

# CLASSICAL SOCIAL JUSTICE

A Philosophical Exploration  
of the Roots of Social and Economic Inequities

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*The gods do not think it right people should succeed unless they understand their duties and are concerned that they are accomplished, but grant their favor to some who are prudent and careful while denying it to others.*

—Xenophon  
(as translated in Pomeroy,  
1994, p. 165)

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*The Kingdom of God comes not at some future time*

*You cannot point out the sign of its coming*

*The Kingdom of God comes not at some special site*

*You cannot point out the place of its coming*

*The Kingdom of God is already here, among you now.*

—Jesus of Nazareth  
(Matthew 24:23-26)  
(as interpreted in Crossan,  
1994, p. 39)

## Introduction

As the United States witnesses a widening gap between rich and poor (U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, 2004), it also faces systemic moral challenges (MacIntyre 1984). Whereas MacIntyre (1988) observes that three ethical traditions challenge moral discourse, Lucey (2008) speculates that various economic classes possess different

interpretations of ethics, morality, and spirituality.

Knowledge and power relations define morality for society. Yet the dominant discourse of morality does not discount or destroy discourses of other groups (Foucault, 1972). What becomes difficult to overcome about the practice of the elites to define morality is their access to the media that reaches the public at large and their abilities to exercise power in many social networks (Fiske, 1993).

According to Bobbitt (2002), security, welfare, and multiculturalism contribute to a market-state social identity that relies heavily upon financial exchange among cultural groups and upon increasing business transactions among distant nations. While this awareness has developed over centuries, the early 21<sup>st</sup> century realizes the consequences of its recent intensification. A social manifestation of the ongoing struggle between economic classes (Zinn, 2003) is a curriculum differentiated along

lines of social class defined by economic knowledge and power relations (Oakes & Lipton, 2007).

The challenge by dominant discourses intensified during the 1980s and extends into the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, as official policy decisions appear to redefine the importance of human interactions in terms of economic relationships (National Center on Education and the Economy 2007; Spring, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 1983; U.S. Department of Labor, 1987). Societies appear to define themselves more through economic relationships and less on geographic proximity. Their economic interdependencies became more apparent during the October 2008 meltdown of global financial markets.

This redefinition prompts moral challenges on a global scale. Ruiz and Mínguez (2001) observe that such environments prompt immoralities such as “poverty, inequality, and exclusion” (p. 159), exacerbating economic dependencies and poverty of South hemispheric populations and economic disadvantage in rich nations (United Nations Children’s Defense Fund, 2002).

Similar ethical challenges occur within societies. Sparks (1994) points out the moral challenges experienced in urban settings, associating high degrees of violence with low-income areas. She attributes these circumstances to patterns of “institutional racism and the gross inequities...in terms of income, employment, health care, education, and political oppression.” (p. 318). As society redefines itself, economic influences and disparities prompt moral challenges that require multicultural focus and a social transformative perspective if any improvements are to occur.

Our thesis is that economic contexts influence patterns of educational practice and decision-making. The philosophers/prophets described in this article illustrate this theory through their philosophical ideals/preaching. If education is to be an equitable process, then all stakeholders need an awareness of these differences to commence a respectful dialogue about meaning and direction of education. Absent this dialogue, we experience the present educational dichotomy of two systems, one procedural (lower economic) and the other judgmental (elite) where the ideals of the judgmental are espoused.

A “for or against” early 21<sup>st</sup> century society that employs a wealth-founded basis for human worth presents ethical problems. Wealth represents an indicator of society’s judgment; distributions of material resources occur based on societal interpretations of merit. This evaluative basis involves a paradox, however,

Although money represents an objective standard of value, lawmakers (biased by the economic contexts that they experience) formulate the policies for societal resources. For a socially just community to occur, decision-making must employ respectful procedures that value input from representatives of all economic contexts.

By considering philosophical roots of Western societal development, it is possible to gain insight into the systemic processes underlying these circumstances. By understanding these bases, multicultural theorists and researchers may better explore the foundational theories for the societal values and challenge conventional interpretations.

We review the origins of modern socioeconomic theories by summarizing the ideas of the classical ancient Greek philosophers, focusing on Aristotle and Xenophon. Afterward, we contrast these views with those of the prominent lower economic class figure, Jesus of Nazareth. Finally, we relate our analysis of these historical philosophies to postmodern education and offer direction for practice.

