

# The Pedigree — and Perils — of *Koshogaku*<sup>1)</sup>

Peter A. Goldsbury

On the occasion of the creation of a new graduate department, it is perhaps worth looking at what new courses are offered, in particular, what is being offered under the name of *koshogaku*.<sup>2)</sup> This is supposedly a new discipline and purports to offer students a complex set of practical skills and theoretical knowledge. The term *koshogaku* is commonly translated as ‘negotiation’ and the context is supposedly business.

If we consult the how-to sections in the larger bookstores, we can find a wide range of practical manuals designed to help people who undertake this practice to do it better and produce results, presumably in the form of lucrative contracts. There is not much presented in the way of theory, but some of the manuals mention works like Sun Tsu’s *The Art of War* and Miyamoto Musashi’s *The Book of Five Rings*. One might assume from this that negotiation is an art or skill with a long history. This seems odd, given that *koshogaku* is apparently a new discipline. Of course, the association of *koshogaku* with warfare has no historical foundation whatever and the enlistment of Musashi Miyamoto and Sun Tsu is intended to show the practical nature of the undertaking and sell more copies. The object is to win the business contract and the self-help manuals are meant to help in this.

In fact the western counterpart of *koshogaku* has a very long history and the citing of works like *The Art of War* and *The Book of Five Rings*, gives some indication of the nature of the subject. However, in one sense this is misleading. The above references correctly suggest that *koshogaku* has a competitive nature, but its origins do not lie in the theory of warfare or swordsmanship, but in the ancient arts of rhetoric and dialectic.

This argument of this essay unfolds in several stages. First, we examine the arguments that *koshogaku* is essentially competitive. If it were, in this it would indeed have obvious similarities with warfare and swordsmanship. However, we shall also argue that the origins of *koshogaku* in rhetoric and dialectic are much less clearly connected to competition. Certainly, rhetoric itself and the less scrupulous users of the art made it the object of extreme suspicion. Aristotle, considered to be the founder of rhetoric and dialectic as disciplines, wrote his *Art of Rhetoric* as a rehabilitation of the subject against the attacks of Plato through the mouth of Socrates.

One modern scholar believes that *koshogaku* is essentially competitive. Barry Eckhouse published *Competitive Communication: A Rhetoric for Modern Business* in 1999 and the book is a practical manual of what he calls “competitive communication”,<sup>3)</sup> which is one English rendering of *koshogaku*. However, Eckhouse’s argument does not show that what he means by *koshogaku* is

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1) This term is extremely difficult to define, let alone to translate into English. The term *negotiation* is too narrow, but *rhetoric* is too wide. *Management communication* assumes a narrow range of uses, whereas *competitive communication* assumes an even narrower range of purposes. Thus the term is best left untranslated and this is the course I have chosen in this essay. The range of meanings intended will become clear in this essay, which deals with the links between *koshogaku* and ancient rhetoric.

2) *Koshogaku* is, of course, *kosho* (negotiation) with the suffix denoting a subject of study. Of course, anything can be an object of study, but, as Aristotle argued, this is not sufficient to make it a subject of study. For this a methodology is required.

3) Barry Eckhouse, *Competitive Communication: A Rhetoric for Modern Business*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999.

intrinsically competitive and he has neglected a very important part of classical rhetoric, understood in a broad sense.

### **Communication and Competition**

Eckhouse begins by stating that communication in business is essentially a competitive activity. It is a “rhetorical venture in which writers and speakers attempt to gain advantage over other forces that contend for the audience’s attention.”<sup>4)</sup> He uses competition in two senses. In a general sense, competition is,

an effort made by two or more parties acting independently to secure the business of a third party by offering the most favourable terms. In this sense, writers in business are realistically viewed as agents who compete to secure the business of the reader, the third party. Business, of course, may be any number of things but routinely includes attention to the message, cooperation, approval, agreement or action as a consequence if it. The most favourable terms may also refer to many things — ease of understanding and quality of reasoning among them — but they take on more more specific meaning when competition is discussed in its more specialized sense.<sup>5)</sup>

Thus a novelist or poet can be understood to be competing with other third parties for the reader’s attention: other novelists or poets, the thought of playing tennis, hunger, but this so widens the sense of the term to make almost any human social activity competitive in some sense. Thus we need the specialized sense of competition if the term is to have any use. Eckhouse provides a similar definition, in the sense that competition takes place between two parties vying for the attention of an audience.

