

## Editor's Introduction: The Philosophy and Practice of *Enterprise & Society*

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WILLIAM J. HAUSMAN

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### The Philosophy of *Enterprise & Society*

Certain aspects of editing a major journal are unequivocally delightful. Earlier this year I was invited to share my thoughts on the philosophy and practice of *Enterprise & Society* with Franco Amatori's seminar at Bocconi University in Milan, Italy.<sup>1</sup> I used part of what I wrote for that seminar as the basis of my annual report to the Board of Trustees of the Business History Conference in Miami in April. I also would like to share some of these thoughts with the readers of *Enterprise & Society*, in part because they elaborate on the statement of the "aims and scope of the journal" found on the inside of the back cover. The first issue of *Enterprise & Society* appeared in March 2000, and this is the seventh issue of the journal to appear. That is sufficient time to reflect on what we actually have been doing and how well we are doing it. My stint as editor has taught me that there are many steps, some of them shaky, between high-minded ideals and the printed page. But I want to be careful not to overstate my role, because the journal is first and foremost the official organ of the Business History Conference. The work of the journal, then, makes sense only in the *context* of the field of business history as it has evolved over the past fifty years, and especially in the context of recent methodological debates. It is difficult to describe the philosophy of a journal whose very existence is predicated on something of an identity crisis: to try to state a complicated matter concisely, the primary purpose of the journal—its philosophy, if you will—is to provide the forum for these debates, many of which go to the heart of what business history *is*.

I believe that the journal must be careful not to settle the debates. Above all else, we want avoid a narrow conception of what business history should be. Thus, the journal is open to narrative, quantita-

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1. William J. Hausman, "Enterprise & Society: Philosophy, Practice, and Meeting Expectations," paper presented at Bocconi University, Milan, Italy, 6 April 2001.

tive, comparative, and synthetic studies, and we solicit work among a broad range of scholars, including those from collateral social scientific and humanities disciplines. So there is no bias toward a particular methodology, with one important qualification. The work must be *historical*: that is, it must be research-based and deal with change over time. We seek to publish papers that have a strong emphasis on context—on analysis and explanation as well as on presentation of information and data. Traditional (internalist) studies of the firm are welcome, but we ask that specific stories be related to broader issues. We also seek to extend the boundaries of business history, which means that work on gender, ethnicity, and environmentalism, for example, are welcome, so long as they are grounded in a theoretical framework. One of the goals to which I am most committed is that the journal be truly international in scope. We also would like to extend geographical and temporal coverage. Most of the published work in business history has focused on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, the United States, and Japan; we would like to encourage work on earlier periods and on other non-Western societies.

### On Editing *Enterprise & Society*

Rita J. Simon and James J. Fyfe note in their introduction to *Editors as Gatekeepers*, “. . . the editor’s role is played in a wide variety of ways. Some editors’ . . . tastes, interests, and ideas determine what and who get published. Other editors are more likely to reflect a ‘board’s’ consensus. Their editorial ‘we’ actually represents the composite views of reviewers, deputy and associate editors, and their own opinions. Their voice is one of many.”<sup>2</sup> My voice decidedly is one of many. Since *Enterprise & Society* is the “official” journal of the Business History Conference, I see it as my role to reflect and nurture what is going on in the field, using the advice of referees (of the utmost importance), the associate editors, guest editors, the editorial board, the officers of the organization, and the Board of Trustees, as well as the members of the organization. I consider myself beholden to each of these individuals or groups, although to varying degrees. This does not mean that I ignore my own methodological preferences for eclecticism, internationalism, and quantification (where appropriate). The first two prejudices I indulge vigorously, since these conveniently foster the goals of the journal; the

2. Rita J. Simon and James J. Fyfe, eds., *Editors as Gatekeepers: Getting Published in the Social Sciences* (Lanham, Md., 1994), vii–viii.

latter, I tend to curb. Precisely because there is little consensus among practitioners about where the field is headed, I consider it one of my main tasks to assure that many viewpoints are reflected in the pages of the journal. I would especially like to guarantee that the journal is global in its scope.

The papers published in *Enterprise & Society* are peer reviewed. Peer review is widely recognized as necessary to uphold the standards of a discipline. "Organized skepticism, institutionalized as a system of peer review, directly addresses issues of quality control in scholarship."<sup>3</sup> As editor of *Enterprise & Society* I take peer review seriously. We try in all cases to use a double-blind refereeing process. When a paper is submitted to the journal, I (or one of the associate editors) send it out to two reviewers, or referees. Referees are asked to advise the editor on whether to accept a paper outright (very rare), accept subject to specific revisions, reject but encourage to revise and resubmit, or reject with no encouragement to resubmit. Referees make anonymous comments that are transmitted to authors for their consideration. Most papers that are revised and resubmitted are sent back to the original referees for a second round of evaluation. In my experience, the two reviewers have agreed in their assessments in most cases. In some cases, however, the reviewers have disagreed and I have on occasion sent revised papers to a third reviewer. I have received a small number of submissions that were not sent out to referees but were immediately rejected. These tended to be papers on contemporary business issues with no historical content or context whatsoever (but which do contain spectacular color graphics).

### Assessing the Results

In terms of subject matter, I believe the thirty-six articles and dissertation summaries published represent a diverse set of approaches that affirm the goals of the journal and represent its philosophy well. Because of the special issues on "beauty" and "gender" there is a wealth of imaginative work "bringing the social, cultural, economic, and ideological categories to bear on business history or of applying business history concerns to social and cultural arenas."<sup>4</sup> The first issue, on technology and the international automobile industry, bridges the natural boundary between technological and business

3. Samuel C. Patterson, "The Itch to Publish in Political Science," in Simon and Fyfe, *Editors*, 4.

4. Angel Kwolek-Folland, "Gender and Business History," *Enterprise & Society* 2 (March 2000): 10.

history. Other papers include studies of industries, firms, consumption, advertising, and style and design, and contain a rich mix of approaches.

Temporally, most of the attention has been devoted to the period 1890–1960, which would be expected. Fortunately, several papers considered both earlier and later periods and it is especially gratifying that there were several articles (one of which was the presidential address) that considered the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

In terms of geographical coverage, just under 60 percent of the papers were on the United States, 20 percent were on Europe, 10 percent (one paper and three dissertation summaries) were comparative (three U.S./Europe and one U.S./Mexico); the remaining 10 percent were on Asia (Japan), Africa, and Australia. It is disappointing to me that we have published no papers on Latin America or Eastern Europe and that the coverage of Asia and Africa has been modest.

### Conclusion

*Enterprise & Society* was founded on the notion that business history is a vibrant field, albeit one facing an identity crisis and considerable turmoil. It is being pulled in several directions simultaneously. This is nothing new for a field that has long been searching for its identity. For the most part the debates over where the field is or should be headed have been constructive and I hope to foster this constructive debate in the pages of *Enterprise & Society* while publishing papers and special issues that both engage the debate directly and reflect work actually being produced using the various methodologies.