### Ancient Greece

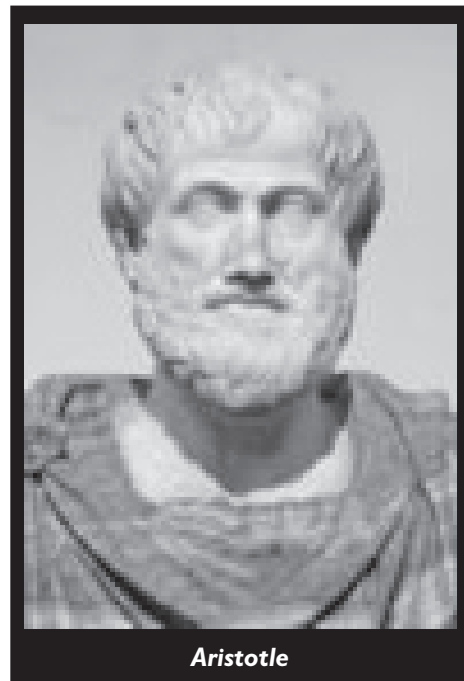
We begin our interpretation with the classical Greek philosophers. The summary begins with a review of the generally recognized classical philosophers, focusing on Aristotle, and comparing their ideas with Xenophon’s. We chose Plato and Aristotle because most scholars would recognize these philosophers as laying the foundation for most philosophical patterns of argument in Western Civilization.

Yet Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, from which the word economics derives, provides a community based perspective that the others appear to omit. As such, akin to MacIntyre’s problem (1984) with modern ethical thinking, we see current economic interpretations as distorted because modern society construes them through different philosophical lenses from which they originated.

### Plato and Aristotle

The public generally recognizes Plato and Aristotle as the influential philosophers of classical Greece. However, MacIntyre (1988) considers Isocrates as the focus of fourth century Athenian moral and political discussions, and asserts that academic traditions obscure his significance. According to MacIntyre, Isocrates applied the moral concepts of the Athenian upper class to the ordinary citizens.

The challenge of Isocrates is that no objective moral standards occur; rather,



Aristotle

societal groups prescribe standards—a relativist perspective as opposed to the outright specifications of the virtuous “man” in *The Republic*, in which Plato argues against Isocrates, laying the groundwork for an objective-based moral theory (MacIntyre, 1988). MacIntyre elaborates that Aristotle, through his *Nichomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, provided a “telos” or direction to Plato’s *Republic*. This telos, however, involves citizens realizing their own good, within the context of a city-state or polis. Aristotle conceives of no standard outside the polis.

Problems associated with standardization derived from the limited context of Aristotle’s polis. They fail to consider an ethical foundation that applies both outside the polis, and inside those polii involving different societal structures. Aristotle’s ideas do not apply to all possible societies.

Likewise, the standardization of values in a 21<sup>st</sup> century capitalist society and its education processes presents an ethical challenge. As societal diversity increases, reconciliation of different views requires respect for additional ideas. Just as Aristotelian tenets could not be extended outside the city-state contexts, one set of educational standards can not apply to students who occupy multicultural contexts.

Aristotle (trans. 1954) advocates the pursuit of virtuous means between behavioral extremes. He espouses the practice of behavioral moderation. Hadreas (2002) observes that Aristotle’s philosophy of wealth is consistent with this theme, since it interprets sound financial management as exercising the mean of “liberality” be-

tween the extremes of “prodigality” and “meanness.” This mean consists of a practical lifestyle, an avoidance of extremes, a moderation of pleasure, and a moral education to discipline feelings.

Regarding the extremes, Aristotle considers prodigality as limited by circumstances; but in its most severe sense, it involves fanatical attempts to acquire money. Prodigality represents a concept that people commonly misconstrue.

...for we call those men prodigals who are incontinent and spend money on self-indulgence. Hence also they are thought the poorest characters; for they combine more vices than one. Therefore the application of the word to them is not its proper use; for a ‘prodigal’ means a man who has a single evil quality...since a prodigal is one who is being ruined by his own fault, and the wasting of substance is thought to be ruining of oneself, life being held to depend on possession of substance. (Aristotle, trans.1954, p. 79)

At the other extreme, according to Aristotle (trans. 1954), meanness involves a lack of desire to spend, a fear-based concept of property ownership, and a greed motivation basis. It presents more of a problem than prodigality, because “meanness is both incurable...and more innate...; for most men are fonder of getting money than of giving. It also extends widely, and is multiform, since there seem to be many kinds of meanness”(84). This definition contains a more condemning tone, providing emotional descriptors and indicating a relationship with community. Unlike prodigality, which is one’s own fault, meanness, rooted in societal exchange, adversely affects the community.