In its more specialized sense, competition may be further understood as it is used in contemporary discussions of industry analysis and strategy. There it is viewed as a way of gaining advantage along two lines: low cost or differentiation. A firm may gain advantage by offering a product or service that is lower in cost than a competitor’s or by offering a product or service that is different in a way that is valuable to its customers. Similarly, writers and speakers in business may gain competitive advantage through messages — the literary equivalent of products or services — if they are differentiated in the sense that they offer the audience something different that is of value. These messages also compete if they offer ‘reduced cost’, in the sense that they require from the audience the least amount of rhetorical investment or effort for what would otherwise be an equivalent return in meaning.<sup>6)</sup>

Here again, Eckhouse’s more specialized definition of competition places the activity firmly in the domain of competing with an audience: readers of advertisements, company brochures, tender proposals, business contracts. The competition has presumably been won if the audience understands the message, buys the product, or accepts the contract. However, once again the definition of competition seems uncomfortably wide. It cannot be denied that anyone who wishes to make a profit by selling a product must spend much time and effort in making that product known to the intended target. Thus in a free-market economy, much effort goes into advertising the product and persuading the potential consumer, by fair means or foul, that his life will be changed for the better by buying the product. But this does not show that communication, even business communication, is essentially a competitive activity.

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4 ) Eckhouse, p.1.

5 ) Eckhouse, p.1.

6 ) Eckhouse, p.1.

Communication long has been a central concern of modern linguistic theory.<sup>7)</sup> However, there is no unanimity as to the notion of an utterance, written or spoken, the aim, the context, or what is presumed by the parties to the communicative activity. Let us take a simple example of communication. A man is taking a shower at home. The telephone rings and the following exchange takes place:

“It’s the phone!”

“Okay. I’ll get it.”

The telephone is answered by his wife and life proceeds as normal. The man makes a statement of fact, but his statement is actually a request and it leads to some action by his wife. The action is the one expected, but if the wife had answered,

“So it is! I’ve often heard it ringing,” or,

“Yes. I know it is,” (while doing nothing),

then communication could not really be said to have taken place at all and the man might wonder whether his wife had not gone slightly mad.

Now to define this encounter in terms of competition adds nothing illuminating and in fact causes conceptual problems. With whom is the man competing? His wife? Hardly. If his wife had answered,

“I’m in the loo,”

successful communication would in fact have taken place, but the man’s request would not have been carried out. Could he be said to have been defeated? Again, hardly. Even if the encounter were a scene in a play, with an audience and thus completely different overall aims — to make the audience laugh, for example, it would make little sense to claim that the man or his wife were competing with each other, or with the audience. Thus, though Eckhouse is surely right to stress the practical importance of the “message” in business communication, this has nothing to do with the act itself.

### **Communication and Classical Rhetoric**

Eckhouse places his discussion of communication as competition in the general context of rhetoric, in particular, classical rhetoric. He quotes a modern scholar of classical rhetoric, Edward J. Corbett:

The basic notion underlying classical rhetoric is that any act of verbal communication between human beings comprises four components: (1) a speaker or writer, (2) listeners or readers, (3) a message or text, and (4) a reality or universe that the message or text is talking about. All four of those components play a part in business or professional communications; but of those four, the one that gets primary consideration is audience — that is the listeners or readers.<sup>8)</sup>

As might be seen, problems arise when we try to fit the short example given in the last section to Corbett’s schema of communication. Items (3) and (4) cannot really be distinguished and there is much else, the general and specific assumptions made by the speakers, for example, that does not appear in Corbett’s scheme. However, we can let that pass. What is important is that Eckhouse accepts Corbett’s scheme and relates it to two other important areas, producing competitive messages and the use of argument in effective communication. Eckhouse then gives a brief outline of classical rhetoric,

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7) There is an enormous literature on the subject. Representative viewpoints can be found in Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, 1951, and John Searle’s *Speech Acts*, 1960.

