

Choice, *Aporia*, and Aristotle's Philosophic Provision for Business

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Abstract

What can Aristotle's philosophy teach businesspeople? Scholarship engaging this question occurs largely in the field of business ethics among scholars who approach Aristotle's philosophy as "virtue ethics." Prioritizing practical applications of Aristotle's philosophy to contemporary businesses, these scholars misunderstand his *Ethics*' and *Politics*' contemplative character. This article argues Aristotle's practical relevance dwells in reading his philosophy carefully and literally. Using my own translation, I demonstrate that the text of Aristotle's philosophy encourages readers to find freedom in contemplating their choices' natural need for the good that transcends business and politics, a need at the heart of friendship.

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I. Introduction

What could Aristotle's philosophy provide to businesspeople? Internet and scholarly-database searches for "Aristotle and business" yield numerous works in the field of business ethics written for academic audiences. Business ethics—"the study of the ethical dimensions of the exchange of goods and services, and of the entities that offer goods and services for exchange"—began in the 1970s–1980s; its central "normative" question is "What *is* ethical and unethical in business?" (Moriarty 2021). Thoughtful businesspeople reading this description could wonder what "normative" means, but would not question understanding "business" as the exchange of goods and services. What businesspeople might not realize is that Aristotle's philosophy holds more than "ethical" teachings. They may

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be more surprised to learn that their knowledge and experience is sufficient for reading Aristotle. But what businesspeople probably do not know is their need to read Aristotle's philosophy on its own terms, carefully and literally, freed from academic disciplines' interpretive constraints.

Removing the lenses business ethics imposes on Aristotle's texts reveals how businesspeople could approach his philosophy more freely than academics. Business ethics' first "important framework" is "virtue ethics," which either links business practices to virtues as internal goods or considers corporations' and communities' contributions to an Aristotelian conception of the good life (Moriarty 2021). "Virtue ethics" is "an approach in normative ethics which emphasizes the virtues, or moral character, in contrast to an approach which emphasizes duties or rules (deontology) or one which emphasizes the consequences of actions (utilitarianism)" (Hursthouse 1999, p. 1). With the academic jargon surrounding Aristotle's appearance in business ethics readily visible, might there be more direct paths to his philosophy? As humans who desire good lives, care for their own characters, and live and work in communities, do businesspeople need anything more to read his philosophy? And they might ask another question: What is virtue?

Businesspeople also need an approach to Aristotle's philosophy that does not break from what his texts teach. Virtue ethics is "Neo-Aristotelian," partly because it freely adds to Aristotle's list of virtues from the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Hursthouse 1999, p. 8). Robert Solomon (1992, p. 330)—the "leading light" for bringing "virtue theory" into business ethics (Bragues 2013, p. 4)—gives an extensive list of virtues amenable to business in his "Aristotelian" approach with little foundation in Aristotle's philosophy (namely, "loyalty," "reliability," "sensitivity," "cooperativeness," "cheerfulness," "liveliness," "warmth," and "hospitality"). Further, virtue ethics acknowledges an "obvious gap" regarding justice, one created by separating "normative ethics" and "moral philosophy" from "political philosophy" (Hursthouse 1999, p. 6; see also Hursthouse and Pettigrove 2023). This contemporary distinction is discordant with Aristotle's texts, which connect arguments about justice in the *Ethics* with the singular mention of "political philosophy" in the *Politics* (1282b14–23).¹

¹ All citations from Aristotle's *Politics* (hereafter abbreviated as "*Pol.*") use Ross's (1957) manuscript. All translations are my own. The lexicon used throughout is Liddell and Scott (1889).

Businesspeople interested in virtue should know that business ethicists might not deeply understand what they elevate in Aristotle's philosophy. A survey of 135 virtue-ethics articles in business-ethics and management journals from 1980 to 2011 yields a curious insight: While 45 percent of the survey's articles cited Aristotle as a primary source, "In most of the articles, 'virtues' or 'virtue ethics' were merely mentioned, and readers were left in the dark as to their exact meaning" (Ferrero and Sison 2014, p. 386). Business ethicists' vagueness about "virtue" and "virtue ethics" stems from errantly assuming that virtue and political community are the horizons for Aristotle's teachings. In truth, Aristotle's *inquiries* into virtue and community turn readers toward a fuller horizon: philosophy. What is most relevant to businesspeople today in Aristotle's philosophy is the text itself, which holds a timeless vision for human life beyond business and politics.

The word "philosophy" contains hints of how Aristotle's texts transcend business and politics. The two parts of "philosophy" are "friend" (*philos*) and "wisdom" (*sophia*). Starting with "wisdom," it has a surprising connection to Aristotle's inquiry most related to business. In *Politics* I.8–11, Aristotle examines the relationship between "the moneymaking art" (*chrēmatistike*) and "the art of household management" (*oikonomike*). This inquiry contains the *Politics*' only two appearances of the word "wisdom." Seeing the *Politics* comprehensively allows a textual question to arise that should interest businesspeople: Why does Aristotle mention "wisdom" solely alongside moneymaking?

Translations of Aristotle's *Politics* conceal his wordplay with terms shared by moneymaking and philosophic inquiry. When "wisdom" appears in the *Politics*, it is in the story of the philosopher Thales's monopoly showing how *poleis*² could "produce provision [*poros*]," though Aristotle leaves readers wondering what wisdom provides (*Pol.* 1259a6–23). Because translators render *poros* as "revenue" or "funds" (consider Lord 2013, p. 20; Simpson 1997, p. 29), English readers cannot see that Thales's "provision" is the opposite condition from that in which Aristotle initiates his inquiry into moneymaking. Vital to Aristotle's philosophy is the experience of *aporia*. Usually translated as "question," "perplexity," or "difficulty" (Lord 2013; Simpson 1997; Bartlett and Collins 2012), *aporia* literally means "without-provision." Recognizing

² Though the customary translation of *polis/poleis* is "city/cities," transliterating the terms preserves their distinct Greek sense, which does not easily fit contemporary labels for political units.

areas where readers are “without-provision” performs a Socratic function in Aristotle’s works: It enacts the “human wisdom” found in knowing what one does not know (Plato, *Apology*, 20d–e, 21d).

Readers’ first experience of *aporia* in Aristotle’s *Politics* occurs in his inquiry into moneymaking. To begin this inquiry—one linked to the prior inquiry into slavery (*Pol.* I.4–7) since both concern “acquisition” (*ktēsis*)—Aristotle says, “Therefore one might first be unprovided [*aporeō*] over whether the moneymaking art is the same as the art of household management or some part of it, or a subordinate” (*Pol.* 1256a1–5). Both slavery and moneymaking are bound to book I’s exploration of “household management” (*oikonomia*), which Aristotle examines from complementary perspectives. Externally, the “household” (*oikos*, *oikia*) is part of the *polis*; internally, “the complete household is from slaves and free persons” (*Pol.* 1253b1–4). The *Politics*’ first “unprovided” philosophic question focuses on the household’s internal relationships. Seen within the broader context of book I, this “unprovided” question about moneymaking bears upon distinguishing slavery from freedom in human life.

A literal reading of Aristotle’s inquiry into moneymaking points to philosophy being essential to human freedom. Businesspeople are, perhaps unexpectedly, more ready to see this than other professions. With the question of how the moneymaking art may be subordinate to the art of household management left open, Aristotle asserts the two arts are not the same: “While the [moneymaking art] provides [*porizō*], the [art of household management] uses” (*Pol.* 1256a3–13). Through literal translation, the kinship between “provision” (*poros*), “being unprovided” (*aporeō*), and “to provide” (*porizō*) reveals that business and philosophy hold something in common: an eye for where humans are without-provision and working to provide for them.³ Where philosophy goes further than business is in the awareness that moneymaking is an activity that seems primarily to concern relationships in and between political communities, when in truth moneymaking’s foundations are in humans’ relationship to nature and themselves.

A brief look to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* shows why businesspeople need his philosophic inquiry into “friendship” (*philia*) to find the natural freedom that transcends business, politics, and even virtue. In an “unprovided” question about whether “love-of-

³ See also Pascarella (2022, pp. 75–77).

self” (*philautos*) exists, Aristotle finds a reproachable form of this love in relation to “money” (*chrēmata*) (NE 1168a28–29, b15–17).⁴ Invisible in translation is *chrēmata*’s primary meaning of “useful things”; its root, *chrē*, appears in the word for “useful” (*chrēsimos*), the first of three forms of friendship named at the beginning of this inquiry from books VIII–IX (NE 1155b17–18). The linguistic threads of Aristotle’s arguments across the *Ethics* and *Politics* indicate that the use of anything (not just money) reflects how people hold friendship’s love toward themselves. But how does this love begin? It begins with choice.

Careful attention to choice in Aristotle’s philosophy brings forth his texts’ more personal character. It is on these grounds that Aristotle’s texts hold practical relevance to not only businesspeople, but all readers. From the *Ethics*’ beginning, “choice” (*proairesis*)—like “art,” “inquiry,” and “action”—relates to “the good” (NE 1094a1–3). Choice’s natural orientation is toward the good. Aristotle makes this further evident when he begins the *Ethics*’ inquiry into friendship by observing that friends are “goods” without which “no one would choose [*haireō*] to live”⁵ (1155a5–6). To choose among goods is the heart of human life, and friends are personal reflections of these choices. Aristotle’s wish to communicate this truth through his philosophic texts is persistent, but academics tend to obscure it.