The concept of freedom closely relates to financial virtue. Aristotle interprets freedom as community related. Hadreas (2002) notes that Aristotle understands a freeman in a more basic sense than would an early 21<sup>st</sup> century interpretation. A freeman required citizenry in a society of modest means. Nevertheless, land ownership was family based, as a man who lacked a family had no land rights. Aristotle espouses freedom based on a “freedom from” idea. Community affiliation effectively frees a member *from* the challenges of isolation and individualism.

This interpretation provides a stark contrast from modern “freedom to” conceptualizations, which construe freedom as conduct outside of community norms or a freedom “from” controlled by rules and regulations that we experience today. Aristotle advocates an upper economic class vision of society whereby the lower economic class fits into the needs of the established roles of the upper economic

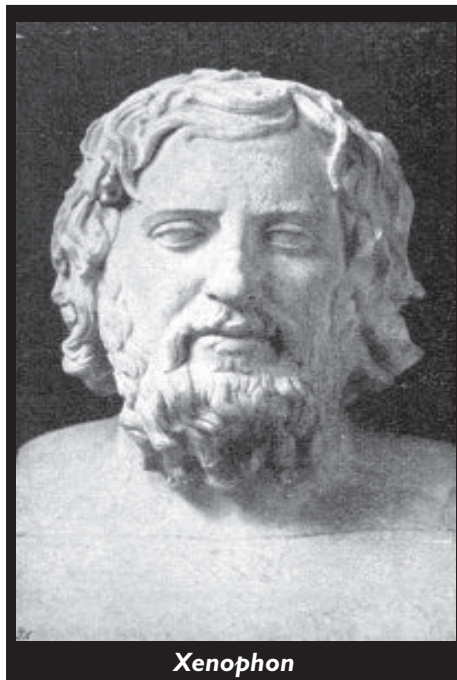
class. Acting immorally, or in the extremes, involves conduct that falls outside of the spectrum of prescribed behaviors.

In effect, Aristotle does not solve Isocrate’s challenge. The lower class plays to the mean of the upper class extremes. The failure to recognize the contextual nature of human judgment undermines Aristotle’s economic philosophy. Just as a means to financial practice presents a virtue, it appears that a means between the human relationships prompted could be virtuous as well.

A cooperative economic-based ethical theory could offer a virtuous mean between the extremes prompted by possessive human relationships. One may find a classical Greek proponent for such a framework outside the *polis*, away from the influences found inside the city-state. For example, an agrarian context that experiences cooperative community among all parties to benefit. This mutual dependency compresses the range of the spectrum between prodigality and meanness by limiting the individual excesses that may prompt such extremities. Our example of Xenophon illustrates the mean between these extremes.

### Xenophon

The ideas of a Greek philosopher whose experiences occurred outside of the city-state perspective appear in *Oeconomicus*. Through this work, Xenophon argues that the nature of economic wants is subjective. He identifies wealth “as any good thing one possesses” (Pomeroy, 1994, p. 105), yet clarifies that different goods and services have different weights,



Xenophon

depending on the person or purpose. He also recognizes the existence of moral deterrents to wealth, such as idleness, moral weakness, carelessness, fornication, drunkenness, and ambitions. Thus, Xenophon considers wealth as an interpretive matter varying between people. Yet, he interprets the hindrances as being objective, considering a definite nature to the deterrents.

Because farming provides the foundations for society, Xenophon employs dialogues about family farming to develop his ideas on estate management. All society at that time in history depended on farming (Pomeroy, 1994). In a familial society, a functionally cooperative family proves the critical element for successful farming, beginning with the spousal unit.

Xenophon considers the unit of husband and wife as economically functional, with the husband responsible for the income and the wife responsible for expenses and estate guardianship. The basis for personal worth depends on actions, rather than income. Assets are to be a common fund, with the better partner determined by value rather than quantity of contributions.

Morality represents a critical element to Xenophon’s philosophy of estate management. Self-control represents a necessary discipline so that “property be in the best condition and greeted increase made to it by just and honorable means” (Pomeroy, 1994, p. 141). This self-control relates to the farmer’s educating of his spouse and workers as well.

Like Aristotle, Xenophon recognizes that cooperative roles represent part of community; however, Xenophon underscores avoidance of personal vices. Marriage represents a practical relationship, contrasting with Aristotle’s male dominant estate management views and copulating marital basis (Pomeroy, 1994).