8) Edward P. J. Corbett, “What Classical Rhetoric Has to Offer the Teacher and the Student of Business and Professional Writing”, in *Writing and the Business Professions*, ed. Myra Kogen, 1989, quoted in Eckhouse, p.3.

which may be summarized in the following general statements:

- ( i ) An understanding of rhetoric was important for the Greeks, through an acquired ability to argue well;
- ( ii ) The Greeks used rhetoric in politics, law and business;
- ( iii ) A market for rhetoric became apparent and instructors appeared to teach the skill of rhetoric;
- ( iv ) These instructors were called *sophists* and the best known was Isocrates;
- ( v ) Other sophists, such as Gorgias, were less savoury characters;
- ( vi ) The sophists enjoyed influence until the Middle Ages, when the teaching of rhetoric became institutionalized as part of formal education and the early liberal arts;
- ( vii ) During the sixteenth century, the study of rhetoric and logic was more strictly divided into separate disciplines by the French scholar, Peter Ramus.

There are many problems with this general account of the development of classical rhetoric, which is seriously inaccurate. In fact, Eckhouse's book is a well-reasoned application of Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric* to the needs of competitive business and so it is strange that his treatment of classical rhetoric is so inadequate. The most serious defect in Eckhouse's accounts that he completely fails even to mention an intellectual activity which has far better claims than rhetoric to be grounded in competition. This activity, of course, is the logical reasoning known as dialectic. The important point about dialectic, of course — the point has some irony in view of Eckhouse's argument, is that because it was so competitive, it was of very limited use in business circles. With these points in mind, we may now modify and supplement Eckhouse's general statements about classical rhetoric:

- ( i ) An understanding of rhetoric eventually became important for the Greeks, through an acquired ability to argue well. This was due to the rise of democracy in Athens, especially in the age of Pericles, in a form which required all property-owning males to participate actively in civic life. This meant attending and speaking at public meetings and also voting;
- ( ii ) The Greeks used rhetoric in politics, law and, to a far lesser recorded degree, in business;
- ( iii ) A market for rhetoric became apparent and instructors appeared to teach the skill of rhetoric.

However, this market originated not so much as a market for rhetoric as such, as a market for what may be called general education;

- ( iv ) These instructors were called *sophists* and the best known was Isocrates. However, they were called sophists, not because they taught rhetoric, but because they claimed to teach wisdom.

Because of this, they incurred the wrath of philosophers like Socrates and Plato, who thought that the sophists could not possibly teach wisdom because they did not possess it. They had not studied dialectic, which Socrates and Plato considered the activity which would lead to knowledge, or wisdom, and virtue;

- ( v ) Other sophists, such as Gorgias, were less savoury characters. Socrates regarded all sophists as unsavoury characters. However, Gorgias never claimed to teach wisdom and Socrates never called him a sophist. Gorgias was known as a 'rhetor' or orator, because he claimed to teach the art of persuasion.<sup>9)</sup> Plato, the disciple of Socrates, opened a school called the Academy, where dialectic was taught. Dialectic was a more formalized version of the kind of question-and-answer debate found in Plato's Socratic dialogues. The point of the activity was to drive the interlocutor into a logical corner from which there was no escape. This state of logical perplexity was known as *elenchos*. Plato's disciple, Aristotle, left the academy and established the Lyceum, the world's first academic institution. The curriculum comprised, among other things, logic,

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9) This is clear from Plato's *Gorgias*, 449a and 465c. See the text and commentary by E. R. Dodds, pp.6-10.

dialectic, and a new discipline called rhetoric, of which Aristotle was the pioneer. A regular feature of the Lyceum, and of other schools, were dialectical debates conducted by two partners before an audience and with referees. Aristotle devotes an entire work, the *Topics*, to these debates and gives detailed directions on how to argue by question and answer in what is essentially a competitive situation.<sup>10</sup> In the debate there is a winner and loser, sometimes when the questioner succeeds in forcing his opponent into a contradiction, sometimes in a stalemate when the referees or audience decide. In view of the fact that dialectic relied strictly on logical inferences and also because of the increasing importance of politics, Aristotle included rhetoric, which he called the 'counterpart' of dialectic;

- (vi) The sophists enjoyed considerably diminished influence until the Middle Ages for Aristotle's mantle was inherited by the Stoics. The Stoics continued to teach dialectic, which for them comprised logic and rhetoric, right up until the medieval period, when the teaching of these subjects became institutionalized as part of formal education and the early liberal arts. The Stoics also divided dialectic into logic and grammar;
- (vii) During the sixteenth century, the study of rhetoric and logic was more strictly divided into separate disciplines by the French scholar, Peter Ramus.