It is difficult for businesspeople to find scholarship on Aristotle’s philosophy that uses careful textual interpretation to discover its practical relevance. “Aristotelian” business ethics aims to be practical, but its priority (like virtue ethics) is to adapt Aristotle’s philosophy to its own ends. Conversely, scholars in political theory do careful interpretive work with Aristotle’s texts, but tend not to discuss their work’s applications in readers’ lives. Unlike business ethicists, the philosophic significance of Thales’s story is not lost among political theorists who interpret Aristotle’s *Politics* as a complete work (Nichols 1992, p. 28; Davis 1996, pp. 31–32; Pangle 2013, pp. 61–62). What these interpretations mean for nonacademic audiences is not part of this scholarship. A conventional scholarly article would see these disparities and put business ethics and political theory into

⁴ All citations from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter abbreviated as “NE”) use Bywater’s (1894) manuscript.

⁵ There are two verbs for “to choose” in Aristotle’s philosophy: *haireō* and *proaireō*, respectively related to the nouns *hairesis* (“choosing”) and *proairesis* (“choice”). This article does not distinguish the verbs in translation in the same way as the nouns.

dialogue with one another, but this article does not aim to be conventional. This article's primary aim is to show businesspeople (and any interested readers) the personal and practical character of Aristotle's philosophy through a literal reading of his texts. To that end, this article translates Aristotle's *Politics* and *Ethics* literally and consistently to provide some sense of his precise use of the Greek language to advance his moral teaching about choice and the good through his philosophic inquiries into business and politics. Any contrasts this article draws between business ethics and political theory serve to illuminate the article's distinctive interpretation.

A literal reading of Aristotle's philosophy shows that "choice" unites his *Ethics* and *Politics* to make them living texts. "Aristotelian" business ethics is thus a helpful test case for what textual interpretation unbound from academic disciplines provides to readers. For example, one political theorist criticizes "Aristotelian virtue ethics" for neglecting ties between the *Ethics* and *Politics*. Further, this scholar claims that virtue ethics misunderstands Aristotle's distinction between theory and practice: Where virtue ethicists distinguish "between the general and the particular," Aristotle distinguishes between "knowing" and "doing." This distinction is supposedly evident in *Ethics* X.9's acknowledgment of the limits in the capacity of *logos*⁶ and "law" (*nomos*) to help humans become good (Simpson 1992, pp. 504–6, 513–14; NE 1179a33–1180b28). Both virtue ethicists and business ethicists believe Aristotle's theory of virtue needs to be put into practice. Aristotle's text, however, confounds the distinction between theory and practice that this political theorist relies upon, for *Ethics* X.9 begins with Aristotle asking whether—in reference to the *Ethics* as a whole—"one must suppose the choice [*proairesis*] to hold an end?" (1179a33–35). If the *Ethics* and its theoretical inquiry into virtue is itself a choice, then reading the text is its own practice in theoretical inquiry.⁷

Through "choice," Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* reach beyond virtue, business, and politics through *logos*. Because "the choice" initiating the *Ethics* is incomplete, Aristotle proposes that examining "legislation" and the "regime" (as he does in the *Politics*) "might complete the philosophy concerning the human things" (NE 1181b12–15). Based on this passage, readers should see

⁶ Given the many translations of *logos* ("speech," "reason," and "argument"), transliteration best preserves its philosophic breadth.

⁷ See also Burger (2008, pp. 207–8).

everything Aristotle explores in the *Ethics* and *Politics* as part of this larger philosophy. Aristotle's philosophic *logos* is a choice to seek the good, one that becomes more intriguing since he characterizes humans as "choice" in *Ethics* VI.2 (NE 1139b4–5). As "choice," Aristotle's texts naturally address *all* facets of human life. Scholars have yet to provide businesspeople an interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy attuned to all that "choice" encompasses. In contrast to "Aristotelian" business ethics' confinement to virtue and politics, this article reads Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* as embodying a "human philosophy" that "does not speak of any relation to the *polis*" (Burger 2008, pp. 207–11).

Aristotle's enduring relevance for businesspeople is not in applying his teachings on virtue to contemporary business and political practices, but his philosophy's use of *logos* to provide readers knowledge of how their choices naturally transcend business and politics. Section 2 outlines how some "Aristotelian" business ethicists' interpretive assumptions bypass Aristotle's philosophic use of *logos*: Where they concentrate on virtue and community, his *logos* continuously contemplates these things (and many others) in light of the human need to know and choose the good. Read in this way, friendship illuminates a natural choice between pleasure and the good behind business. Section 3 contextualizes Aristotle's contemplative use of being "without-provision" (*aporia*) in *Politics* I.8–11 as part of his *logos*'s provision for choice's need for the good. Section 4 uses *Politics* I.8's account of natural acquisition to uncover choice's natural foundations within *Politics* I's contemplative inquiries into the *polis*'s origins and slavery. Through these inquiries, Aristotle demonstrates (especially once he mentions friendship) that freedom in business and politics depends on *logos* and contemplation. In section 5, moneymaking's development illustrates that questions about nature and law that seem to be a problem concerning legal currency's worth truly reflect some *logos* and choice of the good at work in business. Finally, this article's last section shows how philosophic friendship toward oneself ensures humans freely practice business and politics by knowing and holding a true sense of their natural boundaries.

II. Business in Aristotle's Philosophy: The Need for a Literal Approach

To turn businesspeople toward Aristotle's philosophy, they should know why to avoid "Aristotelian" business ethics. Among this literature's top ten most cited and published scholars—specifically in

the works of Robert Solomon, Edwin Hartman, Geoff Moore, and Daryl Koehn (Ferrero and Sison 2014, pp. 377–78)—is a common characterization of Aristotle’s philosophy: Political community’s authority over virtue and happiness is unquestionable. Solomon (1992) insists that Aristotle teaches that communities define virtues. Whether that community is “the corporation” or “the world,” happiness requires seeing no antagonism between “self and society . . . profits and social responsibility” (pp. 102–3, 106–7). Hartman (2017) argues that firms, as communities, must teach virtues to support happiness through “the ethical life” (pp. 8–10). Moore (2005) contends that “craftsmanship” in business organizations “require[s] the exercise of virtue in community.” Koehn (1995) claims “virtue ethics stresses that people become what they are in community” and what its “political regime . . . dictate[s]” (p. 537). This emphasis on virtue and community derives from a surface-level reading of Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Politics*; it mistakes the subjects of his philosophic inquiries for the whole of his philosophy. Such an emphasis ignores the primacy of “the good” in Aristotle’s philosophy. These business ethicists do not wonder why Aristotle says “it might *seem*” that “the good” belongs to “the political art” in the *Ethics*’ first chapter *before* introducing “happiness” and “virtue” to the text (NE 1094a26–28, emphasis added). In searching for the good, Aristotle’s philosophic *logos* contemplates virtue, happiness, politics, and business. This contemplative *logos* has a personal character that speaks to the endurance of a natural choice between pleasure and the good driving all human pursuits. This choice is most naturally understood in the context of friendship and philosophy.

Behind business ethicists’ common misreading of Aristotle is the influence of Alasdair MacIntyre, who (next to Aristotle) is the second-most-cited primary source in the literature (Ferrero and Sison 2014, p. 386). Cited by Solomon, Hartman, and Moore, MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* (2014) presents Aristotle’s teaching as unifying virtue, happiness, and the good for individuals and *poleis* (pp. 148–50, 156–57, 163). Compared to some political theorists’ work on Aristotle, a weakness of MacIntyre’s interpretation is that it “diminishes his appreciation for the open-ended, unresolved character of Aristotelian ethical inquiry.” Such an inquiry demonstrates political philosophy’s place among “permanent political needs” and its status as “prior to the notion of political authority in Aristotle’s thought.” This status allows political philosophy to “provide the ground by which the authoritative good held out by the

polis is established and evaluated” (Tessitore 2002, pp. 141–42, 147). In other words, the limitation of MacIntyre’s interpretation (and those he influences) is his insufficient attention to the “unprovided” questions that are vital to Aristotle’s philosophy. Reliance on business ethicists’ readings of Aristotle therefore leaves businesspeople without a sense of how philosophy’s experience of being “unprovided” could inform their lives and practices.

Lacking Aristotle’s eye for where humans are without-provision, business ethicists overlook the significance of *logos* in his *Politics*. According to Aristotle, the moneymaking art “came into being according to *logos*” (*Pol.* 1257a31). Political theorists either consistently acknowledge the presence of *logos* in *Politics* I.9 (though with a weaker translation of “reasonably enough”) (Shulsky 1991, p. 84; Chan 2006, pp. 24–26) or reflect on moneymaking’s relationship to nature and politics through *logos* (Davis 1996, p. 28; Pangle 2013, pp. 55–56; Pascarella 2022, pp. 24–26). Where the relationship between *logos* and nature prompts political theorists’ curiosity about something directly related to business, in the business ethics literature Koehn (1998) asserts—without textual references—that “reason” is not a “completely transcultural, ahistorical, entirely autonomous activity,” but “a practice or *energeia* learned within community . . . [that] inevitably has a social dimension” (p. 504). By incorrectly elevating the community’s authority over *logos*, Koehn fails to consider the possibility of learning directly from Aristotle’s philosophic *logos*.

Assuming virtue’s and happiness’s subordination to community misunderstands their role in the contemplative character of Aristotle’s philosophic *logos*. Defending the “supremacy” of contemplation in Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophy, Robert Bartlett (2018) observes how “Aristotle refuses to deduce [the moral virtues] from the demands of community” and “scarcely mentions the word ‘happiness’” in accounting for these virtues (pp. 105–7). What connects Aristotle’s inquiries into virtue, happiness, and community is a contemplative *logos* that is mindful of what “philosophizing” about “practical things” entails (*NE* 1094b11–1095a13, 1104a1–11, 1105b9–18). Through “choice,” readers have a natural connection to Aristotle’s texts. Not only is the *Ethics* and *Politics*’ combined *logos* a “choice,” but Aristotle’s characterization of “choice” in *Ethics* VI binds together contemplation and human nature: “Choice is either desiring intellect [*orektikos nous*] or thinking desire [*orexis dianoētikē*], and such a first principle [*archē*] is a human” (*NE* 1139b4–5). If both

humans and Aristotle's philosophic *logos* embody choice, and if choice's need for the good *precedes* his inquiries into virtue, happiness, politics, and business, would not contemplation seek natural knowledge of the good concerning these practical matters?

