

Corporate Speakers: Neglected Canon, Transitional Oratory and a Theory of Rhetorical Economy

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Abstract

There is an obvious impact of corporate discourse on the social, economic, political and cultural spheres at local, national and global levels. U.S. universities regularly teach courses in professional and business speaking and our corporations regularly affirm that persuasive, strategic and inspirational communication are vital for corporate success for both individuals and their organizations. Oddly, then, there is no canon of great corporate discourse. In spite of regular calls for attention to the discourse of corporate rhetors, the 100 greatest speeches are explicitly limited to political oratory. The speech sites list no business speakers or speeches, and there has never been a collection of speeches, criticism or analysis. Using a nomination list, I examine possible reasons, concluding that some of the neglect stems from a fundamental neglect of rhetorical forms that are collaborative, concrete, or performative.

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The discourse of business has had an undeniable impact on the social, economic, and political life of human society in every era and every culture. Further, it is a truism of contemporary business that persuasive, strategic and inspirational communication is vital for both for an individual's career and for the success of his or her organization. It would seem odd, then, that across the several thousand years of rhetorical study, there has grown up no canon of great corporate, economic or business speech. There has been considerable attention to the influence of corporate organizations in terms of organizational theory or public relations, but virtually no investigation of business speakers in terms of their public discourse or their function as members of a larger rhetorical community.

The lack has not gone unnoticed (Curti, 1944), but two generations later not a single collection of business speeches, criticism or analysis has been created to fill the void (Medhurst, 1989). The last thirty-five years have been called a period of "renewal and recovery" in public address scholarship (Medhurst, 2001), but still, the speeches of only one business figure, Chrysler CEO Lee Iacocca, have been studied in any detail (Seeger, 1986). The art of rhetorical biography is "no longer limited to great white men who served in public office" (Medhurst, 2001 500) but the rhetorical history of the United States nevertheless includes virtually no attention to anyone else. A group of public address scholars recently selected the Top 100 Speeches in the twentieth century, but limited the range to "political speeches" and found no speaking of note by any member of the business community (Lucas & Medhurst, 1999).

This study thus has two purposes. The first is to survey the history of business in hopes of identifying a potential realm for rhetorical study. It might be that the lack of disciplinary attention is simply the result of a lack of information. It is not at all uncommon for a speech scholar to have an undergraduate degree in political science, cultural studies, or another liberal arts specialty. Further, even those very few individuals with a business background of any kind are unlikely to have been introduced to a history of business or businessmen. The reality is that even the rhetorically-minded student of business would be hard-pressed to identify key discourses in the discipline. As one business historian has noted, while "aristocrats, dictators and priests have long appreciated the beauties and uses of history" the business man has ignored, if not overtly resisted the exercise (Beard, 1938 1). In spite of their obvious effect on the larger society, "business has no heroes, no folklore, no great myths about its past" (Witzel, 2002 5).

A second purpose is perhaps more subtle, but no less important. Even with the creation of a potential canon of business rhetoric, the question remains as to the reason such a project has never been previously attempted. Perhaps there is something significant about the rhetors and the rhetoric of the business community that has precluded their study across the several thousand years since Plato invented the discipline. Perhaps even more profoundly, it might be gaps in our understanding of rhetoric that lead us to exclude business discourse from the realm of appropriate study. As individuals are nominated to serve as exemplars of business rhetoric, then, a second question must be asked: what is it about the discourse that has caused scholars never to have considered it worthy of study? To answer that it is because the text lies outside the traditional boundaries of the discipline is to beg the question. How then would it be that a discourse that has had a significant role within the decision-making process of a human community would be defined as not rhetorical?

A Review of Business Rhetors

The method of this project has been simple, perhaps even simplistic. Taking a walk through the history of business, the aim was simply to catalogue individuals whose voices seemed to have a significant impact on the business community's conduct of its own affairs, on the fundamental economic decisions of an era, or on the way in a public makes its decisions in the economic realm. Embedded within this approach are two assumptions: one relatively minor and one with potential significance. First, the design of the historical survey was indiscriminate in its scope. That is, the assumption was that individuals recognized as important by any business historian, by the general public, or by economics scholars must have been engaged in some kind of discursive activity worthy of further investigation. This will undoubtedly lead to errors of both omission and unwarranted inclusion, but the issue seems relatively minor at this stage of the project. This is not meant to be a vetted canon of business rhetors, which would presumably take many years or even centuries of disciplinary attention. Rather, the intent is merely to draw up a list of nominations—individuals whose business significance suggests that they are deserving of further rhetorical study.

On another level, however, the decision to include an individual was based on a definition of business and an understanding of rhetoric that bear some discussion. Individuals were defined as business people when their primary source of income was derived from trade, production, or finance. Clearly there are economic philosophers and organizational theorists who have both influenced rhetorical theory and been the subject of rhetorical study; Karl Marx, Max Weber, Adam Smith, and Niccolò Machiavelli might be obvious examples. Disciplinary attention to these figures, however useful, is not a substitute for attention to the discourse of those who are materially engaged in the

economic decision making within a community. As with the study of political, religious or legal discourse, full understanding requires a contextualized appreciation for the rhetor's interests, motives, and constraints, as well as sensitivity to the material impact of the rhetorical act.

This focus on those who are materially engaged in the exchange of goods or money offers an important critical perspective, but it is not without theoretical implications. A definition of rhetoric that restricts the field of study to language use, for example, would not easily accommodate the physical trading of goods or money as a proper text, at least not without an accompanying verbal contract or non-verbal connotation. Similarly, a notion of rhetoric as something that is only present, by definition, in the public sphere, might dismiss private business meetings as outside, if not antithetical to rhetorical discourse. Such definitional arguments are the substance of rhetorical theory, of course, but for the purposes of this project, the premature rejection of texts might compromise the attempt to study unfamiliar forms of rhetorical discourse.

Instead, the project embraced a comprehensive definition of rhetorical culture as a community's "working agreement about who is supposed to participate in decision-making, what counts as good decision-making, and when discourse is the appropriate tool for decision-making" (Cyphert, 2001). From this explicitly cross-cultural perspective, it is possible to investigate any mechanism that allows a group to engage in collective decision-making. Whether or not "business" activity fits the Western model of public discourse, if an individual's words or deeds have the material effect of facilitating the community's economic decisions, then they can be studied in terms of their rhetorical function.

The Nominations

Ancient Merchant Philosophers

While it might be useful to consider the ancient discourses of the great trading peoples of Phoenicia or Carthage in more detail, an important first step might simply be to recognize some of the acknowledged philosophers and rhetoricians as business people.

Thales

Known primarily as a mathematician and philosopher, Thales was a rich merchant of Miletus, with trading concessions with Egypt, interests in salt, olive oil, and quite probably other commodities as well. It was his profession and wealth that allowed him to travel widely both learning and sharing his own thoughts to the extent that he became

known as one of the Seven Sages of Greece (*Thales of Miletus (62?-546)*, ; Turnbull, 1993).

Solon

An associate of Thales, Solon was a merchant at Athens. He also had traveled in pursuit of both gain and wisdom, and has become known as a lawgiver, statesman and political philosopher (Plutarch, 1952 (ancient)). Upon his return to Athens, he gave the city a timocracy, a government of the richest” (Beard, 1938 28).

Cicero

Although not a merchant himself, it might be worth noting that Cicero studied eloquence at Rhodes where the traders “were renowned, like those of Miletus, for love of bombastic oratory, perhaps borrowed from auctions or market chaffering” (Beard, 1938 21).