Xenophon’s ethical model involved an agrarian foundation. Whereas Aristotle interpreted moral behavior through a city-state perspective, Xenophon employed a rural foundation to his ideas. It is important to recognize the moral interpretations prompted through modern urban and rural contexts. Research (Bulach & Peddle, 2001; Gándara, et al., 2001; Lucey, et al., 2006; Theobald & Natchigal, 1995) illustrates the different patterns of rural and urban values such as technology use and character perception.

Xenophon provides a functional justification of the family unit that focuses on values rather than wealth. Each family would have different societal elements that they could manage well. Xenophon espouses functional family values to which

wealth rewards fulfillment of one's societal function. Thus, Xenophon offers some element of individuality within a structured social context. Social roles exist and societal members possess functional duties within that context.

### **Summary of Greek Perspectives**

Aristotle and Xenophon express theories involving different societal dynamics, yet they both would agree that society involves duties that require fulfillment. To our knowledge, the writings of the ancient affluent Greeks are those surviving their time. There are no writings of the slaves or lower class occupants. While Aristotle publicly taught the large groups of the public (Hadreas, 2002), the receptivity of the various social classes to these teachings remains unclear. The audience was present, the message was well organized, but absence of a relevant economic context would have impeded the orators' rhetoric to convince their entire audience.

Diamond (1999) points out that early writing served bureaucratic purposes. The elite learned business writing first, with luxurious writing (e.g., poetry) developing later. Likewise, we suggest that ethical ideas evolved similarly. The societal-role philosophies developed because the occupants of higher economic classes could document their ideas before members of other economic contexts. The social contexts of classical Greek philosophers affected their philosophical perspectives; however, the writing created permanence to their ideas. A complete interpretation of societal perceptions would account for both written and oral ideas.

Modern society values specialization and remembers Aristotle and (to a lesser degree) Xenophon because these philosophers express the ideas that affirm societal structures with existing social roles, not because they represent the views of the masses. To gain a lower class perspective, one needs to consider the first century of the Common Era and the writings about what a member of the lower class orally communicated.

### **Jesus of Nazareth**

Understanding the ideals of Jesus of Nazareth presents a challenge because there is nothing written by Jesus that survives today. Jesus wrote no theses, plays, or dialogues to interpret. Those people who authored accounts of Jesus' preaching did so after Jesus' crucifixion and wrote from locations distant from his ministry. (Crossan, 1994a). Uncertainty about the economic classes of the gospel writers also

exists (Patrick Gray, personal correspondence, October 18, 2004). Since scholarship does not appear to agree upon the identity and contexts of these authors, the complete motives and rationale for these writings remain debatable. Thus, it is important to examine how much the gospels merit literal consideration and how much they require allegorical interpretation.

To interpret Jesus authentically, one must put himself or herself within a contextually appropriate mindset. MacIntyre (1990) recognizes that textual reading involves several dimensions: historical, moral, allegorical, and anagogical. A complete interpretation of the gospels requires awareness of the writers' backgrounds to understand their motives within, at least, these four senses.

The consequences of inaccurately interpreting the gospels evoke foundational challenges for societal and educational structures. Crossan (1998) notes that resurrection claims were commonplace during the first-century societies, and recognizes claims of Jesus' resurrection as ordinary. A complete understanding of Jesus requires that one interpret these readings within contextual senses, as indicated in MacIntyre (1990). For example, Crossan notes that Jesus' societal contemporaries did not distinguish between church and state, materiality and spirituality.

Yet, an "either-or" American society chronically wrestles with its interpretations of the separation of church and state, and its definitions of morals and values, and of materiality and spirituality (Zimmerman, 2002). Ignoring these conceptual overlaps would be like concluding a murder-mystery based on the testimony account of one witness, without considering all other perspectives.

Part of this awareness requires recognition of how Jesus fit into the Jewish tradition. Hoppe (2004) interprets Jewish scripture as an ongoing call for economic justice. For example, the Exodus tells of Jewish freedom from the Egyptians' economic oppression. The Jewish struggles under Moses and Abraham represent challenges to maintain economic parity within the Jewish society. According to Hoppe, Jesus fit into this pattern of messages concerning social justice because he practiced a ministry that challenged the rich to break their bonds of patronship and wealth-based discrimination to pursue a community based on acceptance and forgiveness.