A literal interpretation of *Politics* I.8–11's linguistic connections between household management and moneymaking points careful readers back to the *Ethics*' inquiry into friendship and its natural ends. In *Politics* I.9, "use" (*chrēsis*) is twofold: "proper" (*oikeia*) and "improper" (*ouk oikeia*) (*Pol.* 1257a6–8). The kinship between "proper" and "household" (*oikos*, *oikia*) suggests households determine proper uses of what the moneymaking art provides. *Oikeia* also means "one's own," so *oikonomia* (household management) and *oikonomikē* (the art of household management) concern what is "properly-one's-own."⁸ The ties between *oikeia* and "use" connect moneymaking to a question about friendship and its ends. The "moneymaking art" (*chrēmatistikē*) is literally the art of "useful things" (*chrēmata*). The "useful" (*chrēsimos*) is—alongside the "good" and "pleasant"—one form of friendship with a significant deficiency: Because the useful seems to be the means through which something good or pleasant comes, Aristotle concludes that "only the good and the pleasant would be lovable as ends" (*NE* 1155b17–21). Since the moneymaking art concerns provision of useful things, caring for what is properly-one's-own requires choosing between the good and pleasant as ends. Because friendship is "a rarely, if ever, discussed topic in business ethics" (Bragues 2013, pp. 8–9), businesspeople should consider interpretations of Aristotle's philosophy that see how friendship discloses pleasure and the good as natural ends for the choices behind business and politics (Pascarella 2022, pp. 5–8).

With friendship, there is a natural integration in the *Ethics* between what is "properly-one's-own," philosophy, and choice. This integration may have little to do with virtue. Recall that "philosophy" means being a "friend" of "wisdom." The *Ethics*' first appearance of "friends" causes one to wonder what philosophic "preservation" of truth means for what is "properly-one's-own" (*NE* 1096a11–17; Burger 2008, pp. 159–60; Pascarella 2022, pp. 149–50). Immediately before Aristotle introduces "virtue" to the *Ethics*, he links "the good" with what is "properly-one's-own" (*NE* 1095b22–30). For philosophers, there is no doubt that friends and the good are properly-one's-own; virtue's status, alternatively, is less certain.

⁸ See also Davis (1996, pp. 28, 32) and Winthrop (2019, p. 204).

Indeed, as the inquiry into friendship concludes, Aristotle's "more natural" examination of "the serious person" (the *Ethics*' standard for happiness as the "activity" of the soul "according to the proper virtue") finds that "living" is "good," "pleasant," and "choiceworthy" according to itself with *no mention* of "virtue," "happiness," or "the noble" (virtue's end) (*NE* 1097b22–1098a20, 1170a13–b19, 1115b12–13; Bartlett and Collins 2012, pp. 287–88, 294; Burger 2008, p. 179; Pascarella 2022, pp. 223–25). Discovery of choosing a naturally good and pleasant life without virtue in Aristotle's philosophic *logos* should prompt readers to wonder whether they are without-provision about virtue itself.

A tradition of emphasizing virtue when interpreting Aristotle still causes scholars to stumble despite seeing how choice and friendship contribute to the philosophic experience of being "without-provision" (*aporia*) in his texts. Among political theorists, Stephen Salkever sees choice and its relationship to friendship as vital to the "aporetic" (that is, unprovided) character of Aristotle's philosophy. Despite correctly recognizing that "Aristotle treats friendship for the most part not as a virtue," Salkever (2008, esp. pp. 64–69) still presents Aristotle's "more natural" perspective on friendship as "virtue friendship" without wondering why "virtue" disappears from this argument. If what is "more natural" in Aristotle's philosophy concerns friendship more than virtue, this casts a different light on the choices involved in every human practice (including business). Seeing this requires approaching Aristotle's texts free from academics' preoccupations, asking instead what he teaches readers about their own lives and choices.

What businesspeople need from Aristotle is his Socratic character. Unknowingly, "Aristotelian" business ethicists resemble Plato's Meno, speaking as if nothing is "without-provision" concerning virtue, naming many virtues, and eagerly asserting that virtue involves rule of *poleis* and households (71d–73d). Within short order, though, Socrates leads Meno to realize he is truly "without-provision" about virtue (80a). Properly done, philosophy uses "unprovided" questions to find natural truths. Aristotle's two explicit statements about "political philosophy" suggest how his *logos* guides readers toward philosophy's view of business and politics' natural foundations. In *Ethics* VII.11, Aristotle defines "the political philosopher" as someone who "contemplates [*theōreō*] what concerns

pleasures and pains” (NE 1152b1–3). In *Politics* III.12, “the just”—while subject to “grasping-to-hold-more” (*pleonexia*)⁹ in political claims to rule based on “goods”—“holds without-provision and political philosophy” (*Pol.* 1282b14–30). Philosophy sees what is “without-provision” and contemplates politics in terms of pleasures and goods, the natural grounds for the choice at the heart of friendship. This philosophic vision shapes Aristotle’s inquiry into moneymaking, freeing readers to see beyond virtue and community to what is most properly-one’s-own in all human pursuits: choice (Pascarella 2022, pp. 294–96).

III. Aristotle’s Contemplative Approach to the Good Through *Aporia* and Choice

From the beginning of his *logos* related to business in *Politics* I, Aristotle emphasizes not virtue but contemplation. He introduces business by declaring “one must contemplate” (*theōreteon*) how the moneymaking art “holds” toward household management, for moneymaking *seems* (to some people) to be the “greatest part” of household management (*Pol.* 1253b12–13). Following the first experience of being “unprovided” over the relationship between the arts of moneymaking and household management, the “moneymaker” emerges as someone who “contemplates” sources of “useful things,” “acquisition,” and “wealth” (*Pol.* 1256a15–16). Compared to one appearance of “virtue” in passages concerning the arts of moneymaking and household management in *Politics* I (*Pol.* 1258b39), terms connected to contemplation make six appearances (*Pol.* 1253b13 [*theōreteon*]; 1256a1–2, 1256a15, 1257b6, 1259a3 [*theoreō*]; 1258b11 [*theōria*]).

Within Aristotle’s *logos*, contemplation introduces readers to moneymaking, is present in moneymaking itself, and is active in engaging “unprovided” questions. Contemplation is a naturally human activity and therefore bound to choice. As the previous section shows, business ethicists’ virtue-ethics framework sidesteps the contemplative character of Aristotle’s philosophy by assuming political community’s authority over virtue and happiness. With closer looks at what precedes Aristotle’s respective inquiries into business and happiness in the first books of the *Politics* and *Ethics*, readers can see how his *logos* prepares them to contemplate their choices’ natural authority in pursuit of the good.

⁹ This compound translation of *pleonexia* combines one of its primary meanings (“grasping”) with a literal rendering of its roots: “to hold” (*echo*) and “more” (*pleon*).

From the *Politics*' beginning, Aristotle's *logos* sees communities and rule from readers' personal perspective on the good. To establish why the *polis* is "the most authoritative" of all communities, Aristotle observes how "we see" that every community is "set-standing-together for the sake of some good" because "everyone does everything for the sake of what seems to be good." A problem then arises: People suppose the "political ruler," "kingly ruler," "household manager," and "master" are the same form of rule, "but these things are not true" (*Pol.* 1252a1–16). Following the progression of Aristotle's *logos*, readers' capacity to differentiate communities and forms of rule derives from what "we see": a common, human pursuit of what seems good.

Cognizance of Aristotle's broader philosophical search for the good should adjust readers' approach to his inquiries into moneymaking, rule, and community. The first unprovided question about the moneymaking art establishes its subordination to household management. The second unprovided question asks whether the moneymaking art belongs to the "household manager" or "political ruler," or whether it needs "to be present" to them. The kinship between the household manager and "the political art" is that both "use" what nature gives (food and humans, respectively) according to what they "know" (*gignōskeō*) is useful and suitable for their rule. Though both household managers and politicians hold common concern for "useful things," this concern belongs more to the moneymaking art, which is "subordinate" to these rulers (*Pol.* 1258a19–34). What unites household management, political rule, and moneymaking is knowledge and use, two things bound to human life. Where a business-ethics reading of these ideas pushes one toward examining "the political rule of economic activity" in Aristotle's thought (Pearce 2012, p. 28), a philosophic reading would wonder why moneymaking and its "useful things" can simultaneously touch and be separable from households and political rule. Might it be because moneymaking begins from human needs for acquisition and use that people can know and contemplate in their own nature without reference to business and politics?

If Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* are the works of one "choice," then readers must see his treatments of business, rule, and communities in the *Politics* in light of what the *Ethics* teaches about choice and the good. Aristotle begins the *Ethics* with competing accounts of what makes ends "choiceworthy." These accounts challenge the interpretation that Aristotle's primary concern with business is its subordination to politics. On the one hand, an end is choiceworthy

because it falls under an “architectonic” “capacity,” “art,” or “science.” In this case, household management belongs to the “political art,” which supposedly uses household management for “the human good.” On the other hand, “knowledge” (*gnōsis*) of “the good” in life “would hold great weight” since it ensures “we do not choose all things . . . without-limit [*apeiron*], so that desire is empty and vain” (NE 1094a6–b11). Choosing the good unveils competition between the political art’s authority and each person’s desire. Rather than asserting the political art’s authority over the good as Koehn (1995, p. 537) claims among the business ethicists, Aristotle raises a philosophic question about choice that persists throughout the *Ethics*’ and *Politics*’ exploration of moneymaking, household management, and political rule (Burger 2008, pp. 13–17; Bartlett and Collins 2012, pp. 238–43; Pascarella 2022, pp. 89–102).