Crassus

Crassus, although of noble birth, made a fortune buying up executed noblemen’s estates and invested the assets in various businesses, speculating in real estate and banking, slave education, and fire companies. He became the richest man in Rome and was “unique” in that he desired political power as well. Although he was “taciturn” and unable to make “the eloquent speeches expected of statesmen in Rome....he found that he could win cases in court easily, because the judges were in debt to him” (Beard, 1938 35).

An Ancient Business Canon

Presumably there would be a number of ancient philosophers and statesmen whose fame was made possible by the wealth and travel offered by business interests. Attention to that aspect of the historical context might offer insights into their rhetoric, of course, but we might also wonder why their philosophical and political activities have so completely overshadowed their commercial roles. Modern scholars must rely heavily on the histories left for us by “Greeks and Romans who despised the trader” and gave us instead a record “of heroes, of institutions, of ideas” (Beard, 1938 2). Granted, the day-to-day affairs of a salt merchant are dull monotony against the tales of battle or the puzzles of mathematics or metaphysics, but there is more. The pragmatic activities of daily life were beneath the exalted activities and interests of the elite classes; traders were scorned by the history-writing aristocracies. Plato decreed that the merchants of his Republic would live with the tradesmen, apart from the aristocracy, and that a citizen could be punished for engaging in a business deal (Beard, 1938).

From a rhetorical perspective, however, the matter cannot be simply written off as a class struggle. The resource allocation of the ancient world—the economic decision-making that moved commodities around and beyond the Mediterranean—was left to a class of people whose decisions were rewarded in material terms and whose values have become the foundation of a contemporary global economy. Despite theories and philosophies that argued for other rhetorical norms, it has been the traders who made the decisions about where salt or oil could be had. It has been the traders' valuation of commodities, risk, and time that became the epistemological basis for economic decision-making. The tacit discourses of trade have become the public sphere in which resource allocation decisions are made. In short, the contemporary separation of economic decisions from political and social discourse has its roots in the ancient rhetorics of trade.

Merchant Cities

The written history of the West has been predominately a political history, and the contemporary scholar could be forgiven a focus on the rhetorics of politicians, statesmen, and rulers. Those who influenced their communities the most have often been business people, however, and their discourses would seem to offer a rich source of rhetorical study.

Salvestro de' Medici

The fascist Duke of Athens had taken over as “Conservator” of Florence after a string of bankruptcies had disrupted the city's commercial governance system. Salvestro de' Medici rallied the citizens to overthrow the regime with “a stirring oration in which he declared the malice of the mighty prevented him from assisting the people” (Beard, 1938 149). The revolt led to a brief reign of labor although they could not coordinate production, and the bankers and manufacturers quickly restored “bourgeois order” (Beard, 1938 150).

Cosimo Medici

The grandson of Salvestro, Cosimo Medici was the “giant of the Medici” (Beard, 1938 152) with a delightful smile, charming ease, enormous indirect power over both financial and political activities of Florence. “From first to last, a professed friend of the people and champion of democracy, Cosimo remained a private citizen of simple habits and judicious temper, always in the background, often indeed a dark corner. In his retreat, he studied the art of manipulating elections and popular moods” (Beard, 1938 153)

Gianozzo Manetti

Having been wiped out by Cosimo de Medici, Gianozzo Manetti fled to Naples where he recouped his fortunes by delivering an oration in Latin to King Alfonso “so eloquent ...so the story runs, that, although a fly settled on the royal nose during the peroration, the monarch did not even lift a finger to drive it away” and Manetti procured from the king a monopoly on cloth importation for his son” (Beard, 1938 175).

Lorenzo de Medici

The most famous of the Medici earned his notoriety through his lavish spending on architecture and the arts rather than on the business acumen that allowed the display. Even so, “display was a part of economic competition in those times. The successful business men of Florence vied with one another in the extravagance of their robes and jewels...homes and gardens...weddings and funerals” (Beard, 1938 174), not generally as a symptom of vanity, but because “it was necessary for even the busiest man to display his credit upon his person” (Beard, 1938 174). Lorenzo became known as *il Magnifico* as he “brought display to its greatest perfection in Florence” and delighted the populace with spectacles, pageantry and elaborate costume at that “impressed the spectators as much as any yearly statement of his solvency” (Beard, 1938 175).

The Burghermeisters

It is fair to single out a few exemplars, Jordan Pleskow at Lubeck or Heinrich Castorp whose “patience, skill, and eloquence” were tested by the squabbling of the Hanse League (Beard, 1938 78). The point of greater rhetorical interest might be, however, the degree to which the German commercial cities engaged in collective decision making discourse. “Nearly everything the German businessman did was done in a crowd” (Beard, 1938 86) and even the most mundane decisions were made as a group, and the merchants created rules to govern themselves without governments or strong individual leaders.

A Reticent Canon of Performance

In an age of intrigue and mayhem, perhaps the mundane commercial exchange of resources has little to recommend sustained attention. Business men were “the representatives of thrift, temperance, reticence, hard work, domesticity and other qualities which wearied, instead of thrilling readers,” says one historian, noting that “the perverts and maniacs who might succeed as monarchs could never ...manage a cloth-factory” (Beard, 1938 3). Still, the studied reticence of the commercial classes might offer insights into that community’s rhetorical stability. For example, it was largely

Salvestro's son, Giovanni, who solidified the Medici family power, establishing a graduated income tax and thereby leaving great wealth and power to his own son, Cosimo. His testamentary advice describes a rhetoric of discretion; "Speak not as though giving advice...not puffed up with pride at receiving many votes....Avoid litigation...Be careful not to attract public attention" (quoted in Beard, 1938 152). Political power has often resulted from public discourse, and rhetorical theory has consequently presumed oratorical eloquence to be the source of that power, but for those decisions having to do with the allocation of a community's material resources—its economic decisions—a quieter discourse of performance and perseverance might have more impact.

Financiers of Political Ambition

During the rise of the nation states, the business person has been similarly invisible in the historical record of empires and emperors, even as they financed the campaigns that made possible the consolidations of power. Throughout much of European history, the nominal rulers had far less impact on the material outcomes of resource allocation decisions than did the commercial lenders.

Jacob Fugger

The son of a prosperous businessman, Jacob Fugger took charge of the Innsbruck branch, expanding the company's investments in copper and silver mining such that the family's capital assets ultimately exceeded the Medici with interests in mining, importing, banking, agriculture, and a news service. Fugger supported the Hapsburgs with loans of increasing amounts to the Emperor Maximilian, earning profits from interest or defaulted collateral, as well as a certain amount of security and protection from the Crown (Witzel, 2002), and in the most material way, "the destinies of Europe were decided by the Fugger wealth" (Beard, 1938 231). Although Fugger never held a governmental post, he was consulted before any important political moves, was able to reprove the monarch when he did not act in an acceptable way, and provided the resources for the Emperor's military and exploratory campaigns, including the exploration and exploitation of Vasco de Gama's route to India.

Sir Thomas Gresham

Financial power sometimes took on a more formalized relationship to political power, as when Thomas Gresham, the son of a prosperous mercer and sometime Lord Mayor of London, was sent to Antwerp in 1552 to act as royal agent with his primary task "to manage the huge royal debt run up by King Henry VIII" (Witzel, 2002 162). Gresham retained his commercial interests as a money-lender, munitioneer, and cloth merchant, but served as the financial advisor of all three of Henry VIII's children. He was brought

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in as an advisor to Edward and maintained the only honorable and profitable way to reduce the royal debts was to pay them off. He assisted Mary in maintaining credit in Antwerp, and to Elizabeth, “he laid down certain fundamental principles which made England the only financially sound nation left in Europe by the end of the century” (Beard, 1938 236).