Thus, it can be seen from the revised account, above, that Aristotle played a very important role in the development of dialectic and rhetoric and Eckhouse is right to base his book on Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric*.<sup>11</sup> We now need to round out our account by taking a closer look at the two disciplines and consider why rhetoric is in fact less 'competitive' than dialectic.

### Dialectic and Rhetoric

The origins of dialectic are obscure, though it is certain that this developed as an art or science before rhetoric. There is a collection known as the *Dissoi Logoi*, a set of logical arguments and fallacies.

Zeno, the famous discoverer of paradoxes, is said to have practiced disputation. As mentioned above, Socrates is known as a famous practitioner of disputation. In the early dialogues of Plato, Socrates usually meets educated Athenians, 'experts' in their respective fields, and asks them for a definition of some important term in ethics or philosophy. His interlocutors cannot satisfy Socrates and they are usually driven into a corner. Socrates, always the winner in the dispute, goes away unsatisfied, since he has not discovered what the term in question means.<sup>12</sup> However, the interlocutor, who usually goes away from the argument frustrated or even angry, has been shown to be ignorant also, in spite of his pretensions to being an 'expert'. This dilemma was known as an *elenchus* and his skill in causing such embarrassing dilemmas did not gain Socrates any popularity. But it was later considered to be a crucial stage on the way to knowledge or wisdom.

In the middle dialogues of Plato, there is a change of emphasis. Socrates is no longer content simply to ask questions and drive his opponents into a corner. He spends much more time explaining the stages in the intellectual ascent from ignorance to knowledge.<sup>13</sup> He develops an entire philosophy,

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10) The details of the debates are given in *Topics*, Books I and VIII. Another work, called *De Sophisticis Elenchis*, deals with logical fallacies and has its title because Sophists were considered to employ such fallacies.

11) Eckhouse is not the only modern writer on *koshogaku* to do this. In 1998, Peter Thompson, an Australian broadcasting expert, published *Persuading Aristotle: A Master Class in the Timeless Art of Strategic Persuasion in Business* (published by Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW).

12) Socrates' approach, however, is not without problems. It is a fallacy, the Socratic Fallacy, to believe that giving the definition of 'x' will enable one to claim correctly to know what 'x' is.

13) The turning point is the *Republic*.

known as the Theory of Forms, which is probably one of the most important concepts in western culture. The notion of an entire world, lying behind the world of senses, was not, of course, invented by Plato. What he did invent was the notion that one can gain access to this world by a process of logical analysis. This ascent to truth was known as dialectic.

The association of dialectic with the pursuit of truth explains why Socrates, and also Plato — sometimes as the latter's mouthpiece, sometimes in his own right — attacked the Sophists so severely. The reason is that dialectic was given a strongly moral flavouring and this latter association is due to the Greek belief in the primacy of knowledge. No one could be virtuous, or pious, or just, without knowing what virtue, or piety, or justice actually was and for Socrates this meant giving an acceptable definition of the term. Later Plato came to stress the logical relationship between the definition and the 'account', or explanation, but he, too, believed in the primacy of knowledge as a precondition for virtue. The Sophists claimed to teach virtue and wisdom, but their arguments were specious. Thus they could not possibly be virtuous and their activities were therefore fraudulent.

Along with the Sophists, Socrates and Plato also attacked what they claimed to teach and in this category art and rhetoric were included. The reasons for this are connected with the primacy of knowledge. The only certain knowledge was knowledge of the Forms, the world of Reality, and the only certain path to this beatific state was the painful process of dialectic. Art was doubly suspect, for, not only was art concerned with depicting the world of sense, which was not a true source of knowledge, but it was concerned with mere imitation of objects of sense. Thus artists were floundering in a double layer of ignorance. Rhetoricians were similar. Dialectic was a rigorous logical process, using what was later known as the syllogism. For a conclusion to follow, the premises had to be not only true but the inference had to be correct. Rhetoric failed on both counts and the practitioners were, also, floundering in ignorance.