To engage this competition over what is “choiceworthy,” Aristotle considers the “proper” audience and work of *logos* before “virtue” and “happiness” appear in the *Ethics*. Despite seeming to declare that the young are not “proper” (*oikeion*) students of the political art’s *logoi* because they are “without-experience” (*apeiron*) of life’s actions, Aristotle reveals that the “defect” (whether from age or “character”) derives from “living according to passion” and not “producing desires according to *logos*” (NE 1095a2–13). What is “properly-one’s-own” is character, the product of the relationship between *logos*, passion, and desire that humans carry into *every* practical pursuit.

When “happiness” enters the *Ethics*, moneymaking and virtue appear in ways that point to the centrality of wisdom, the good, and choice to its *logos*. After observing that “every knowledge and choice desires some good,” Aristotle notices that the political art’s aim *and* “the highest of the practical goods” is agreed in name by all to be “happiness,” though “the many” and “the wise” disagree about what it is, with the many claiming it is “pleasure,” “wealth,” or “honor” (NE 1095a14–25). Including “wealth” in this opposition between the wise and the many suggests unbridgeable division, yet this opposition in the *Ethics* becomes more puzzling knowing the only appearances of “wisdom” in the *Politics* are in its inquiry into moneymaking. Business provides common ground for the many and the wise, and it does so without referencing virtue and community.

When Aristotle examines lives with claims to happiness, the inquiry turns on sensing the good as what is “properly-one’s-own.” Aristotle apparently dismisses the life of “enjoyment” while

acknowledging that it is “not without-*logos*” for “the good and happiness” to look like “pleasure” from lives the many “choose.” With “the political life,” “virtue” first appears in the *Ethics* in response to both honor’s failure to be “the good . . . we divine to be properly-one’s-own” and the recognition that people pursue honor to “trust” they are good (NE 1095b14–31). Aristotle’s initial approach to virtue in his philosophy is thus the opposite of what the above-mentioned business ethicists claim: Where they assume the *polis* sets the horizon for virtue and happiness, Aristotle begins from what is properly-one’s-own. Understanding what Aristotle means by “properly-one’s-own” and its relation to the *polis* requires reading his texts literally. The need for trust in the good that is properly-one’s-own is *prior* to Aristotle’s inquiry into virtue.

The next two lives Aristotle introduces with claims to happiness place contemplation alongside moneymaking. The third life Aristotle names but does not describe is the “contemplative.” The fourth, unanticipated life is “the moneymaking [which] is something forced/violent [*biaios*], and it is clear that wealth is not the sought-for good, for it is useful for the sake of something else.” Despite criticizing the moneymaking life, neither pleasure, honor, nor virtue are “more ends” than wealth (NE 1096a4–10). Unlike the lives of pleasure, politics, and moneymaking, the contemplative life receives no characterization or criticism. The moneymaking life, however, receives the harshest characterization and criticism, which may repulse businesspeople. Yet pursuing wealth as an end is equal to mistaking pleasure, honor, and virtue as ends. Contemplation may remedy this error and save moneymaking from being “forced/violent,” but businesspeople need a complete sense of Aristotle’s philosophy to know why this is true.

When the *Ethics* reaches its final account of happiness, Aristotle harmonizes book I’s four lives while recognizing a natural place for business to support what is properly-one’s-own. In book X, Aristotle defines “complete happiness” as the “most pleasant” contemplative activity of the intellect “according to the proper [*oikeion*] virtue”: wisdom (NE 1177a12–27). Compared to the contemplative life, the life of “moral virtue” contains a “secondary” happiness because it involves relations with others, concerns the body, and needs “external resources” like “useful things” (NE 1178a9–1179a34). Though Aristotle presents a tension between moral and intellectual virtue on the one hand, and political and philosophic virtue on the other (Tessitore 2002, pp. 142–47; Pearce 2012, pp. 34–35), the lives

of contemplation and moral virtue naturally hold something in common that depends on business: Both need “necessities” (NE 1177a29, 1178a25–26). Provision for necessities is *prior* to concerns with virtue in Aristotle’s philosophy. Because business grows from necessities, it reaches something fundamentally human that Aristotle’s philosophy contemplates holistically *and* without virtue.

In one of the *Ethics*’ earliest characterizations of virtue, there is evidence that moneymaking is more closely bound to human nature than virtue. The question whether happiness and virtue reside in *hexis* (literally a “holding,” with a sense of constancy) or “activity” begins with Aristotle respectively likening them to “acquisition” and “use” (NE 1099b31–33). In the *Politics*, the arts of household management and moneymaking are both “arts of acquisition.” As previously noted, the moneymaking art “provides” what the art of household management “uses.” Acquisition and use are natural to human life, and people can understand each concept *without* virtue. It is more natural for people to know where they are without-provision and seek provision. Both business and philosophy provide where humans are unprovided. Their true usefulness depends on knowing what humans naturally need.

Whether it is in philosophy or business, seeking to provide for what is without-provision is a work in need of natural limits. Between the *Ethics*’ introductions to virtue and happiness, Aristotle digresses to state Plato was “well . . . unprovided” over whether *logos* should proceed toward or away from “first principles,” like athletes proceeding toward or away from a racecourse’s “limit” (*peras*) (NE 1095a14–b1). *Logos*’s movement toward and away from first principles as its limit contrasts with two problems captured by one term (*apeiron*) with dual meanings prior to this digression: choosing and desire being “without-limit” when lacking knowledge of the good, and the young being “without-experience” of life’s actions (the concern of the political art’s *logos*). The opposite of “without-experience” (*apeiron*) is “experience” (*empeiria*), which suggests being “in” (*en*) the “limit” (*peras*) of something. If knowledge and choice desire, they need limits. Being unprovided in *logos* provides the experience needed to live in the limit of the good (Pascarella 2022,

pp. 8–11, 145–46).¹⁰ Seeking applications for Aristotle’s philosophy in business misses the life inherent to his *logos*. The philosophic inquiry into moneymaking and household management uses *logos* to provide readers contemplative experience that can inform their choices. Because *Politics* I.8–11 begins with being unprovided, discovers moneymaking’s natural limits, and concludes by comparing wisdom’s provision to business, its philosophic *logos* embodies its practical application.

IV. What Produces Free Acquisition: Nature, Politics, or Choice?

Initially, promoting human freedom in business and politics seems to be a practical goal that is separable from contemplative philosophy. This is why business ethicists find virtue ethics appealing: It allows them to extract what Aristotle says about virtue and community from his *Ethics* and *Politics* for the purpose of producing better business practices. But if the whole of Aristotle’s philosophic *logos* is a “choice,” then his contemplative inquiries into business and politics do not merely promote human freedom—they embody it. The sequence of *Politics* I’s *logos* indicates freedom’s natural place in politics, moneymaking, and household management requires contemplating slavery. Since Aristotle’s inquiry into slavery sits between his inquiries into the *polis*’s origins and the moneymaking art, his *logos* makes it necessary to engage these inquiries together. Aristotle’s aim is not to make politics and business vessels for his philosophy to advance freedom through certain practices. On the contrary, Aristotle’s philosophy demonstrates that freedom naturally resides in choices that transcend business and politics. It is in the persistent recollection of these choices that readers learn how to bring freedom into their business and political practices.

Quietly, *Politics* I’s *logos* teaches how politics and business can inhibit freedom by obscuring the presence, scope, and work of human choice. This is evident in three ways, all of which rely on careful and literal readings of *Politics* I that draw more from the *Ethics* than its account of the virtues. First, “choice” (which is present in the *Ethics*’ first sentence) appears only once in *Politics* I, and it is set aside because nature *seems* to be what forms politics. Second, the elements Aristotle uses to define “choice” in the *Ethics* all appear in *Politics* I.4–

¹⁰ Compare Pearce (2012, p. 34), who correctly emphasizes the importance of “limit” in Aristotle’s philosophy, though without the same emphasis on his use of Greek.

7's inquiry into slavery, which strangely contains the first appearance of "friendship" in that book. Third, questions about nature, pleasure, and the good (all of which come together in the *Ethics*' inquiry into friendship) emerge in *Politics* I.8's comparison between natural acquisition and arts of acquisition. If choice and friendship in the *Ethics* depend on distinguishing pleasure and the good as natural ends, then *Politics* I's inquiry into slavery is crucial to seeing how business and politics may override or cloud this distinction. Specifically, slavery exposes how humans misunderstand the proper relationship first to themselves, then others. This misunderstanding causes errant practices in business and politics. To correct these errors, one must understand the nature of friendship.

Before proceeding, businesspeople should know that the reading outlined above and explored further below is nonexistent in the fields of virtue ethics and business ethics. Scholars in these fields never seriously engage Aristotle's inquiry into slavery, but simply dismiss it as "deplorable" (Hursthouse 1999, p. 2), an "indefensible defense of slavery" (MacIntyre 2014, p. 162), and an "intolerable exception" in his conception of community (Solomon 1992, p. 154). Political theorists, however, situate Aristotle's examination of slavery in *Politics* I's broader contemplative inquiry, thereby showing how he questions the practice of slavery (Ambler 1987; Nichols 1992, pp. 13–51; Davis 1996, pp. 15–23; Pangle 2013, pp. 39–62; Pascarella 2022, pp. 33–38, 55–65). For this article's purposes, the contrast between these two sets of scholars shows that dismissals of Aristotle's inquiry into slavery by scholars in virtue ethics and business ethics are at least questionable, if not altogether wrong. Rather than turning businesspeople toward this scholarly debate, it is more important to turn to the text. Since Aristotle's inquiries into slavery and moneymaking are necessary for contemplating politics' relationship with nature (Ambler 1984), these inquiries can spur readers' contemplation about their own choices' relationship to nature and how they practice business and politics.