Perhaps most important, Gresham maintained the credit of the Crown by establishing laws that would allow and encourage merchants to lend money to it, and he insisted that the Crown also keep faith with the people. He successfully urged Queen Elizabeth to remove the statutory prohibition against charging interest (Beard, 1938). Further, Gresham saw it in Britain’s best interests to wage economic war on the continent and undertook the breaking of the German textile monopolies. Gresham the munitioneer did not limit himself to financial issues, however, offering military proposals for defense as well.

Minister Colbert

Colbert had made a fortune in business enterprise, having been trained by his cloth-dealing father and banker uncle (Beard, 1938) and then became the financial coordinator of France from 1661-1683, holding the departments of administration, finance, the navy, commerce and agriculture, and attempted to organized all of French government along business principles and to encourage French manufacturing as a means of maintaining the country’s economic health.

Colbert’s persuasive message was generally directly at the Crown, as when he requested that the King set the fashion standards to support the French industry rather than wearing imported waistcoat fabrics (Beard, 1938 369). He was also sensitive to the need to instill in the French citizenry a willingness to engage in production in order to create goods with which to trade. He urged another merchant in his administration, Jacques Savary, to write “Le Parfait Négoçiant” (1674) a tract designed to teach poor youth how to become bourgeoisie gentlemen with rules for apprentices that would encourage thrift and sobriety on which to found a good family.

James Houblon the elder and the younger

James Houblon the elder, the “Father of the London Exchange,” was a French emigrant who landed in England in “no mood to finance in his adopted country the same sort of Absolutism which had driven his family into exile” from France (Beard, 1938 387). Houblon the younger became Lord Mayor of London and with his brothers, ran the newly established Bank of England. He played a role in replacing the English kings with a “Dutch King, who knew bookkeeping and had some idea of contracts” (Beard, 1938

398). Although they were opposed to using the bank's funds for warfare, Houblon demanded that the bank's shareholders assess themselves 20% to fund William's war. And "when Houblon stepped before them, he not only calmed their wrath—he got from them another big loan for William's war. Hypnotized by Houblon's massive presence, every hand in the hall went up in his favor" (Beard, 1938 400).

Jagat Seth

Born 1680, Bengal, India to a family already involved in banking and finance, Jagat Seth built good business relationships with the emperors in both Bengal and Delhi and cultivated relationships with the banking houses in other parts of India. He was successful in "helping to establish a financial structure which covered all of India" (Witzel, 2002 33).

John Law

Not all attempts at state finance resulted in success. John Law, who was probably honorable in his intentions, urged against France's King Louis XV's declaration of bankruptcy in favor of establishing a national bank. "His propaganda was masterly" (Beard, 1938 417) and he created a market for New World investment rights to finance the government. Unfortunately, his persuasive methods were perhaps too successful and his efforts sparked an investment frenzy that drew in the wealth of all classes, only to collapse suddenly, leaving France and many of her subjects bankrupt.

Discovering the Common Interest

Oratory is not the genre of choice for one who plays the role of financial advisor to a monarch, and even the public display of financial solvency has little significance in the context. This is not to say, however, that such individuals did not engage in persuasive communication, or that such communication did not have far-reaching effects on the economic decision making of their communities. Gresham's persuasions, for example, were directed primarily to the Crown. In a "brief note" to Queen Elizabeth's minister, he offered provisions for a "large navy" and as one historian put it, "this little document could do the work which nowadays requires a thousand pamphlets, editorials and speeches" (Beard, 1938 235).

Rather than create arguments that appeal to the lowest common denominator of a public audience, such messages could focus on the issues that mattered. The "frank alliance of business and politics" made for "great intellectual honesty, if not for clear separation of private and public purse" (Beard, 1938 235). Gresham urged the Queen to "aid the Protestant cause in Europe in order to lift the British pound. It was not necessary for him

to plead patriotic or religious motives, as Cromwell had to do a hundred years later” (Beard, 1938 236). The patriotic and religious arguments of a Cromwell have been recognized as the eloquent invention of a great public speaker, but perhaps it is only the bias of a particular rhetorical culture that sees Cromwell’s rhetoric as more relevant to the community’s economic decisions than the private notes of Gresham.

Arguments of Self-Interest

With the more complex issues of growing economies, the rhetoric of individual businessmen became advocacy for narrowly defined positions, self-interested proposals that would benefit both the merchant and the community. “All the economic writing, with rare exceptions, was done by interested parties urging specific action on concrete issues; the authors were not professorial theorists” (Beard, 1938 301).

Willem Usselinx

One business rhetor of Holland, Willem Usselinx, urged war against Spain, while proposing himself as the principle director of a corporation to undertake the project. His “most effective argument” to the audience of that community was a straightforward economic calculation; “the best ordinary business adventures paid only ten percent per annum, mortgages yielded four to six and deposits five to six, while agriculture returned but a paltry three per cent—whereas the monopolistic East India Company had paid twenty-four per cent.” He concluded, therefore, that “it would be worth while to fight Spain for the purpose of launching a new corporation” (Beard, 1938 301).

Grotius

Grotius was not a businessperson per se, but a “brilliant jurist” of Delft who was hired by the Dutch East India Company to make the case for alien consumption. In “Mare Librum,” he appealed to the British audience’s respect for moral arguments and created a “superb brief” that became the doctrine of free seas in international law (Beard, 1938 302).

John Wheeler

As Secretary of the Merchant Adventurers, John Wheeler wrote a defense of business in 1601, “A Treatise of Commerce, wherein are shewed the commodities arising by a well-ordered and ruled trade, such as that of the Society of Merchant Adventurers is proved to be, written principallie for the better information of those, who doubt of the necessariness of the said Society in the State of the Realm of England.”

Sir Walter Raleigh

Walter Raleigh, monopolist and state-merchant, prepared a pamphlet for King James that argued for the creation of more positions to perform the same function.

Thomas Mun

Governor of the East India Company, Thomas Mun “produced an impressive defense of that organization,” in 1621, “Discourse of Trade from England to the East Indies,” which urged the export of bullion to the East as a benefit to the national trade balance (Beard, 1938 476).

A Sphere for Economic Advocacy

Unlike the political or philosophical rhetor, business rhetoric of the day found “an almost complete absence of heart-stirring slogans and imposing abstractions.” Instead, “the efforts of the pamphlet-writers were designed...to proclaim the interests of a small party to be the interests of all” (Beard, 1938 300). While the individual business man speaking in his own self-interest is now judged to be acting outside the public sphere of common interest, the rhetorical efforts of these earlier eras suggest there is not a clear, bright line between the two.

When resources are allocated according to rules that are advantageous to both parties, the negotiation is viewed as the technical calculation of profit. These earlier rhetors were no less creative in their persuasive efforts, however, than those who might have made a claim to fear or reason or religious authority. Contemporary theorists make distinctions between public, private and technical spheres of argument (Goodnight, 1982), but the definitions of each realm are not constant across rhetorical communities. The agreement that “profit” is a measure of value, whether for the individual or the community, is an epistemological one. The question of theoretical interest might be why we have ruled discussions of profit to be unacceptable in the public discussions of resource allocation, even as cost/benefit information supports the material decision-making processes that govern the world’s resource allocation.

Advocacy of General Principles

As it happens, the English business men of the age of exploration were somewhat freer than German or French merchants, and more personally vocal. Rather than relying on the intellectuals in their communities to speak for them, they “became active and effective propagandists for their own causes” (Beard, 1938 475) and necessitating a broadening of their persuasive appeals.

