

Memorial Notice for Richard Cobb-Stevens

Richard Cobb-Stevens, né Richard Stevens, an alumnus of and longtime professor of philosophy at Boston College — a BC man through and through — died this past summer on July 6 at the age of 83. Richard was deeply committed to philosophical and humanistic education, a commitment whose value he knew from his own training, first at Boston College High School, then in his formation in the Society of Jesus during which he earned both a B.A. and M.A. at Boston College. Although Dick left the Jesuits in 1979, and shortly thereafter married Veda Cobb (and both adopted the last name Cobb-Stevens), the commitment did not vanish. It led him not only to a long career teaching philosophy but to long service — 9 years as chair of the Philosophy Department and 18 years (!) as the Director of BC's University Core Development Committee — service that to me sounds like cruel and unusual punishment. If there are eternal rewards, Dick certainly earned them. As a veteran of a number of core wars, I can remember several talks with him about both the structure and politics of core curricula. As his length of service shows, he was a master at both.

Dick was one of the kindest, gentlest, most humble, open-minded persons I have ever met. All these traits displayed themselves in his personal relations with colleagues at both BC and beyond. They also display themselves in his philosophical work. Each of his two books engages Husserl's phenomenology with another philosophical tradition. *James and Husserl: The Foundations of Meaning* explores what seems at first blush an odd pairing, but Dick fruitfully explored a host of shared themes, such as the notion of pure experience; space and time; sensation, perception, and conception; the self and personal identity; and freedom. His second book *Husserl and Analytic Philosophy* is to my mind just a terrific book in which Dick explores how different choices in the philosophy of logic led to the development of two different philosophical traditions. But the book is not limited to a discussion of Husserl and Frege; it also considers problems and thinkers that range beyond the early philosophy of logic. It fruitfully explores not only Husserlian themes but Aristotelian ones in clarifying the two traditions and their relation. Both books, along with his numerous articles, exhibit intellectual charity, generosity, that open-mindedness I mentioned, but also a firmness in his view about whose arguments ultimately carried the day.

Dick was also a *raconteur extraordinaire*. He was a storehouse of anecdotes and tales, often about other philosophers, always funny, often self-deprecatory. I can see him now. He raises his finger to the corner of his mouth; his head tilts down just a bit; his eyes light up; a trace of a smile spreads across his face — and he begins. And immediately everyone else is smiling. Dick brought smiles to every face and made every day a better day. He was a good friend, a good scholar, a great teacher, and a great colleague. We will miss him.