From the perspective of textual interpretation, *Politics* I's treatment of "choice" in business and politics is curious. To Aristotle's practically-minded readers in business ethics, there is no curiosity about how his singular mentions of "choice" (*proairesis*) and "choosing" (*hairesis*) work together to advance his contemplative inquiry. Taking up "choosing" first, this term appears after *Politics* I.8's "unprovided" question about the arts of household management and moneymaking when Aristotle uses pleasure to compare animals' and humans' natural acquisition. Nature "bounds" (*horizō*) animals'

“choosing” of food with the “pleasant,” and it is “advantageous” for them to be carnivores, herbivores, or omnivores. Similarly, humans have five lives (nomadic, farming, piracy, fishing, and hunting)¹¹ “holding natural work and not providing food through exchange [*allage*] and retail trade [*kapēleia*].” In mixing these lives, humans “live pleasantly,” seeking the “self-sufficient” as “need necessitates” (*Pol.* 1256a19–b7). These are the only appearances of “pleasure” and “pleasant” in *Politics* I.8–11. This presents at least two questions. First, why does Aristotle speak of animals “choosing” but not human “choice”? Second, how might this omission of “choice” bear on Aristotle’s separation of humans’ natural acquisition of food from exchange and retail trade?

Politics I’s limited approach to “choice” is deliberate. At key moments in his inquiries into the origins of politics and business, Aristotle reminds readers that both pursuits originate from the interaction of two things: natural needs and human *logos*. In *Politics* I.2 and I.8–9, *logos* emerges to correct strictly naturalistic accounts of communities and acquisition. These corrections are signposts for *Politics* I’s philosophic dialogue. Aristotle’s inquiries into the *polis*, slavery, moneymaking, and household management in *Politics* I are inseparable. Each inquiry is a necessary step toward the next; each step deepens the prior inquiries’ insights. Like life, Aristotle’s philosophic *logos* is active. Through contemplation, those who actively read Aristotle’s *logos* learn more about how they choose to live.

Before turning to arts of acquisition in *Politics* I.8, Aristotle presents a strange argument. The argument supposes a natural hierarchy for human acquisition that provides hypothetical grounds for concluding that war is a naturally just art of acquisition, but it begins with a conditional statement: “If nature produces nothing incomplete nor vainly” (*Pol.* 1256b7–26). A similar phrase appears earlier in *Politics* I.2 to explain why “the human is by nature a political animal.” Aristotle first describes a person “without *polis* by nature” as “desiring of war,” then says, “For, as we assert, nature produces nothing vainly; only a human among the animals holds *logos*” (*Pol.* 1253a1–10). Aristotle’s repeated phrase about what nature produces suggests humans holding *logos* must come to bear on their arts of acquisition in ways that steer them away from war. This occurs in *Politics* I.9 when Aristotle describes the moneymaking art’s origins as

¹¹ Consider Davis (1996, pp. 17–20) on piracy’s bearing on *Politics* I’s larger puzzles.

“according to *logos*” (*Pol.* 1257a31). What, then, is the work of *logos* in politics and business? How does this work relate to nature?

When *logos* appears in *Politics* I.2, it complements and refines Aristotle’s contemplative inquiry into the origins of the *polis*. Business ethicists influenced by MacIntyre’s virtue ethics cite Aristotle’s progression of communities (from household, to village, to *polis*) and his statement that “self-sufficiency” is the *polis*’s “end” and “nature” to claim that the *polis* completes humans with virtue (*Pol.* 1252a24–1253a1; Bragues 2006, p. 343; Solomon 1992, p. 161; MacIntyre 2014, p. 150). This progression, though, begins with Aristotle proposing that “to look at the matters naturally-growing [*phuo*] from the beginning” *may* be how to “contemplate” them “most nobly” (*Pol.* 1252a23–26). For Aristotle, his *logos* regarding communities’ natural growth is neither descriptive nor prescriptive; it is a contemplative exercise. In this exercise, he describes the household’s genesis as “not from choice” (*Pol.* 1252a26–29). This is the lone appearance of “choice” in *Politics* I, and Aristotle *excludes* it from contemplating communities’ growth. Whatever Aristotle says about the *polis* in *Politics* I thus has no reference to “choice,” the very definition of human nature in *Ethics* VI. Read contemplatively, Aristotle’s *logos* in *Politics* I implies choice is a foundation for community over which nature lacks authority.¹²

The insufficiency of contemplating communities’ “naturally-growing” without choice foregrounds Aristotle’s turn toward humans’ naturally holding *logos*. Through *logos*, humans “hold sense-perception” of the “good and bad,” “just and unjust,” “advantageous and harmful,” and “painful and pleasant”; further, “community of such things produces household and *polis*” (*Pol.* 1253a10–18). This conclusion revises *Politics* I.2’s beginning. The inquiry sets out to learn how nature produces communities but discovers that it is truly humans who produce communities with *logos*.¹³ Humans may exist within nature, but *logos* gives them a sense-perception of nature that is not merely physical but moral. As shown above, in the early stages of Aristotle’s inquiry into natural acquisition, the “pleasant,” “advantageous,” and “just” appear in quick succession.¹⁴ With the just in particular, its application to nature comes at the expense of human *logos*. Subtly, Aristotle’s inquiry prepares readers for the

¹² Consider also Pangle (2013, pp. 29–30).

¹³ See also Nichols (1992, pp. 13–51) on how Aristotle explores the “dual origins of the city [*polis*]” in natural drives for survival and choice.

¹⁴ *Pol.* 1256a24, 27; 1256b23, 26.

possibility that human *logos* does not always perceive nature correctly. To do this, *logos* must perceive the good.

When Aristotle moves from natural acquisition to arts of acquisition in *Politics* I.8–9, the good enters the inquiry. Aristotle divides the “art of acquisition” into two forms: one that “according to nature is part of the art of household management,” and the other that “justly calls itself the moneymaking art.” What separates these arts is their limits. With respect to what belongs to the art of household management, it can acquire “true wealth,” which Aristotle defines as “a store of useful things necessary toward living, and useful for community of *polis* or household.” To this definition, Aristotle adds that “the self-sufficiency of such acquisition is not without-limit toward good living.” With the moneymaking art, however, “there does not seem to be a limit to wealth and acquisition” (*Pol.* 1256b26–1257a1). Notice that “self-sufficiency” (the supposed “end” and “nature” of the *polis* in *Politics* I.2) now applies directly to acquisition and finds its limit in the “good.” Where several business ethicists assert virtue is necessary to counter limitless profit-maximizing practices and unify individuals, households, and societies in the pursuit of happiness (Solomon 1992, pp. 104–7, 148; Bragues 2006, pp. 343–45; Dierksmeier and Pirson 2009; Kavaliauskas 2010, p. 28), Aristotle’s text never mentions “virtue” or “happiness” as the necessary limits to wealth in communities and business. The true natural limit to business and politics in Aristotle’s *logos* is the good.

Politics I.8’s movement from the pleasant and advantageous in natural acquisition to “good living” in arts of acquisition is better understood in relation to the *Ethics*’ accounts of choice. The “advantageous” and “pleasant” belong to “three things of choosing” in *Ethics* II.3; the good person is most distinct by choosing pleasures correctly (*NE* 1104b30–1105a5). In *Ethics* III.2, “choice is neither of the pleasant nor the painful” (which are bound to “desire”), but is itself “with *logos* and thought,” deliberating “things up to ourselves” (*NE* 1111b15–18, 1112a15–17, 1113a9–14). In *Politics* I.9’s opening sentence, Aristotle sets up moneymaking’s disregard for limits to teach how this art is the product of errant *logos* and desires. In exposing these errors, Aristotle uncovers the personal choices about life that threaten freedom in business and politics.

Surprisingly, choice’s natural foundations from the *Ethics* (desire, *logos*, thought, and intellect) appear in the *Politics*’ examination of slavery, but to what end? The beginning of Aristotle’s inquiry into the moneymaking art contains a clue: “Let us contemplate every

acquisition and moneymaking art . . . since the slave was some part of acquisition” (*Pol.* 1256a1–3). Both slavery and moneymaking provide opportunities to contemplate human acquisition to help differentiate communities and forms of rule. Something odd happens, however, when Aristotle’s examination of slavery yields multiple forms of rule *within* humans, particularly regarding the body and soul’s relationship. Acquisition—a natural, pre-political human need—reveals the inseparable connection between humans’ relationship to their own nature *and* one another. Given their roots in acquisition, slavery and moneymaking expose dehumanizing distortions of how people choose to provide for life’s necessities. To acquire and use acquisition freely, readers need Aristotle’s philosophy that sees business and politics in light of a natural human relationship to oneself and others.