William Paterson

William Paterson has been judged “one of the most far-sighted writers of the business world” and he argued extensively on a series of economic and financial topics. He “almost alone stopped one unsound paper-money scheme from going through Parliament” (Beard, 1938 479), and his pamphlet exposing the John Law scheme in France was “publicly burned by infuriated clerks of the English Stock Exchange” (Beard, 1938 479). Paterson is not remembered as an advocate, however, as much as for his more general arguments. One pamphlet argued for the indemnification of investors in his failed New World trade venture, the Darien Company, but “around this specific proposal, he wove such a general discussion of economics as to render this pamphlet decidedly noteworthy” (Beard, 1938 479). Patterson’s work had no direct effect on the English monarchy, which proceeded instead to try save the government’s credit by investing in the wildly speculative South Sea Bubble, but his work proposed economic measures we now take for granted such as standardized weights and measures, trade consuls, government purchases to support prices, and government funding for roads, harbors and bridges.

William Ewart Gladstone

William Gladstone is known now as a political rhetor, but that “supreme embodiment of the Victorian bourgeois gentleman” came out of the Liverpool business community (Beard, 1938 382). Gladstone was the son of a wealthy grain merchant and West Indies plantation owner and took seriously the issues of commerce.

Sir Josiah Child

Director of the East India Company, which functioned as the government of India, able to raise an army, coin money, and make laws as well as trade. “Eloquent” in defense of monopolies, and “ensuing writers down to the most modern apologists have, in essence, but repeated the arguments of this remarkable man” (Beard, 1938 477).

John Stuart Mill

John Stuart Mill wrote much of *System of Logic* and *Principles of Political Economy* “during office hours” at the East India Company, where his father, James Mill also worked (Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2003 35).

Richard Cantillon

Although the English rhetors might have predominated, they were not unique. French businessman, Richard Cantillon, wrote “Upon the Nature of Commerce in General” in

1755. Dealing with the production and distribution of wealth, his work has been called one of the most important works to foreshadow the study of political economy, a field now “so generally considered a structure reared by pure theoreticians, whole objective and removed from the strife of the marketplace, that its origins in the disputations of business men are sometimes overlooked” (Beard, 1938 476).

Richard Cobden

Richard Cobden, an industrialist of the British North country, assumed a public role and in the course of campaigning, “elaborated the thesis of laissez faire and business individualism” (Beard, 1938 589). He was one of the organizers of a propaganda campaign to educate the poor toward support of laissez faire business policies and free trade and instrumental in repeal of the British Corn Laws in 1846. Perhaps the rhetoric took over, as one historian claims “the manufacturers who led the charge against the camp of the agrarians had to whip themselves into such orgies of sentiment in order to carry along the masses...that, incessantly proclaiming the holiness of their mission, they converted themselves as well” (Beard, 1938 594). In any case, Cobden exhausted his private fortune in his campaigns, but with the donations of supporters, he went abroad as a spokesman for “Manchesterism.” He “visited royal courts, addressed banquets, cemented trade treaties and everywhere drummed up a tremendous interest in the English industrial experiment and its philosophy” (Beard, 1938 596).

John Bright

After creating a successful income from cotton-spinning, John Bright put business aside and “cleared his decks for political action” (Beard, 1938 594). Campaigning with Cobden, he was apparently sincere in his evangelistic belief that agrarian interest must be overthrown in order to save laborers from abuse. Bright’s “Angle of Death” speech during the Crimean War is said to have “moved the crustiest of Victorians to a sigh or tears” (Beard, 1938 595).

Thomas Attwood

From a business family in Birmingham, Thomas Attwood organized a Political Union in 1830 to agitate for the enfranchisement of propertied men, making the plain argument that trade was falling off and thus taxes needed to be reduced. Along with an equally blunt citizen of Manchester, Richard Potter, he argued for a place in Parliament where there were no “men of business” sitting to do something about taxes (Beard, 1938 594).

Eloquent Spokesmen for the Economy

As these early men of commerce defended and theorized their practices, they had to address a broader public audience, which directed their arguments in directions we still recognize as the basis for economic theory. One historian describes the business rhetoric in largely agrarian England, for example, as a challenge for the “ambitious man of business” to present a case to “slow-minded country squires” to whom he had to appeal “on a ‘commonsense’ level, without intricacy” with ideas that were “sensible, national, rational and agreeable to God” (Beard, 1938 476). The arguments—a common good, defense of the seas, and religious values—explained how commercial interests were also those of the nation, and the call to support the “national interest” became a stock argument in political rhetoric as well (Beard, 1938 476).

Middle Class Democracy

In spite of the fine language of liberty and democracy, it is no secret that the revolutions against various aristocracies around the world have had an economic basis. The democratic nature of the American colonies, for example, was largely the result of their origins as commercial ventures, and British restrictions against manufacturing and trade restrictions led to an American Revolution that was sparked by smugglers. Attention to the ideological rhetoric of the era should not preclude attention to the economic discourse as well.

Sir Edwin Sandys

Sir Edwin Sandys, as treasurer of the Virginia Company, “earned the wrath of James I” when he spoke before the British House of Commons to question the legitimacy of any government not based on a mutual contract between ruler and ruled. His organization effectively introduced representative democracy into the colonies, authorizing a General Assembly in which members elected the company’s officers” (Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2003 34).

John Winthrop

John Winthrop introduced democracy to Massachusetts in 1630 when the General Court of the Massachusetts Company “transformed itself into a commonwealth, redefining “freemen” from stockholders in a commercial venture to citizens of a state” (Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2003 34).

Ishida Baigan

In the early eighteenth century, a former apprentice with the business house of Kuroyanagi in Kyoto developed an ethical system called *sekimon shingaku*, which “had at its heart an appreciation of the role of the merchant and businessman” (Witzel, 2002 43). The philosophy became widespread among both the samurai and the middle classes, and “from thenceforth trade and industry were increasingly seen as powers for social good” in Japan (Witzel, 2002 43).

David Hansemann

David Hansemann was a Prussian businessman who retired to political office. Becoming Prussian Minister, he tried to steer the state toward liberalism and compromise, although in that nation the effort did not prevail.

Jacques Necker

Jacques Necker, France’s “great merchant and banker, theorist and all-around business success of the day” (Beard, 1938 543) had made a huge impression in the best salons and written *The Administration of the Finances of France* (1788), which sold well to both the business community and the nobility, who demanded he be returned to a ministerial position. Faced with a depression, however, Necker took no action, believing it was “his duty let the people speak themselves out” (Beard, 1938 545). The ensuing public discussion and subsequent lack of leadership in both the elections and the management of the Estates-General ultimately resulted in the French Revolution.

Samuel Johnson

Although Samuel Johnson’s active management role was short, but his writings reflect commentary on economic issues, and his “interest in the practical business of the world illuminates many of his attitudes as a writer and as a person” (Mathias, 1978 264).

Benjamin Franklin

Often recognized as a consummate politician, inventor or raconteur, Benjamin Franklin was also a proud businessperson who had earned a large part of his wealth from land investments and denigrated by European critics as “the very embodiment of the Puritan entrepreneur mentality (Beard, 1938 518). A leader among the “middle-class artisans and mechanics who outlined the objectives, set the pace, provided the leadership, and reaped the benefits of the Revolutionary turmoil” (Olton, 1975), he refused to turn his back on his background as a business owner and signed himself “Benjamin Franklin, Printer” throughout his political career.

Frederick Engels

Frederick Engels was “perhaps...the only truly happy and confident business man in that dreadful time [during the panic following the collapse of American gold rush]. As a representative of his German father’s cotton firm in Manchester, Engles welcomed the ‘downfall of the capitalist system’” (Beard, 1938 600). He wrote the first draft of his friend, Karl Marx’s Communist Manifesto, furnishing “both practical advice and descriptive material” (Beard, 1938 600) based on his own industrial experience.

Benjamin Disraeli

Descended from a Venetian family that earned its business fortune in England, Disraeli “entered the Stock Exchange and merrily gambled on Spanish-American mining shares” (Beard, 1938 603). He went bankrupt but gained a respect for those with business acumen. He maintained that business prepared him for politics.