This portrait of Jesus depicts a peasant with great oratory skills (yet who could not read) and having great knowledge of society and Jewish traditions

(Borg, 1987; Crossan, 1994a). Yet, just as time and cultural change obscured the understanding of the virtues in ancient Greece (MacIntyre 1984), time and social bias affected modern interpretations of Jesus' ministry. Crossan's triangulation of cultural anthropology, Greco-Roman and Jewish history, and literary text sources represents an effort to reduce such bias.

Jesus challenged the societal order of his time and culture in a radical manner: by living the antithesis to the urban lifestyle of that time and place (Crossan, 1994a). Through his parables and his actions, Jesus confronted a societal wealth focus that prompted economic differences and espoused what Crossan terms "a radically egalitarian society representing an absolute equity of people that denies any discrimination between them and negates the necessity of any hierarchy" (p. 71). Jesus abandoned a secure economic context (Hoppe, 2004) to speak and model his message of social justice.

Jesus' parables challenged the concepts of the establishment. For example, Borg (1998) interprets the Prodigal Son parable as advocating the outcast members' reacceptance into the Jewish community. The second son represents a challenge to the religious establishment to receive and forgive those wishing to renew their community membership. The prodigal son is not the one who squandered the inheritance, but the one who stood by and challenged his father's acceptance of the repentant.

Jesus' message provided an interesting twist on Aristotle's aforementioned interpretation of prodigality. Whereas Aristotle saw the concept as involving foolish financial pursuits, Jesus interpreted prodigality as the effect of wealth on interpersonal judgment. The prodigal son was not the one who spent poorly, but was the one who judged the spending of the other.

The interpretational twist provides important meaning for an economically influenced early 21<sup>st</sup> century society, where government and business pass the increasing responsibilities for financial risks, such as health care and pensions, to workers. The moral challenge does not involve judging others' financial behaviors; the challenge involves withholding judgment of those who are less financially fortunate.

Apply this to standardized curriculum and instruction challenges and related assessment issues where governments and school districts respond punitively to low-achieving schools by prescribing (often scripted) instruction. Such a contrast of this philosophy and practice with one of ex-

aming the schools and student contexts to develop programs consistent with community needs reveals how far education remains from an egalitarian perspective of policymaking.

Family structure lay at the core of first century economic injustices. Jesus criticized the family basis for ownership and inheritance (Crossan, 1994a), as the Roman urbanization processes disrupted rural Jewish family and economic structures (Crossan, 1998). In ancient Rome, Greece, and Egypt, heredity played a significant role in wealth acquisition. (Aldred, 1961; Bagnall, 1993; Crossan, 1994a; Kemp, 1982) This practice continues today and contributes to North American racial economic disparities (Conley, 2001). Contemporary societies continue the same inheritance patterns criticized by Jesus approximately 2000 years ago.

Jesus' strength lay in spoken communication, modeling of his message, and pursuing his own ministerial wishes (Crossan, 1994a). He traveled because settling down would have prompted a patron-based communication process, fostering paradoxical institutions in challenge to the Roman system. By preaching in rural areas, Jesus randomly delivered his ideas to those he met, rather than those who sought him. This practice challenged the urbanized patron-based Roman societal structure by advocating a system of chance acceptance, rather than structured exclusion. Jesus recognized that a sedentary society prompted dehumanizing economic comparisons.

The classical Mediterranean societies' economic disparities affected patterns of social injustice. It is important to consider the societal destitute, not just the poor, because they also suffered through societal injustices (Crossan, 1994a). Jesus' contact with the lepers was an economic message, as leprosy was not only a medical circumstance, but also one involving material imperfections. For example, torn clothing represented a social sign of indebtedness and ill social health. Being unclean involved being outcast by the wealthy.

This definition of the destitute included the children who were socially outcast, unless accepted by their fathers. It also applied to women that society shunned or labeled as prostitutes for failure to adhere to male-prescribed social roles. Likewise, modern public debates over health care and education represent the devaluation of women. Consider how administrators might label outspoken teachers who challenge district curricula and one sees parallel processes.

A structured familial setting represented a micro-model of larger social

structures. Familial roles determined expectations for food preparation, seating arrangements, and meal company. The open eating practices derived by Jesus pulled the tablecloth out from under the patron system established by Augustus (Crossan, 1994a). According to Crossan, the term "Kingdom of God" was the "process of open commensality of a non-discriminating table in miniature of a non-discriminating society" (p. 70). Jesus took meals in houses without regard to the hosts' social class, contradicting the pervasive culture of the time. The protocols for meals represented particular challenges for the apostle Paul and his followers (Crossan & Reed, 2004).