Within Aristotle’s examination of slavery, the body and soul’s relationship initially appears as rule, but later becomes friendship. Though Aristotle first associates “thought” with “ruler by nature and master by nature” *and* the body’s labor with what is “ruled by nature and slave” for “preservation,” his inquiry into slavery by law ends by noting that “the same thing is advantageous . . . for body and soul.” Since the slave is “some ensouled, separate part of [the master’s] body, there is something advantageous and friendship for slave and master toward each other” (*Pol.* 1252a31–34, 1255b9–13). Mastery and slavery presuppose some separation of soul and body unpermitted by nature. As Aristotle observes elsewhere, things may be “two in *logos* but naturally inseparable” (*NE* 1102a26–32). If acquisition is necessary for preservation, it is more advantageously approached as friendship between body and soul, not rule.¹⁵

The appearance of choice’s foundations in the *Politics*’ inquiry into slavery reveals constraints to contemplating provision for acquisition in terms of rule. In examining slavery, Aristotle describes the soul’s rule over the body as “despotic,” and intellect’s rule of desire as “political or kingly.” While it is “according to nature and advantageous for the soul to rule the body . . . the harm is to all from equality or reversal” of this rule (*Pol.* 1254b4–9). If the body labors for the soul’s thought (which, like choice, holds intellect and desire), the body seems to be a slave. But is the soul’s rule of the body mastery? Without food, the body dies, rendering thought impossible. Even when identifying happiness with contemplation, Aristotle admits that “the nature [of a human] is not self-sufficient toward

¹⁵ See also Nichols (1992, p. 23).

contemplation, but there is need for the body to be healthy, and food, and the remaining tendencies to be present” (NE 1178b32–1179a35). Humans’ need for acquisition is not a choice; provision for this need is. Rule’s perspective in *Politics* I fractures readers’ view of providing for the whole of human nature (that is, body and soul), hence Aristotle’s separation of the elements of “choice” when examining slavery. The *Ethics*’ inquiry into friendship, by contrast, provides a holistic view of choice and human nature.

Holding the natural slave against Aristotle’s “more natural” view of friendship uncovers a potential for self-chosen slavery through moneymaking. The “slave by nature” is someone whose sole work is “use of the body,” and who is “such to form-community (*koinōneō*) in *logos* so far as to perceive but not to hold” it (*Pol.* 1254b14–23). Conversely, in friendship “there is need to perceive-together that the friend is, and this would come to be in living-together and forming-community in *logoi* and thoughts” (NE 1170b10–12). To “hold *logos*” makes humans political animals, but common perception of *logos* and thought among friends is not bound to the *polis*. Things for which friends “choose living” and “form-community” include “drinking-together,” “exercising-together,” “hunting-together,” and “philosophizing-together” (NE 1172a5–8). In friendship, freedom dwells in the good, pleasant, and choiceworthy “perceiving-together” of one another’s life through *logos*, and this perception carries into acquisition and bodily care. Because the slave is a human (*Pol.* 1254a13–17), the slave also holds *logos*. To treat slaves as mere bodies denies their humanity. Moneymaking runs the same risk. In contrast to perceiving *logos* and thought, living-together for humans is not “to feed” in the same place like cattle (which recalls Aristotle’s dismissal of the life of bodily pleasure as one people choose for happiness) (NE 1170b12–14, 1095b14–22). Moneymaking’s greatest danger is its potential slavery, where provision for the body and its pleasures becomes the sole occupation of people’s *logos* and thought.

V. Moneymaking, Legal Currency, and *Logos* of the Good

If humans do not hold *logos* “vainly,” and if desire is “vain” when choosing is “without-limit” absent knowledge of the good, then preventing moneymaking’s use from going without-limit requires *logos* of the good. This *logos* cannot err regarding pleasure, for people choose “the apparent good” as “the good” because of pleasure, choosing what “seems” good instead of the good “by nature” (NE 1113a15–b2). Only philosophy provides such *logos* through

contemplating the expansive scope of human choices. Aristotle's philosophical approach opposes MacIntyre's (1982) business ethics, which focuses on "social and cultural structures" rather than choice (p. 350). Give businesspeople glimpses into the philosophic character of Aristotle's *logos*, and deeper self-knowledge is possible. For Aristotle, business (like politics) arises from nature and law. As he traces what belongs to each in moneymaking, readers learn how the *logos* behind legal currency establishes its worth according to some choice of the good that is more personal than it first appears.

Uncertainty over whether moneymaking is natural in *Politics* I.9 continues Aristotle's exploration of *logos*'s place in nature and law. Many "conventionally-consider" (*nomizō*)¹⁶ the moneymaking art to be the same as the natural art of acquisition, but the moneymaking art "comes to be more through experience and art," not "by nature" (*Pol.* 1257a1–5). Aristotle's observations direct readers to *logos* in two ways. First, *nomos* (a form of *logos*) encompasses "law" and "conventional" opinion; how one chooses to use moneymaking may be subject to these conventions. Second, in the *Ethics*, Aristotle defines "art" as "productive" and "with true *logos*," though he admits that—compared with prudence (a virtue)—it is more "choiceworthy" to err with art (*NE* 1141b23–1142a11, 1140b20–24). This latter observation suggests that, as an art, one could choose to use moneymaking errantly and even supersede the virtue of prudence (MacIntyre's [2015, pp. 17, 19] proposed solution in the field of business ethics). Aristotle's approach to arts of acquisition in *Politics* I.8–11 never mentions "prudence," but it does focus on how *logos* works with nature and law to discover the choices behind moneymaking.¹⁷

To explain the confusion that the moneymaking art creates about wealth, Aristotle's *logos* describes the development of acquisitive arts. There are three stages: a natural "art of exchange" (*hē metablētikē*), "the moneymaking art," and the "art of retail trade." Before Aristotle takes up these arts' origins, he explicitly invokes what is "proper" while implicitly calling attention to what is "properly-one's-own" with a

¹⁶ This translation shows how *nomos* is implicit in *nomizō*.

¹⁷ Aristotle's "crucial distinction" between nature and law is absent from MacIntyre's interpretation because he lacks "any undisputed notion of nature or reason" (Tessitore 2002, pp. 146–47, 154, 157).

single term: *oikeia*.¹⁸ Every “acquisition” has a “twofold” use: its “proper” use for what it is (such as wearing a shoe), and its “improper” use in “exchange” (*allagē*) for food or “legal currency” (*nomisma*) (*Pol.* 1257a5–14). Acquisitions’ proper use relates to oneself; improper use entails exchange outside oneself. But improper use is not unnatural. The art of exchange through which many households “produce” the exchange of useful things begins from something “according to nature”: Because all humans hold more or less of things than is “adequate,” they exchange these things as necessary according to their needs, fostering “restoration of the self-sufficiency according to nature.” This “art of exchange is neither contrary to nature, nor a form of the moneymaking art.” Although the natural art of exchange occurs between households, “there is no work” for this art *in* the household where people “form-community in all things” (*Pol.* 1257a14–30). This exchange is an “art” because it “produces” exchange, and natural because nature unequally distributes acquisitions. This teaching adheres to Aristotle’s distinction between the household as the “community according to nature for every day” and the village as the community for nondaily “use” (*Pol.* 1252b12–16). Exchange is inessential for daily life within the household because exchange does not “form-community”; that work belongs to *logos*, which is more properly-one’s-own than acquisition.

When introducing the moneymaking art to the arts of acquisitions’ development, Aristotle shows that *logos* is vital to providing what nature leaves unprovided. The moneymaking art arose from the natural art of exchange “according to *logos*,” for when people imported things they needed and exported their surplus items, “the use of legal currency was provided out of necessity.” Since carrying “necessary things according to nature” was not easy, people “set-down-together” (*suntithēmi*) some “useful thing” (that is, a metal) for exchanges that “held a manageable need toward living” (*Pol.* 1257a30–41). Like the natural art of exchange, the moneymaking art begins from nature’s unequal distribution of acquisitions but extends exchange beyond households and *poleis*. Because nature produces no provision for things more “manageable” for exchange, people use *logos* to determine what natural metals suit this need.

¹⁸ Some business ethicists overlook these distinctions, along with how Aristotle’s *logos* hints at *oikeia*’s deeper meaning (Solomon 1992, p. 101; Dierksmeier and Pirson 2009, p. 424).

The moneymaking art's provision according to *logos* becomes the grounds for seeing the natural choice between the good and pleasure behind business. The effects of this choice are evident in contemplation. With the moneymaking art's emergence, it tends in two directions:

Now having provided legal currency from necessary exchange, another form of the moneymaking art came to be, retail trade, and while perhaps it first came to be simply, through experience and more-art it next [became] from where and how exchange will produce the most gain. On account of this the moneymaking art seems most of all to be concerned with legal currency, and its work to have the capacity to contemplate from where will be a quantity of useful things, for it is productive of wealth and useful things. (*Pol.* 1257b1–8)

As retail trade, the moneymaking art produces either “necessary exchange” or “gain,” which suggests retail trade could serve a necessary role.¹⁹ Still, legal currency's gain can redefine “wealth,” and this affects retail traders' contemplation. This is not necessarily negative, for “gain” and “useful things” are “choiceworthy” pleasures for which blame resides not in “being affected by, desiring, and loving [*phileō*]” these goods, but in “being more serious” about them than needed, which is contrary to *logos* (*NE* 1147b20–31, 1148a22–32).²⁰ The moneymaking art and retail trade are therefore products of competing *logoi* holding different choices about goods and pleasures.

Retail trade's redefinition of “wealth” becomes the basis for exploring whether legal currency is natural or unnatural. The problem seems to turn on legal currency's “worth,” but Aristotle's play on words related to what is “set-down” (*tithēmi*) points in a different direction.

Opposed to those who set-down wealth as “a quantity of legal currency,” to some people legal currency seems “altogether law” and not by nature. Partially defending this argument, Aristotle acknowledges the strangeness of someone being “well-provided” in legal currency but “unprovided” in necessary food and starving because of “changing-the-set-down” (*metatithēmi*) “worth” (*axios*) of legal currency. Such was Midas's “mythologized” fate, destroyed through his “insatiably greedy prayer” for all things “set-down-

¹⁹ See also “the most necessary *polis*” in Plato's *Republic*, 369b-372c.

