last months of my term, I have tried to take a breath long enough to reflect a bit on the experience. In doing so, I find myself thinking differently about the journal as it exists in the present versus what may lie ahead in the future. Let me say a few words about each.

Thinking in terms of the present, I would sum up the state of the journal as very good, with robust submission volume, smoothly operating review and production functions, and a solid manuscript pipeline that has recently enabled us to expand the number of articles we are publishing per issue. Submission volume has grown by half during my term. This is a good thing if you construe interest in submitting as a marker of a journal's health, but it is a less good thing if it taxes the journal's systems without adding quality and variety. Fortunately, going forward, we are able to publish more articles per volume than in the recent past, and more submissions plus more journal pages does seem like a salutary mix. Beyond submissions, the journal's impact and reputation metrics (imperfect as they are and will always be) are solid, and our working relationship with our publisher, Cambridge University Press, is excellent. The process of transition to the new editorial team led by coeditors Frank den Hond and Mollie Painter has gone well, and I feel confident that the keys to the journal are being handed over to colleagues who will shepherd *BEQ* into a bright future.

Yet, even with that favorable state of current affairs, pondering the future of a journal like *BEQ* is an exercise in no small amount of uncertainty. As an academic subdiscipline, business ethics isn't going anywhere: if anything, it is a pursuit attracting expanding attention and concern within the larger realm of business and management scholarship and practice. Interest in the moral and social roles and activities of business enterprises is a growth industry, and that work continues to sprout across the epistemological terrains of philosophy, social science, and critical

theory that feed the journal's mission and contributions. But while the field of study of business ethics may be venerable, the academic and publishing milieus within which it exists are undergoing compelling transformation.

In the academy, many of us are encountering significant changes to the expectations of universities and funding entities regarding our mix of professional activities across domains of research, teaching, and service. In some countries and at some institutions, the very nature of academic employment is in transition, and scholars have no choice but to reinvent how they use and allocate their time and energy. This can have serious consequences for the strategies and operations of professional scholarly societies and journals, which have long been powered by engines of professional service and volunteerism. A straightforward example for a journal like *BEQ* is found in peer review, where rising submission volume coupled with an increasingly reluctant referee pool (owing to their own shifting work demands) jeopardizes the effectiveness of the process. Any editor will tell you (and that includes me) that finding good reviewers is among the most challenging parts of the gig these days. As at many journals, *BEQ*'s desk rejection rate is rather high—and arguably higher than it should be—in no small measure because of the need to conserve precious reviewer bandwidth. As a result, many papers that could receive constructive reviews that would benefit both the work and the author go without. In this way, the operational challenges of keeping *BEQ* humming have the unfortunate effect of compromising the developmental missions of both the journal and the Society for Business Ethics (SBE).

The corporate industry of academic journal publishing is also undergoing a time of turbulence and change. Rapid expansion of open-access scholarly publishing (where all can read an article without subscription barriers or paywalls) and a proliferation of read-and-publish agreements are very positive steps for open science and academic freedom, especially given how much scholarship (namely, most of it) is either directly or indirectly subsidized with public money. But with these welcome trends comes the need to reinvent the funding model for academic publishing. For-profit corporate publishing behemoths have amassed thousands of journals and have been rewarding their shareholders handsomely for doing so. At *BEQ*, we can imagine ourselves fortunate to have the widely respected and not-for-profit Cambridge University Press as our publishing overlord—a firm whose stable of academic journals is measured in hundreds, not thousands. But the good people at Cambridge, like their for-profit counterparts, are under substantial pressure to meet the financial expectations of stakeholders as they navigate through these roiling waters of academic journal publishing. With a society-owned journal like *BEQ*, the wherewithal of the society itself depends heavily on the financial model of the journal and its publisher. Accordingly (if you'll permit me to torture a climate metaphor), for *BEQ* and SBE, the winds of change in academic publishing aren't merely jet stream patterns aloft; they blow straight through the society itself, with uncertain consequences for the journal going forward.