Joseph Chamberlain

A screw manufacturer from Birmingham, Joseph Chamberlain “retired to try orchid-fancying and statesmanship (Beard, 1938 604). He became a Colonial Minister, then Mayor of Birmingham, where he “remade the community” by initiating municipal control of light and water, cleared slum areas, reduced the death rate by 30%, founded an art gallery and university, and “strove to heal the scars left by the lawless anarchy which his forebears had proclaimed as the will of Nature” (Beard, 1938 605).

William Gregg

A Virginian who had made a fortune in the jewelry business, William Gregg later “devoted his days to breaking down the prejudices of Southerners against industrialism. Pamphleteering, fighting in the legislature, seeking to arouse interest in the problem of educating and employing the idle poor whites, he finally crushed Charleston’s opposition to the steam engine [it had been prohibited within the city to prevent pollution] and opened mills” (Beard, 1938 610).

Edmund Ruffin

“...subduing all men by his fierce eyes and the dignity of a hoary mane floating to his shoulders” (Beard, 1938 612), Edmund Ruffin preached “enmity to nearly everything Gregg had advocated” and after years of crusading, was delighted to be given permission to participate in the attack on Fort Sumter, the “symbol of Yankee commercial despotism” that lead to the Civil War.

Robert McNamara

With the introduction of managerial science to the business community, and then to government organizations (Drucker, 1973), the discourses of business became, in many respects, the discourse of government. The revolution was demonstrated when “Bob McNamara’s Whiz Kids moved all too effortlessly from managing Ford to running the Vietnam War” (Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2003 119).

No Memory for Figures

Any complete history of Western politics will recognize that business individuals and economic factors have shaped national boundaries, conflicts and political systems. But, while “the average citizen can name explorers and despots, few can name even one person from business who has had a significant impact on history” (Witzel, 2002 4). Perhaps the reason is simple; history students find the economic background and context to be tedious, while the resulting war is inherently exciting and easy to remember. Slightly less simple is the cultural bias that finds institutions and ideas to be more important than the mundane job of moving provisions into the community. The business man’s labors have “lacked significance as well as eccentricity” (Beard, 1938 4), but the very definition of significant behavior warrants a rhetorical examination. How is it that the orator espousing a new political system is deemed to have more impact on the community than the merchant whose discourse has resulted in new food sources for the population?

The theoretical demarcation between business and political rhetoric also implies that the business man who goes into politics is crossing an inviolate line. Both business (Friedman, 1970) and rhetorical critics (Goodnight, 1982) will argue that the line protects their preferred discourse from contamination, but the separation of business and social decision-making has not always been seen as desirable. A lack of business involvement in political and cultural activities has been the more common complaint since the ancient times (Beard, 1938). In purely practical terms, focus on the political results without attention to the commercial context, actions, and values of the rhetors who achieved those results might cause us to miss important rhetorical insights. More fundamentally, arbitrary distinctions between those discourses might be reconsidered.

Industrial Revolution

In many ways, the contemporary business environment is the product of technological developments that allowed standardization and growth of production processes. National wealth mushroomed with production, as did the wealth of those individuals who controlled the production and thus the economic decision making of the community.

Emil Rathenau

A technological genius, Emil Rathenau was “one of the men who revolutionized the surroundings of the human race,” but took no public role in politics or civic life. Nevertheless, he was an influential figure for the many who “came from far to ask him what would come out of this technique, that form of communication, this economic structure” (Beard, 1938 570) and built on the ideas they gleaned from him in private conversation.

Alfred Krupp

Born in Essen in 1812, Alfred Krupp inherited a bankrupt steel business from his father, rebuilding it slowly until the 1860’s when railroads became widespread and his steel rails and components were in great demand (Witzel, 2002 90). Apparently from sincere concern for the welfare of the country, he used his great fortune to manufacture guns and “did more to upset the balance of Europe and the budgets of nations, destroy the whole political set-up of the world, and endanger the future of capitalism itself, than the soldiers and politicians put together” (Beard, 1938 575). Krupp was not an orator, but as a businessman “had built up a relationship network with key clients. Rather than charm (he had none), Krupp employed an unshakeable faith in his own products combined with a dour persistence; he laid siege to the Prussian government for more than twenty years before the latter finally caved in and agreed to test his new designs for cannon” (Witzel, 2002 89).

John D. Rockefeller

John D. Rockefeller formed Standard Oil and “set about rationalizing the oil industry” (Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2003 67). He “encouraged the creation of the refiners’ association [the National Refiners Association] and became its first president. The association failed to maintain control of price or production” and Rockefeller came to believe that such associations “were ‘mere ropes of sand.’ He and his associates then decided to obtain the cooperation of its rivals by relying on the economic power provided by their high-volume, low-cost operation” (Chandler, 1977 321). By 1881 the cartel had forty members and controlled 90% of the country’s refining capacity, maintaining control over the alliance by holding each others’ stock as well as coordinated production practices that “could easily crush the remaining few small refiners” if they didn’t cooperate. (Chandler, 1977 322).

Robert Owen

Purchasing the New Lanark Mill upon his marriage to its owner's daughter, Robert Owen "made the mill and community into a model of enlightened capitalism." In this case, the rhetoric was a material performance that was aimed toward "improving the quality of life and the physical conditions of work ...contributing to the good of society" while insuring that their work in the mill would be more efficient as well (Witzel, 2002 244).

Henry Ford

Clearly Henry Ford had a major impact on subsequent economic behaviors around the world, and his standardized production processes have become a significant *topoi* in the material rhetorics of resource allocation that have determined global fuel consumption and pollution as well as the working class' standard of living (Lewis, 1976). The "folk hero" image that Ford nurtured in interviews and media stories was also a rhetorical technique; he was astute at creating situations that generated news and took advantage of those opportunities to express his opinions on cultural and political issues as well as business interests.

Daniel Guggenheim

Born in 1856, Daniel Guggenheim joined his father's lace-importing business as a buyer in Switzerland. The firm expanded into silver and lead-mining in the U.S. west, and after taking it over from his father, Guggenheim greatly expanded the operations. He took over ASARCO in 1899, making him the largest mine owner in the world. "In 1915 he stunned the United States Industrial Relations Commission, before which he was testifying, when he said that employees were justified in organizing, as many capitalists were too arbitrary in their treatment of their workers" (Witzel, 2002 219).

Lord Salisbury

Robert Cecil, the third Marquess of Salisbury was forced to "earn his own living" and tried to give up his political seat in order to find "paid" government service. With no position available, he turned to writing. The insolvent Great Eastern Railway, in need of someone with sufficient social standing to provide it credibility, asked him to chair. Lord Salisbury brought the company back to economic health with his involvement in the day-to-day operations (Barker, 1978). Later, as Prime Minister, his experiences as a "railway chairman" probably influenced the passage of the "Railway Act of 1888 and the wholesale revision of railway rates which followed it" (Barker, 1978 100).

Lord Beaverbrook

A British businessman, Lord Beaverbrook was asked to take over the office of Minister of Aircraft Production from May 1940 to May 1941 and judged to be an "industrial miracleworker." His managerial methods were instrumental in maintaining aircraft production levels that had a significant impact on Allied success in the Battle of Britain (Robertson, 1982).

The Persuasiveness of Production

No discussion of business discourse is complete without a recognition of the influence of the actions of the Fords, GM's and Duponts. The most fundamental choices about the world's resource allocation have been made largely on the basis of administrative and technical innovations, seldom as the consequence of articulated arguments for or against a given course of action. For that matter, in a business context, no decision is complete without its implementation (Drucker, 1973), and it is largely meaningless to choose a course of action unconnected to its material performance. Rhetorical studies have recognized the influence of performative acts across a range of political issues (Bowers & Ochs, 1971; Brummett, 1991; DeLuca & Peeples, 2002; Finnegan & Kang, 2004), but have yet to consider the inducements of production as a rhetorical performance.