²⁰ See also Pascarella (2022, pp. 178–80).

before” (*paratithēmi*) him to become gold. Because of this, there is both a “necessary moneymaking art” and an “unnecessary moneymaking art.” The former is the art of household management; the latter is the art of retail trade. The art of household management and its wealth are according to nature because it concerns food, which is not without-limit and holds a “boundary” (*horos*). The art of retail trade produces useful things and wealth without-limit through legal currency’s exchange (*Pol.* 1257b8–24, 1258a14–19). This comparison’s implicit argument is that legal currency, wealth, and worth can be “set-down” in law according to nature when ensuring provision of necessities, but contrary to nature when leaving one unprovided in necessities. But in the provision of legal currency, what humans set-down in law is less about worth and more about the goods they choose.

The inclusion of Midas’s prayer prompts thoughtful readers to return to *Ethics* V’s inquiry into justice to see the choice of goods within Aristotle’s mythological allusion. Describing “the unjust person” as “one-grasping-to-hold-more” (*pleonektēs*) of “simply good things,” Aristotle says, “While humans pray for and pursue these things, they need not, but pray that the simply good things are good for themselves, and to choose the good things for themselves” (*NE* 1129b1–6). Praying for good things differs not only from choosing good things, but from *knowing* which “simply good things” are good for oneself. Midas lacked this knowledge; praying to be well-provided in one good (gold) left him unprovided in another (food). The effect of Midas’s ignorance on goods “set-down-before” him is analogous to legal currency’s worth, for if legal currency is only “lawfully” just, its being “set-down” is all that matters (*NE* 1134b18–21). The question behind legal currency is whether its worth in exchange corresponds “in truth” with “need, that which holds-together (*sunechō*) all things” (*NE* 1134b18–21; see *NE* 1133a26–27 and 1133a23–b28 for full context).²¹ Humans’ need to acquire good things endures no matter the legal currency provided. When assessing legal currency’s worth, Aristotle’s philosophy suggests one must look to what people *choose* to set-down in law either through knowledge or through ignorance of the good.²²

²¹ See also Pascarella (2022 pp. 81–83, 218–19).

²² Compare Meikle (1995), who argues legal currency’s worth is a “metaphysical” problem.

The questions about nature and law behind business and politics in Aristotle's philosophy rest on *logos* about goods, not virtue. Referring to what the political art's *logoi* concern before "virtue" enters the *Ethics*, Aristotle says, "The noble things and the just things . . . hold *much difference* and wandering, so they seem to be by law alone, not by nature." "The good things," by contrast, "hold *some* wandering . . . for some destroy themselves through wealth, and others through courage" (NE 1094b11–19, emphasis added). The good things hold no difference for Aristotle, nor hints of being by law but not nature (Burger 2008, pp. 17–18). As a good, wealth exists by nature *and* law. Whether as food or as legal currency, wealth is "not without-limit toward good living." How people choose to use wealth determines whether it is good for them. To change legal currency's set-down worth renders it useless for acquisition, but legal currency is no less good because of this. Since Aristotle's *logos* traces human pursuits back to choices about the good, it accounts for why business wanders from the good, *and* it provides natural grounds for returning to the good.

VI. Love-of-Self: Philosophy's Natural Remedy for Business

Aristotle's digression on Midas in *Politics* I.9 to help distinguish the arts of household management, moneymaking, and retail trade subtly indicates his philosophy's profound human reach. The "grasping-to-hold-more" (*pleonexia*) to which Midas's prayer alludes has a natural cause in the *Ethics*: "pleasure from gain" in pursuit of goods like "useful things and preservation" (NE 1130b1–4). By definition, "grasping-to-hold-more" involves choosing pleasure before what is good and useful. In this way, Aristotle's introduction to "grasping-to-hold-more" anticipates the three forms of friendship and that inquiry's central tension between the good and the pleasant as ends.

How Aristotle chooses to address "grasping-to-hold-more" in his philosophy sets him apart from business ethicists acting in his name. For MacIntyre, *pleonexia* is the "vice that informs the financial sector of the globalizing economy," and justice is its virtuous remedy (2015, p. 17). Though Aristotle recognizes *pleonexia* as a form of injustice, justice is not its remedy, for there is neither justice nor injustice toward oneself (NE 1138a3–b19). While there is no justice toward oneself, there is friendship in the form of "love-of-self" (*philautos*), a friendship Aristotle's *logos* discovers through being contemplatively "unprovided" (NE 1168a28–b2). Friendship's philosophic significance is lost on MacIntyre (2014), who binds friendship to the *polis* in defense of "the

moral unity of Aristotelianism” (pp. 155–56). Business ethicists’ tendency to approach business within a top-down view of global economics is impersonal. Aristotle’s appeal to myth and Midas’s prayer—to forms of *logos*—is more personal, revealing how *logos* naturally touches all human things. In contemplating retail trade’s origins, Aristotle’s *logos* uncovers a failed love-of-self that ripples into business and politics. Through friendship, the philosophic unity of Aristotle’s *logos* provides for readers’ need to love the good along with a true sense of business’s and politics’ natural boundaries.

Because *logos* transcends arts and politics, the art of retail trade poses a perpetual problem for the art of household management. As an art, retail trade’s end—wealth acquired by gaining legal currency through exchange—is “without-limit.” Though the art of household management’s “work” and end differ from those of the art of retail trade, both “exchange-upon the use of [legal currency],” so it seems the art of household management’s work is to “preserve” and “increase” legal currency without-limit (*Pol.* 1257b17–40). Since the moneymaking art “came into being according to *logos*” and the art of retail trade grew “through experience and more-art,” some *logos* always works within moneymaking arts. Arts of exchange hold no work within the household, but if *logos* forms-community in households and forms arts, retail trade (and profit-maximizing business) could affect the *logos* humans use to manage their households and care for what is properly-one’s-own.

Aristotle’s concern with the art of retail trade is not its effect on communities, but humans’ self-misunderstanding of their ends. The “cause” of the “set-down-disposition” (*diathesis*)²³ through which people confuse the arts of household management and retail trade is either a desire “without-limit” that is “more serious” about “living” than “living well,” or they seek “living well” in what produces excessive “bodily enjoyments.” If people “do not have the capacity to provide this through the moneymaking art,” they “use” their “capacities” (such as courage, a virtue) contrary to nature for moneymaking, as if this is all things’ end (*Pol.* 1257b40–1258a14). Despite appealing to the complementary components of the *polis*’s self-sufficiency (living and living well) (*Pol.* 1252b29–30), the *polis* lacks authority over people’s bodies, desires, and capacities. Notice that, for Aristotle, the problem with pursuing money without-limit through business does not originate at the level of “the economy.”

²³ This compound translation brings out *diathesis*’s root in *tithemi*.

Even virtue (the sole focus of “Aristotelian” business ethicists) can become subject to moneymaking. The problem is one of desire, and this brings it into the realm of choice. Moneymaking can distort virtue because “acquisition” and “use” are natural human needs and capacities that precede the *hexis* (“holding”) and “activity” of virtue.²⁴ A literal reading of Aristotle’s philosophy teaches that some choice about the good holds authority over business, politics, and virtue. Such a reading can also show how his philosophy attempts to inform this choice.

Because Aristotle’s philosophic *logos* is, like humans, a “choice,” it embodies a coworking of intellect, thought, and desire in search of the good needed to avoid using oneself and business improperly. Aristotle’s *logos* thus demonstrates how contemplation is human freedom’s natural foundation. In his inquiry into the moneymaking art’s last chapter, Aristotle declares a shift from “knowledge” in the preceding chapters to “use,” then says, “All such things hold free contemplation on the one hand, necessary experience on the other” (*Pol.* 1258b9–11). This passage reiterates theory and practice’s complementarity in Aristotle’s philosophy. Being contemplatively “unprovided” in the *Politics*’ inquiry into arts of acquisition provides readers experience of “free contemplation.” This contemplation opposes the art of retail trade’s contemplation of gain without-limit (which slavishly pursues desire and bodily pleasures). Reading Aristotle’s philosophic *logos* about moneymaking is an active experience of free contemplation beneficial to businesspeople as humans, not just professionals. To “contemplate” *logos* is to “use” it; only through contemplation can one “naturally-grow-together” (*sumphuō*) with *logos* (*NE* 1146b24–35, 1147a10–24). Aristotle’s philosophy naturally encourages dialogue between “free contemplation” and “necessary experience” in business by prompting readers to see that their knowledge of the good and the need to live within its limit is without-provision.²⁵

If readers follow Aristotle’s inquiry into the moneymaking art to its end, they find that it turns them not toward virtue but toward philosophy. This inquiry ends with two anecdotes, the first pointing to wisdom, and the second to something “without-provision” tied to “political philosophy.” The first story is of Thales, the philosopher

²⁴ Recall *NE* 1099b31–33, mentioned above, in which Aristotle establishes the parallels between *hexis* and “acquisition,” “activity” and “use.”

²⁵ See also Pascarella (2022, pp. 176–77).

whose “monopoly” demonstrates how *poleis* could use monopoly “to produce provision, whenever unprovided in useful things.” Twice in the story Aristotle says people mistake Thales’s “general” moneymaking as “wisdom,” and he concludes by stating philosophers could become wealthy but are not “serious” about this (*Pol.* 1259a6–23). Thales’s seriousness in choosing to live philosophically contrasts with the overly serious desire without-limit for living behind retail trade. His seriousness is about wisdom which, like moneymaking, provides where humans are unprovided.