The problem with this rigid approach is that it caused the baby to be thrown out with the bathwater. It was clear that the Sophists were doing something of great value in teaching ordinary Athenians to play a role in public life and political decision-making. True, many Sophists were unscrupulous and 'sophistry' and 'sophism' have been inherited from their Greek originals. Socrates was put to death for his refusal to compromise and Plato modified his philosophical views later in his life. It was left to Aristotle to find a compromise and to rehabilitate rhetoric, in fact, to establish rhetoric as an important branch of knowledge. By examining Aristotle's approach, we shall be in a position to see the relationship between dialectic, competition and rhetoric.

Aristotle was a star pupil in Plato's Academy, but he gradually became dissatisfied and left to found his own school. Aristotle's biological researches demonstrated the importance of having a correct experimental and scientific method and he made very important changes to the theory and practice of dialectic. It ceased to be regarded as an ascent to a World of Forms and instead became a method of disputation and of what we would call scientific research.

In both forms, as disputation and as scientific research, dialectic for Aristotle rests on what he called *endoxa*. These are opinions, held by "the many or the wise" and dialectic was the rigorous logical examination of these opinions. In the form of disputation between two opponents, a controversial topic would be chosen for debate and the questioner would put a series of 'yes' / 'no' questions, using *endoxa*. The answerer could only use 'yes' or 'no', but he could also choose freely whether to accept or reject the questioner's 'suggestions'. The object of the exercise was for the questioner to drive his opponent into an *elenchos*, where any answer he gave would contradict the

answers he had previously given. This type of disputation had a long history and survived to the Middle Ages as a method of debate in university classes.

As a scientific method, dialectic as practised in Aristotle's Lyceum was less overtly disputational in character, but it was no less rigorous. The researcher sought systematically to find logical gaps and inconsistencies in the latest scientific theories. Someone would adopt a new theory, considered, as always, as *endoxa*, and defend the theory in the face of arguments by one or many opponents.

There are two important characteristics of Aristotle's dialectic. One is that it led to the discovery of what one might call scientific principles. The Greek view of knowledge has had some very powerful influences on western scientific method and one of these influences is the overriding importance given to principles in rational argument. However, principles cannot themselves rely on principles for their validity: the causal chain has to stop somewhere. It is the business of dialectic to establish these principles, but in this guise dialectic became known as First Philosophy.

The second important characteristic of dialectic is its disputational character and it is here that there are crucial links with competition and rhetoric. As we have seen, Eckhouse aims to show the "essentially" competitive nature of communication by appealing to two opposing parties and a third: possibly an audience. But he has omitted crucial parts of the argument and added parts which are non-essential. A disputation is a particular type of communication, which rests for its effectiveness on the notion of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Thus, this form of communication is essentially competitive because one party is trying to defeat the other purely by the resources essential to language: the logical relationships between concepts. The audience is not essential and the referee's function is solely to give the impartial judgement of an expert. Dialectic, far more than rhetoric, plays the role of being "essentially" competitive and thus is really what Eckhouse needs for his argument.

The problem for Eckhouse is that, unlike dialectic, rhetoric is not an essentially competitive tool and this lack of competitiveness makes it far more suitable than dialectic as an instrument for business negotiations. The reason for this lies in a logical problem, which Aristotle saw, but Plato did not. Consider the following example of correct logical reasoning,

Major Premiss: "The equator is the imaginary line which divides the earth's northern and southern hemispheres,"

Minor Premiss: "I am now flying directly over the Equator,"

Conclusion: "I am now flying directly over the imaginary line which divides the earth's northern and southern hemispheres."

If both premises are true at the time of utterance, the conclusion must also be true, though it might be quite impossible to prove. The following, more troubling, piece of reasoning is also logically correct.

Major Premiss: "I know that repeated smoking and drinking is undesirable and will lead to my premature death,"

Minor Premiss: "I am now smoking my twentieth cigarette of the morning and the whisky I am drinking is the tenth I have drunk so far today,"

Conclusion: "I am now indulging in two activities which are undesirable and will lead to my premature death."