Meaningful Money

For many in the 21st century, business is often synonymous with the financial markets. The image of "Main Street" as the community's backbone of civic engagement is distinguished from "Wall Street" where corporate enterprises conduct business. Certainly that sphere of global financial exchange was built by some key figures.

Jay Gould

Jay Gould, a 19th century speculator, was instrumental in building the who "forced the Pennsylvania [Railroad] to abandon its long-held territorial strategy and to build the nation's first interterritorial railroad empire. And it was Gould who finally convinced William Vanderbilt to transform the New York Central into a similar giant system" (Chandler, 1977 148) and ten years later "pushed the top managers of the Burlington, the Chicago and Northwestern, and other western lines into a strategy of expansion and consolidation." His campaign began with negotiations he had to resort to the more novel method of purchasing proxies, which allowed him to appoint directors and arrange for the sale of the assets he desired. Ultimately, his campaign failed, but his actions did have a lasting impact on the railroad companies involved. "It required a speculator with the

imagination and talent of Jay Gould to mount a serious competitive challenge” to the communication networks of Western Union (Chandler, 1977 149).

Henry Varnum Poor

The potential for profit fueled much of the investment in the railways, of course, but it was at least in part the discourse surrounding those investments that created the investor culture that we now recognize as Wall Street. The *Commercial and Financial Chronicle* and the *Wall Street Journal* covered railroad stocks in depth, and Henry V. Poor edited the *American Railroad Journal* and then *Poor's Manual of Railroad Securities* before giving his name to the ratings agency, Standard & Poor's.

J.Pierpoint Morgan

His father, Junius Morgan had been a wealthy banker, and J.P. Morgan held immense power over the US economy. Without a Federal Reserve to control the money supply, he sometimes operated as the nation's one-man central bank. “By withdrawing his approval from a shaky deal, he could cause a panic. By pouring millions into tottering banks, he could end one” (Lacayo, 2006). The Morgans' alliance with the great British banking houses of the Rothschilds and Barings, allowed J.P. Morgan to work closely with them in later years to bail out the US Treasury (Witzel, 2002), and he was instrumental in transforming the market, which then traded only a few manufacturers, mostly associated with railroads. Market capitalization expanded from \$33 million in 1890 to more than \$7 billion in 1903 as a consequence of Morgan's promotion of stock purchases.

Morgan believed in free enterprise, but had seen enough of unbridled competition.” (Lacayo, 2006) and he advocated monopolies as a means of setting “fair” prices that afforded producers the full value for their labor. His rhetoric might have been “private” by the standards of contemporary rhetorical theory, but he was clearly effective, “a supreme manipulator, arbiter and king of kings...in 1889 he invited eighteen railway presidents and bankers to dinner, at which he told these mighty magnates that they could no longer ‘take the law into their own hands,’ and sent armed trainmen to gun-play in the battle over lines....Morgan's fiat, tremblingly accepted by his satraps, closed the era of rough-and-tumble individualism” (Beard, 1938 635).

A Discourse of Interest

The bias against money lending and speculation can be traced to ancient texts. After the collapse of the Roman empire, the Christian church continued “subduing the profit-maker” with moral strictures on earning interest that officially lasted until 1830 (Beard, 1938 30). The money-lender was condemned, along with the “middleman” who profited

from the work of tradesman “who did nothing to improve an article” but charged a higher price than did its maker (1938 51). The bias against greedy speculators and shysters is easily observed today, and it is probably no wonder that the persuasive efforts that make the manipulation of money possible are seldom considered as legitimate functions of the public sphere. Nevertheless, the contemporary economy functions as a consequence of its monetary tools, and that economy, in turn, is the mechanism by which resources are valued, allocated and moved around the globe. Interest itself might even be considered a *topoi* in the material rhetoric of economic transactions, but surely the discourse of those who have created and used the system deserve scrutiny by rhetorical scholars.

The Language of Accounting and Control

Just as science has been formed through the discourses of objectivist rationalism, business as we know it today is a product of discourses of accounting and control. In the history of business, key figures have created methods that defined, located, recorded, and ultimately communicated types of information that are now the “taken for granted” of business discourse.

Luca Pacioli

Luca Pacioli’s *Summa de arithmetica*, published in Venice in 1494. is the earliest known written account of how the double-entry bookkeeping system works, although it seems likely that the system goes back to around 1300.

William Deloitte

Born in London in 1818, William Deloitte established an accountancy practice, served as external auditor for many large companies, and “continued to be an innovator in accounting practice” he developed “a number of accounting and auditing methods which have had lasting impact on management reporting and control” (Witzel, 2002 173).

Andrew Carnegie

Andrew Carnegie organized his steel company with a structure similar to that of his former employer, the Pennsylvania Railroad. His general manager, William P. Shin, also a former railroad executive, applied the voucher system of accounting, previously unused in manufacturing, to provide Carnegie with monthly costs of materials and operations. Carnegie used these reports as his primary means of control, declaring, “watch the costs and the profits will take care of themselves.’ He compared costs with previous periods, and when possible with competitors’ operations (Chandler, 1977 267).

Henry R. Towne

Senior executive and major stockholder of the Yale and Towne Lock Company, Henry Towne made the presidential address, “The Engineer as an Economist,” to the annual meeting of the recently formed American Society of Mechanical Engineers in 1886. The prolonged depression of the 1870’s was turning attention from technology to organization, and Towne’s speech, along with two significant papers on cost accounting and capital accounting led to “long discussion” at the meeting as manufacturers realized they “were developing comparable control and accounting methods” (Chandler, 1977 274) that then came into common use.

Frederick W. Taylor

In his position at the Midvale Steel Company, Frederick Taylor had been working on control and accounting methods for several years, and in 1895 he delivered his first paper (Taylor, 1895) on what he called “scientific management” (Chandler, 1977) and “his efforts to determine scientifically standard time and output helped Taylor to become the nation’s best known expert on factory management” (Chandler, 1977 276), testifying before congress with great impact.

Control of Information as Control of Business

In the history of business management, there are countless examples of information control as the basis of success. Jacob Fugger, for example, personally kept the books for the entire Fugger enterprise, which extended across Europe, and it was “this combination of intense monitoring of information and a flexible, far-flung network gave Fugger the ability to respond quickly to crisis” (Witzel, 2002 161). With an ability to catalogue and communicate key facts having to do with a business, managers have found themselves more persuasive and more successful, of course. The elements that are defined as “facts” also become the focus of further activities, structuring not only the immediate enterprise, but those that follow as well. The rhetorical study of either stage of the discursive process would seem to promise a richer understanding of business and of the world’s economic decision-making processes.

Publicists, Advertisers, and Salesmen

Advertising and public relations are business functions that have received considerable rhetorical attention. Clearly these overt attempts at persuasion deserve study in general, but some instances of personal persuasiveness have created whole industries and markets.

Phineas Taylor Barnum

P.T. Barnum failed in a series of more conventional business ventures before he realized “that in order to draw crowds he needed publicity” for which he proved to have “a natural flair” (Witzel, 2002 91). Barnum used advertising, but found media publicity cheaper so he cultivated newspaper editors in hope of placing favorable stories. Ultimately, he became the news himself, a legend that was built on his own personal flamboyance.