The second story highlights tensions between business and politics with a man in Sicily who produced monopoly by “employing-art” (*technazō*) to use legal currency. Because his ruler Dionysius (a tyrant) “perceived” that this monopoly was “disadvantageous” to himself, he banished the man from Syracuse (*Pol.* 1259a23–33). Although Aristotle later defines “the just” as “the common advantage” (*Pol.* 1282b17–18), his concern with Dionysius is not justice. Dionysius’s tyranny—a regime with “little to no friendship” (*NE* 1161a32)—reflects his perception. The conclusion to this story and the inquiry into moneymaking allude to this errant perception’s natural source. Aristotle observes that while household and *polis* need “moneymaking” and “provision,” some “practice-politics” (*politēuō*) on these things alone (*Pol.* 1259a33–36). Household management, moneymaking, and politics face a common temptation: seeking provision solely in money and useful things. This temptation’s remedy is not knowledge of one’s place in business and society, but philosophy that provides for the natural human perception of the good.

Aristotle’s philosophy recognizes that perceiving the good is most authoritative in life. This perception naturally, and most properly, begins with oneself. Through holding *logos*, humans have sense-perception of the good, just, advantageous, and pleasant. The just, however, is doubly subordinate: Aristotle identifies it first as “a political good” (*Pol.* 1282b16–17), then as “the common advantage,” leaving the just subordinate to perceiving the good *and* advantageous. And since there is “some grasping-to-hold-more of the politically just things” (*Pol.* 1282b29–30), the just can also be subordinate to pleasure from gaining goods. If neither business nor politics can free humans to choose the good, why might philosophy succeed? The question of what goods should define equality and inequality “holds without-provision [*aporia*] and political philosophy” (*Pol.* 1282b20–23). Three chapters before Aristotle introduces readers to the question “without-provision” that drives political philosophy, conflict

between democrats and oligarchs—the “unprovided” (*aporoí*) and “well-provided” (*euporoí*)—shows that these timeless factions are “base judges concerning the things that are properly-one’s-own,” neglecting how all “hold-a-share [*metechō*] of freedom” (*Pol.* 1280a5–16; see *Pol.* 1279b11–1280a5 for context).²⁶ Political factions and monetary inequality derive from false judgments concerning what is properly-one’s-own. Philosophy uncovers the choices of goods underlying politics and business, and its *logos* provides true freedom by seeing these goods’ relation to what is properly-one’s-own.

Literal readings of Aristotle’s texts offer businesspeople (and all readers, for that matter) a glimpse into how there is far more to his philosophy than his teaching on virtue. Briefly sketching the natural connection between choice, friendship, and what is properly-one’s-own in Aristotle’s *logos* exemplifies his sense of what is fundamental in life. As Aristotle says to initiate his inquiry into friendship, “It is either some virtue or with virtue, and further most necessary in life. For without friends no one would choose to live, even when holding all the remaining goods” (*NE* 1155a5–6). Friendship’s relationship to virtue is an open question; friendship’s necessity is not. The choice behind friendship rests on sensing life’s “most necessary” good. Happiness is not an “acquisition” (like money) but an “activity” that is good and pleasant if one “chooses to contemplate actions that are . . . properly-one’s-own, and such things are of the good friend” (*NE* 1169b28–1170a4). In friendship, what is properly-one’s-own is good and pleasant, simultaneously existing toward oneself and a friend through choice and contemplation. Such friendship is truly free, for friendships through “the pleasant” are “more free” than “useful [friendships] of the marketplace,” for no one could endure “the good itself, if it was painful” (*NE* 1158a20–25). Unlike acquisition (business’s primary concern), friendship bounds what is properly-one’s-own to natural human activity beginning with choice.

Sensing what is good, pleasant, and properly-one’s-own in friendship provides a natural sense of boundaries. Perception of these boundaries serves dual purposes in Aristotle’s philosophy: It teaches readers what pursuit of the good is proper to oneself *and* acknowledges boundaries to politics (and, through this, business). Within the “more natural” examination of friendship, virtue recedes when Aristotle describes how humans “desire” living because it is “choiceworthy,”

²⁶ See also Simpson (1992, p. 518), Winthrop (2019, pp. 89–87), and Pascarella (2022, pp. 291–96).

saying, “It looks like living is authoritatively perceiving or thinking. And living is of the things good and pleasant according to themselves, for it is bounded, and bounded belongs to the nature of the good” (NE 1170a18–21). Friendship’s natural “perceiving-together” provides a more human perspective on love-of-self requiring the “authoritative” character of the “intellect” to “choose the best thing for itself” (NE 1168b33–1169a6, 17–18). Friendship also illuminates how the intellect “holds sense-perception” of particulars in “practical things” and “first boundaries”—a sense-perception providing “eyesight” to prudence to make “the authoritative good” possible (NE 1143a35–b5, 1144b6–17). Friendship’s perceiving-together is active in an embodied choice, one more tangible than “desiring intellect” or “thinking desire.”²⁷ Friendship thus reveals a naturally bounded sense of the good within oneself.

Only after discovering friendship’s internally bounded sense of the good does Aristotle turn to what this means for politics and business. Opposed to the “laborious” character of having many useful friends, one should seek as many friends as “adequate” for “the life that is properly-one’s-own,” the “measure” of which—like the *polis*—is not a number, but “anything between some bounds” evident in friendship’s “living-together” (NE 1170b29–1171a4). From the perspective of friendship and life, what is “properly-one’s-own” bounds politics. Business (which originates in the acquisition of useful things) can extend to many who are useful, but insofar as it is laborious, it risks becoming slavish. Readers will not find such caution in Solomon’s “Aristotelian” business ethics, which assumes corporations’ place in the “global community” is most authoritative (Solomon 1992, pp. 102–3).²⁸ With this assumption, Solomon and his followers ignore the natural boundaries for what is properly-one’s-own in Aristotle’s philosophy. Neglecting these boundaries produces a laborious life in business and politics not bound to one’s own choices. Through the contemplative freedom found in reading Aristotle’s philosophy literally, businesspeople can learn their authoritative need to pursue the good in *all* parts of their lives while they engage in business and politics.

²⁷ Compare von Heyking (2008), who, while capturing the importance of “perceiving-together,” does not connect this to “choice.”

²⁸ See also Pearce (2013, p. 27) on the problems with Solomon treating the “global community” as a “neo-*polis*.”

VII. Conclusion

More than forms of “virtue ethics” imposed on their professions by academics, businesspeople need Aristotle’s philosophy and his comprehensive contemplation of the human desire to know and choose the good. Preceding Aristotle’s “more natural” account of friendship is the statement that a happy person needs friends because “they *seem* to be the greatest of the external goods” (*NE* 1169b9–10, emphasis added). If friends are “external goods” (distinct from goods of “body” and “soul”), they are like money and risk being sought “without-limit,” though external goods “hold a limit” (*NE* 1098b12–20, *Pol.* 1323a24–b7). Yet Aristotle is unclear on what “good” friends are, which conveys a truth about human nature: Humans need all three goods to live, and friendship—which begins with the choice to “live-together”—“forms-community” in body and soul through perceiving “*logos* and thought.” Humans need goods not as members of corporations and communities, but according to their nature.

The natural sense of what is “properly-one’s-own” (*oikeion*) in Aristotle’s philosophy befriends and bounds humans’ physical and intellectual needs for goods. Countering retail trade’s production of gain without-limit are both the art of household management (which is “according to nature” because its acquisition of food is “not without-limit but holds a boundary”) and “the most proper moneymaking art” (which is “according to nature” because it concerns livestock, farming grain and plants, and raising fish and fowl) (*Pol.* 1258a14–18, b12–21). Business’s “most proper” natural foundation is provision for bodily goods. Providing legal currency for these goods’ exchange should not come at the expense of humans’ intellect and the “proper” pleasure bound to their activity “according to wisdom” through philosophy, a free activity capable of sustaining contemplation through choice. It is choice that transcends concerns with exchange and “worth” (that is, the guiding concerns of legal currency, business, and justice) (*NE* 1177a12–27, 1177b19–21, 1164a32–b6, 1158b11–1159a12). Using Aristotle’s philosophy to meet the demands of business ethics constrains his work to a false horizon. Businesspeople need Aristotle’s philosophy to reach them neither as businesspeople nor citizens, but simply as humans who participate in business and politics. However necessary business and politics are, these are neither natural nor proper starting points for one’s own pursuit of the good. But love and friendship for oneself are *natural and proper*, and one can choose to engage in business (and any human pursuit) with this true sense of what is good and pleasant.

It would be best for businesspeople interested in Aristotle's philosophy to read his texts directly and discover for themselves the riches they provide. Taken on their own terms, these texts see beyond what some academics seeking to address businesspeople pull from them. For example, one business ethicist drawn to virtue ethics laments economics' reliance on abstract mathematical models (Hühn 2015, pp. 58–59) without knowing how Aristotle's philosophic *logos* literally remedies abstractions. After wondering whether people need household management or regimes to seek “the good for themselves,” Aristotle considers how the young become “wise” not in “natural” first principles needed for their good, but in mathematical ones. The problem is that while the young “trust” mathematical first principles through “abstraction” (*aphairesis*), natural first principles require “experience” (NE 1147a7–20). The Greek for “abstraction” means “away-from [*apo*] choosing [*hairesis*].” Aristotle's pun indicates how his *logos* never neglects readers' need to choose within the limit of the good.²⁹ If businesspeople accept Aristotle's invitations to contemplate (often through *aporia* and its sense of what is without-provision), they find his *logos* wanders through virtue, happiness, politics, household management, and moneymaking to provide them the experience of wondering about their need to choose the good. If readers wish to go further, they could follow the contemplative character of Aristotle's philosophy back to Plato's *Meno* and wonder (unlike business ethicists) about the significance of becoming unprovided over how virtue provides good things (78b-80b).³⁰

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²⁹ See also Pascarella (2022, pp. 10–11, 122).

³⁰ This passage puns on *porizō*, *poros*, and *aporeō*. See also Robert Bartlett (2004), who notes in his translation how Socrates's puns on *aporia* “[play] on Meno's interest in wealth” (p. 103).

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