The problem is that Plato wanted to identify the (correct) conclusion of this reasoning with another (false) conclusion, which is the action of giving up smoking and drinking. If giving up smoking and drinking did not occur, then, Plato argued, the first premises could not be true and that the speaker could not be said to know that repeated smoking and drinking is undesirable and will lead to premature death. The reason why Plato believed this is, as we have already stated above, that he thought that

virtue is impossible without knowledge. Plato's point cannot be dismissed lightly, by the way, for a common feature of theories of action is that actions are thought to be intentional, that is, grounded in warrants which have a logical character, and this involves knowing, or being aware, of what one is doing and of its moral significance. Nevertheless, it is true that no amount of dialectical debate will ever prove that Plato's desired practical conclusion follows from the premises, even if they are true.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle wrestled with this problem and struggled to find a chain of reasoning which will yield the practical conclusion, but he was not successful. This is one reason why he rehabilitated rhetoric and included it as part of his curriculum.

The relationship between dialectic and rhetoric is mentioned often in the first chapter of the *Art of Rhetoric*:

The art of rhetoric is an *antistrophos*, or counterpart, of dialectic. Both dialectic and rhetoric are concerned with subjects within the knowledge of anyone, not with special sciences. Both are methods of discourse and arts in which the cause of success can be observed. Existing handbooks of rhetoric neglect logical argument, the most important part of the subject, and concern themselves with external matters, including appeals to the emotions of an audience and the parts of an oration. Also, they only discuss judicial oratory, whereas deliberative oratory is a finer form. A student of rhetoric needs especially to understand the use of an *enthymeme*. This is a rhetorical syllogism, or probable argument in the form suited to a popular audience.

Rhetoric is useful, since without it the truth can be defeated in debate. Rhetoric also allows one to debate both sides of an issue, not to persuade the audience of what is untrue or wicked, but to understand the real nature of the case and to refute an opponent. It would be strange if we could not use words to defend ourselves when it is acceptable to use physical force in self-defence.<sup>14)</sup>

Aristotle saw that a vast, overwhelming, number of everyday inferences, which actually guided people's conduct, were inductive or 'practical' in nature. As such they were logically false, when judged by the exacting standards of the logic required in teaching and expounded at great length in the *Analytics*.<sup>15)</sup> Nevertheless, they did really provide some kind of justification for conduct. Thus, though the conclusion to the 'practical' syllogism, given above, "I must give up smoking and drinking" (followed by actual abstention), does not strictly follow from the premises, Aristotle was well aware that such syllogistic rationalizations were the actual model of much ethical and political reasoning. Such syllogisms as the one given above (but without the practical conclusion), were examples of what Aristotle called *enthymeme*, in the above quotation.

### **Conclusion: The Perils of *Koshogaku***

We have examined Aristotle's concept of rhetoric and its close relationship with dialectic. Rhetoric was considered a dangerous activity by Socrates and Plato and, in another way, Socrates' brilliance in rhetoric led to his execution. Aristotle did much to lessen the dangers and the Stoics passed on

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14) This is a summary of Chapter One, as given in the translation by George A. Kennedy: *Aristotle on Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1991, p.14.

15) In the *Prior Analytics and Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle expounded his theory of the demonstrative and modal syllogism. *The Topics* deals with general syllogistic reasoning, while the *Ethics* and *Rhetoric* deal with what might be called 'practical' reasoning understood in a wide sense. Dialectic is the lynchpin of the whole enterprise and also governs Aristotle's own research projects.



Aristotle's tradition and transmitted it to the Europe of the Middle Ages. One small part of the activity that is rhetoric is represented by the Japanese concept of *kosho* and *koshogaku*. Nevertheless, it should be noticed that rhetoric, especially in relation to business dealings, does not occupy Aristotle very much and the aspect of competition is not particularly stressed by him. Skill in rhetoric does indeed serve to refute a political opponent, or enables one to judge persuasion with a cold critical eye. But the main locus of the cut and thrust of the dialectical debate would be in forensic rhetoric, which Eckhouse does not consider in his book. Eckhouse provides a wealth of examples taken from modern business, which would constitute a modern casebook of rhetorical enthymemes, but they are not genuine examples of 'competitive communication'

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