John Patterson

So impressed with the technology of the newly invented cash register, John Patterson raised capital and bought the inventor’s company to establish National Cash Register (NCR). Knowing the task of selling a high-tech machine to small retailers would be difficult, he provided his sales force with intensive training and instructed them “first to learn about the customer’s business and its needs, and only when they could see a genuine use for the cash register that would benefit the customer were they to make a pitch” (Witzel, 2002 95).

John North Willys

John Willys had been a bicycle retailer, then an agent for Pierce-Arrow and Rambler cars. He bought out the bankrupt Overland Car Company and established one of the first large-scale car dealership networks, “backing up his dealers with promotions, advertising and credit plans which helped them attract customers and made it easier for them to sell cars.” He was a “sales genius” with an “almost instinctive understanding of his market; what is more, he knew how to apply his understanding of psychology to his sales force” (Witzel, 2002 96).

William Hesketh Lever

William Lever had followed his father into the grocery business, but with the rising affluence of the British working class, he “realized that there were opportunities to break through to this group by offering them products which had formerly been unaffordable. The greatest opportunity, he believed, lay in soap. The task was to convince working-class housewives that soap, which they had regarded as a luxury, was in fact a necessity” (Witzel, 2002 97). Lever first invented a brand name (Sunlight), but unable to find suppliers who could provide consistent quality, he purchased his own soap works. None of the various promotional tools he used was new, his innovation was “their combined deployment as part of a larger brand strategy” (Witzel, 2002 97), introducing a new brand every two years (2002 98)

George Eastman

George Eastman invented a cheap camera, but more importantly for both his business and U.S. culture, “also the idea of the amateur photographer to find a market for his photographic film” (Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2003 66). In order to market the new cameras, Eastman “immediately created a worldwide marketing network of branch offices with managers to supervise salesmen and demonstrators and coordinate the flow of cameras, films, and funds” (Chandler, 1977 297). By the early twentieth century, Eastman Kodak began to build retail stores in major cities.

Thomas Edison

Edison could not interest banks or Wall Street to finance the production of the light bulb he had invented, so he supplied 90 percent of the capital needed to go into manufacturing himself. The plants eventually became the nucleus of GE. “He would use the press for instant credibility and communication for his projects...His ability to charm the world as the great technological problem-solver was truly charismatic” (Landrum, 1993 17).

George Francis Train

“With the shrewdness of a Barnum he united the mellifluous oratorical periods of a Southern Senator, and could sway any audience into a mad stampede for subscriptions” in his various land speculation schemes (Beard, 1938 618).

Mark Hanna

Not all publicity was strictly for business purposes. Mark Hanna “left a business career in Cleveland’s coal and iron region to organize the Republican Party on a business basis. Hanna’s machine was stupendous. Bringing advertising methods into politics, Hanna used clever slogans, distributed tons of ‘boilerplate’ to local newspapers, set up posters and conducted local canvasses....he was the most effective business personality in politics” (Beard, 1938 642).

Fred Smith

Fred Smith invented the first overnight delivery service and formed Federal Express in 1972, an enterprise built on a “charismatic magnetism” that convinced employees and formed a market that others were convinced was non-existent (Landrum, 1993 88). His persona is fundamental to the success of Federal Express, where “the founder/leader and the organization have become ‘one and the same’ “(Landrum, 1993). The result has been “...widespread business changes and opportunities have been made possible by the new

mentality of Fred Smith's 'absolutely positively overnight'—anywhere in the world" (Landrum, 1993 94).

Richard Sears

We take the rhetoric of mail order catalogs for granted, but it took Richard Sears, "a copywriter of genius," (along with the organizational talent of Julius Rosenwald, to create an economic revolution with the Sears, Roebuck catalog (Micklethwait & Wooldridge, 2003 57).

Akio Morita

The charismatic father of the transistor radio, which spawned the consumer electronics revolution, Akio Morita cofounded Sony and earned a "reputation as one of the Western world's greatest salespeople" (Landrum, 1993 189). It was Morita's "burning desire to reverse the image of 'Made in Japan' as a cheap copy," and "more than any other individual or company in Japan, Morita has been responsible for achieving that objective" (Landrum, 1993 191).

Marcel Bich

Marcel Bich is credited with creating the contemporary "throwaway culture" with the BIC pen in 1953, followed by BIC shavers and lighters. Marketing emphasized the reliability of the product, and distribution reached 93 % of U.S. retailers in the rollout (Landrum, 1993). Bich's business innovations have had a lasting impact on multinational conduct of contemporary business, and his "highly focused ingenuity changed the buying habits of society" (Landrum, 1993 142).

Steve Jobs

By nurturing Steve Wozniak's invention, Steve Jobs transformed the personal computer from niche product for the technologically inclined hobbyist to a mass marketed commodity appliance that "forever changed the way the world works, writes, and computes"(Landrum, 1993 77). Job's single-minded design focus has been cited as the source of Apple's success, but his ability to articulate a vision was key in creating both the organization and the market.

Creating a Consumer Audience

Marketing communication is clearly intended to be persuasive, and most scholars would include advertising, sales and public relations communication as legitimate, if mundane, rhetorical discourse. Some might view the advertiser as an unscrupulous rhetor,

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persuading audiences to act in undesirable ways and the salesman hypocritical in his or her willingness to feign a relationship with a customer. The nominations here suggest, however, that key individuals have not merely created messages for existing audiences. These eloquent business voices have created markets, “called forth audiences,” to use Charland’s terminology (1987), to constitute a market: a group of individuals who find value in a product, consumer identity, or a lifestyle. At least some of the bias against the merchant classes has been traced to the discourse of status-conscious aristocrats who jealously guarded their ability to purchase the baubles that signified rank (Beard, 1938). The more far-reaching impact of business discourse might be in the rhetoric that defines social classes by the baubles they value.

The Corporate Evolution

As the size and complexity of business enterprises grew beyond what a single person or even a single family could manage, “the actual work of management fell increasingly to the lot of the business bureaucrats” (Beard, 1938 727). Some business historians trace the history of management to the Medici’s practice of placing salaried professionals at the head of each division of their financial empire (Witzel, 2002). Others will point to the industrial age (Beard, 1938), and still others to the creation of contemporary corporate structures. In any case, an interesting rhetorical study would consider the impetus and implications of the evolution of business person to industry leader to corporate spokesperson to corporate citizen as the primary voice in business discourse.

Nelson B. Aldrich

Nelson B. Aldrich served in the U.S. Senate for many years in alliance with other business men and “through his skillful maneuvers he managed to win for big industry the protection it sought” (Beard, 1938 643). “Not being skilled in forensics” and taciturn, he didn’t even reply to attacks, but resorted to “shrewd arguments and dry jests. He could not sway masses. His true genius lay in back-stage strategy” (Beard, 1938 643).

Elbert Gary

“As early as 1902 [J.P.] Morgan himself had suggested a man-to-man understanding to Roosevelt, but it was left to Elbert Gary, chairman of the board of U.S. Steel, to fashion comprehensive agreements with the executive....his legal training, his ability to articulate the case for bigness and price stability, and above all his position as head of U.S. Steel, made him an impressive public figure” (Wiebe, 1962 46).

Takafusa

A member of the Mitsui trading family, Takafusa wrote “Chonimnko” to urge “merchants to unite in order to make their associations as strong as the clans of their hereditary foes, the sword-bearers.” The result was the “creation of such organizations as the Wholesale Merchants’ Association to sweep away corruption in the Buddhist churches and the Shogunate, leading to the business triumph in the Japanese Restoration” (Beard, 1938 677).

Mitsui Takatoshi

Hachirobei Mitsui, founded the first fixed price dry-goods store, Echigo-ya, in Edo (now Tokyo) in 1673 (Witzel, 2002). He wrote the constitution of the family [*zaibatsu*], which still governs itself with a family council and dominated, with the Mitsubishi family, Japan’s textile, shipping, and banking industries into the twentieth century (Beard, 1938).