I say all this not to conclude my term as editor on a sour note but rather to let others in on what I have come to see firsthand. We have a flourishing journal in *BEQ* that by some measures is better than ever, but that success comes against a

backdrop of metamorphosis in academic publishing, the trajectory of which is hard to predict. The cultivation and dissemination of good ideas by smart humans will never go out of style, but the ways in which that happens are in transformation. In the next decade or two, I expect that the journal and its relationship with its publisher will look a lot different than they do now. I'll be watching with interest to see how it all plays out.

### *Journal Awards*

One of the most rewarding aspects of being editor is the chance each year to honor outstanding articles and reviewers through our journal awards. For 2021, these awards were presented, as usual, at the annual meeting of SBE, which convened virtually in July.

The winner of the *Outstanding Article Award* is selected by a committee of associate editors based on nominations provided by *BEQ*'s editorial leadership team. The committee this year consisted of associate editors Jeff Moriarty, Andreas Rasche, and Scott Reynolds. As the outstanding article published in 2020, the committee selected "Contestation in Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives: Enhancing the Democratic Quality of Transnational Governance" (*BEQ* 30[2], 169–99) authored by Daniel Arenas, Laura Albareda, and Jennifer Goodman. In choosing this article as the winner, the committee commended the authors for offering an important new approach to understanding the workings of MSIs, one that represents a genuinely new contribution—well grounded in existing work, clearly written, and tightly argued.

The award committee this year also opted to recognize the excellence of two runner-up articles. One is "The Ethics of Noncompete Clauses" (*BEQ* 30[2], 229–49) by Harrison Frye. The committee felt that Frye's article breaks new ground in an admirably interdisciplinary way, summoning research from philosophy, law, sociology, economics, and politics to make his case for when noncompetes should be regarded as acceptable. The other runner-up article is "Unfolding the Black Box of Questionable Research Practices: Where Is the Line between Acceptable and Unacceptable Practices?" (*BEQ* 30[3], 335–60) by Christian Linder and Siavash Farahbakhsh. The committee found this article to present a well-argued normative perspective based on the theory of communicative action. As the committee observed, the general subject of questionable research practices is receiving increasing attention, but there has been little normative treatment of the issue—a gap this article nicely fills.

I was also pleased to announce at the SBE conference this year's winner of the journal's *Reviewer Award*, which recognizes an individual for exemplary service as a referee for *BEQ* over a period of recent years. This year, the award went to Anne Antoni of the Grenoble Ecole de Management. In congratulating Anne, I also wish to express my gratitude to all in our scholarly community who lend their time, energy, and expertise as referees to the journal's peer review process. Perhaps the greatest pleasure of my five years as editor has been the opportunity to see—time and time again—the great improvement in manuscripts on their path to publication that results from the expertise and constructive guidance provided by the journal's reviewers.

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In closing, I could not have navigated the role of editor these last five years without the immense help of the editorial team and the editorial board. I single out in particular my appreciation for Denis Arnold, who, as my predecessor, showed me how it's done and who, as senior associate editor, has handled initial review of theory submissions throughout my term. I am also grateful to Guido Palazzo and Julianne Reinecke, who have performed a similar function with qualitative empirical submissions. Book review editor Miguel Alzola continues to be splendid in this crucial role. And our recently retired managing editor, Libby Scott, was here all the way through my term to keep all kinds of things on track. Her successor, Joanna Osiewicz-Lorenzutti, appointed earlier this year to an expanded managing editor role, is making major contributions. I have also appreciated very much the goodwill and constructive input I have received throughout my term from the SBE board of directors. I depart the editor's chair with an upbeat feeling about what we have accomplished and about where the journal is headed, and with a sense of deep gratitude for having been entrusted with the opportunity to helm this important corner of our field.

Bruce Barry  
Editor in Chief