Solomon Price

Sol Price created the first warehouse club, Price Club, in 1977 innovating “the fundamental precept of offering high-quality *brand* merchandise at wholesale prices” (Landrum, 1993 147).

Warren Buffett

Warren Buffett, Chairman of Berkshire Hathaway, Inc., delivers a report to shareholders, which is read closely by financial professionals and the business media. Buffett’s messages have had an enormous influence on investment behavior as well as the contemporary view of the stock market as a mechanism through which every citizen can participate in growth and prosperity (Iden, 2005).

Aurelio Peccei

Aurelio Peccei, senior manager at Fiat and president of the business executives’ Club of Rome, successfully argued for global perspectives on ecological, political and economic problems during the 1970s (Elichirigoity, 2005).

Bill Gates

Of course, Bill Gates created the first PC software and formed Microsoft in 1978, but his rhetoric has also envisioned and guided the internet revolution and had a lasting impact on the multinational conduct of contemporary business(Landrum, 1993). By framing his vision in context, interpreting reality for listeners and giving meaning to events, Gate has

built on utopian themes and demonstrated leadership strategies commonly associated with social movement leaders (French, 2005).

Lee Iaccoca

Giving more than 600 formal speeches to both internal and external audiences, Lee Iaccoca became the voice of his company and his industry and became the model of proactive corporate leadership as a business statesman and ambassador (Seeger, 1994).

Oprah Winfrey

Oprah Winfrey is a media personality, but also an entrepreneur and savvy businessperson. Winfrey's ability to bridge rhetorical spaces, merging the social, economic, and political spheres to result in unprecedented political power (Hart & Coopman, 2006).

Industry Spokesman as Public Rhetor

Selecting contemporary business individuals for their rhetorical impact is complicated by the media's role in recognizing key figures on the basis of their high business profile independently of their public discourse. Organizational success increases the assessment of a CEO as "charismatic" rather than charisma leading to organizational performance (Agle, Nagarajan, Sonnenfeld, & Srinivasan, 2006). Further, media attention often focuses on raiders and moguls such as T. Boone Pickens, Carl Icahn, Ted Turner, or Donald Trump, regardless of any long term social or economic effect. These issues are themselves of rhetorical interest, however, in the demonstration of contemporary media's role in defining a significant political voice.

Outside the Realm of Rhetorical

It would take considerable study and debate to create a canon of exemplary business rhetors, and this list of 81 individuals is no more than a first slate of nominees. Some figures are clearly influential in the history of business; others have displayed discursive skill that bears examination. As an exercise in rhetorical history, it is just a list—and a somewhat arbitrary list at that—of potential paper-topics. The more interesting question is whether this list can offer some explanation for the scholarly inattention to economic discourse. Arranged chronologically, there are some hints that business discourse has simply been too boring, too technical, and too sordid to interest the scholar of public address. Still, political speakers have been, more often than not, boring or technical or sordid, and their discourse remains respectably within the parameters of the discipline.

A more subtle cause might be the degree to which Western rhetorical scholars have defined their own scope in terms of the Western political discourse. Any alternative decision-making methods are deemed arhetorical on the circular grounds that they do not conform to the normative rules that define rhetorical discourse. Thus the poets were banned, along with their narrative and lyrical forms of discourse, and theorists have only admitted in the last century the rhetorical importance of narrative , image , and performance . Similarly, the narrow epistemological grounds of Western rhetoric's "good reason" have been exploded to acknowledge alternate ways of knowing . The business discourse listed here suggests that these theoretical biases might have blinded scholars to the rhetorical functions of both business discourse and business individuals. Because their methods do not fit the normative model of rhetorical discourse, the reality of their decision-making role has been ignored.

The Collaborative Voice in Rhetorical Agency

While it is not difficult to name individuals who have played significant roles in business or political affairs, it is clear that most business discourse functions as a collaborative process (Wiebe, 1962). Individuals engaged in a corporate venture are seeking consensus; seldom is the stubborn defense of an idiosyncratic perspective a virtue. By contrast, public address has been traditionally understood in terms of the individual speaker. Further, the unique vision is an important element of eloquence and significance is judged on the basis of an individual's ability to sway others, for better or for worse, from the course they preferred. Thus, especially since the industrial revolution, business rhetoric is often characterized in terms of the collective behavior or voice of a corporate entity, which lacks theoretical standing as a rhetorical being. It is possible, as this list suggests, to trace the cause of many business events to the visionary, motivational or structuring words of single individuals as they call forth and address organizational or consumer publics. In many more cases, however, the impact of an individual pales against the economic clout of a Dutch Royal Shell or the social impact of a Walt Disney Company.

Clearly it is important for rhetorical scholars to understand the ways in which human communities actually do make their collective decisions. Western culture's resource allocation decisions have been made almost exclusively by traders, merchants, and multinational corporate entities; the inconsequence of individual agency in the process should not prevent attention to its rhetoricity. Instead, scholars might consider communicative dynamics of "distributed cognition" to explain the rhetorical results of collective decision-making processes. The teleological presumption that a single rhetor "causes" a certain outcome might be set aside to consider the intricate communicative networks, relationships and technology that allow complex organizations to "act" as

viable units (Chandler, 1977; Yates, 1989). A consideration of the group itself as a rhetor might allow theories of group or organizational behavior to enhance our understanding of the nested and overlapping publics that seem to comprise the rhetorical process .

Decision-making Attention to Concrete Data

While it is possible to find business discourse that makes the abstract argument for economic policy or national interest or legal rules, such texts are the exceptions. The mass of business discourse is the fine-grained record of transactions, values, agreements and day-to-day minutia of commercial exchange. Such mundane details have seldom been the stuff of rhetorical study, and even when the texts are not numeric, careful attention to the intricacies of a discourse is problematic . Business scholars have begun to realize, however, the degree to which accounting practices and reporting requirements guide the decision-making behavior of both individuals and organizations. The notational form of the data—rows of number rather than words and sentences—does not reduce its potential for meaningfulness.

The iconoclastic nature of rhetorical scholarship has been challenged , as has the Western presumption that language symbolically represents reality in any important way . Some exploratory work in the rhetoric of mathematics and graphic design suggests that notational discourses allow modes of thinking outside the range of language. Analysis of business texts that embraces rather than discounts their form might serve to illustrate the epistemological and rhetorical potential of both numeric and graphical communication.

A Rhetoric of Material Effect

It might seem that the most relevant measure of a community's decision-making process would be its material outcome. A reasonable measure of a community's rhetorical success would be the degree to which the decision benefits its immediate or long-term interests. Instead, critical measures of both rhetorical process and rhetorical texts have been largely divorced from the materiality of their outcome . It is possible to talk about the "rhetoric" of a private journal, never read or heard by any audience. It is possible to judge a rhetor to be "eloquent" on the basis of his or her ideas, irrespective of any attempt (much less success) in implementing those ideas. A telling feature of the historical businessman is the frequency with which he is "indicted for taciturnity" (Beard, 1938). It seems that material outcomes are not only irrelevant to the rhetoricity of words, but material outcomes without words lie outside the boundaries of rhetorical consequence.

This is not to discount the potential of business discourse to affect the political, social and economic choices of a community; its study would offer much to our rhetorical understanding. Beyond that, however, expanding the scope of "rhetorical" to include

whatever human behavior results in a collective choice can be instructive. Such a perspective would allow the study of human behaviors across the multiple cultures that have not embraced the West's focus on articulated reason-giving as the only legitimate source of collective action. Further, removing an arbitrary and artificial distinction between legitimate rhetorical processes and their material outcome suggests a more useful means of understanding how communities manage—or don't—their own sustainability.

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