In school cafeterias, students tend to judge their peers based on the contents of their lunches as well as with whom they sit. The student with the sandwich gets less positive attention than the student who purchased pizza. The student who brings the popular snack food to the cafeteria receives more peer-support than the student who brings carrots or celery.

The aforementioned interpretation of Jesus contrasts with popular early 21<sup>st</sup> century North American perceptions. Society pacifies Jesus' preaching into a message accommodating its materially inclined audience. Crossan (1994a) notes differences between the three synoptic Gospels in this context. He (1998) explains that the gospels represent works written sequentially, weaving a narrative among a series of quotes from oral and written tradition to rationalize scripture fulfillment.

Modern society tends to interpret the gospels out of both the contexts of the periods of their writing and the processes of their development. Rather than constructing several different accounts of one event, the gospels represent documents modified to suit the authors' audiences. Think of a manuscript that one has put aside for several years, revised, then put aside for several more years, and revised again. A comparison of the original and the three revisions may give an idea of this writing process.

Modern society builds its Christian understandings from the writings of Paul. Armstrong (1994) observes that Paul represented the basis for historical interpretation of Jesus, but did not consider his interpretations as rationally justifiable. Crossan and Reed (2004) address this

challenge by arguing that society traditionally misconstrues both the content and nature of Paul's writings, as well as information concerning his background. They hold that Paul promoted gender equity within Christianity and that he likely questioned a property-based hierarchical society practicing a standard system. How one interprets Paul's writings presents important consequences for both societal and educational structures.

Likewise, the interpretation of women's social roles prompts important societal consequences. Torjesen (1993) provides evidence that male-dominated societies subverted messages of gender equality. Similarly, Crossan and Reed (2004) point to artistic evidence that Paul held an equal status with Thecla, a prominent woman of that period, but later assumed a dominant position because of his gender (as indicated by the defacing of the Thecla's image). Paul continued the traditions of Jesus' advocacy for community based on faith and trust, rather than financial control.

In Jesus, we observe a radically refreshing societal interpretation from the classical Greek philosophers. This difference involves one of alternate perspectives derived from contrasting economic contexts. Jesus was an illiterate peasant (Crossan & Reed, 2001) who challenged the inequitable effects of class-based society; the Greek philosophers were literate men of societal status who advocated social roles for the masses in their society. Economic status related to interpretations of society and justice early in history.

Modern society distorts the message of the Jesus movement into a behaviorist framework advocating material rewards for good behavior. Since the existing hierarchical societal (and educational) structure is based on control of resources, a socially just culture would recognize the original Christian movement as an egalitarian effort advocating community, compassion, and sacrifice.

The early 21<sup>st</sup> century's Western philosophical foundations represent the prescriptions of contextually limited playwrights and their traditions. Descendants of these traditions distort the ideas of lower-class philosophies by rationalizing them to a form of religion that suits the needs of the upper economic class. Economic status dominates interpretations

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of religion and morality. Because financial contexts affect human relationships, multiculturalists should explore associated curricular implications.

### Discussion

Our analysis of the classical Greek philosophers and Jesus finds that the upper economic class prescribes citizenship in a manner contextually inconsistent with the needs of other societal members. Interpreting the preaching of Jesus as a voice for the lower economic class, a procedural based society keyed to patronage distorts the conceptualization of prodigality and meanness. The opposing values of rural and urban contexts illustrate these differing ideals. We see the following three themes as present in post-modern education structures.

#### ***The Education Policy Makers Prescribe Learning in a Manner Contextually Inconsistent with the Needs of Other Socio-Economic Classes***

We see educational structures as founded on the contextually skewed philosophies of the well to do and prompting the repetition of inequitable processes. Curricula reflect principles that range from “technical” to “emancipatory” (Lucey & Lorschach, in press) and a consensus of what a community regards as truth (Foucault, 1972). Put another way, the discourses of education that reflect an economic truth represent the inherent relationship of knowledge and power.

The disparity of education quality between rich and poor results from these conditions. The inequitable decision-making that occurs in hierarchical authority structures prompts educational conflict. The clash between standards-based curricula and diversity-motivated academic freedom pits a scientific-based and narrow vision that emphasizes compliant behaviors and convergent thinking against a constructivist philosophy that encourages creative thought and divergent ideas. Economic motives undergird this problem as legislators and district administrators seek simple solutions to complex challenges.

Education represents a vehicle for providing children with information necessary for societal survival, teaching the values of the dominant economic culture; however, the survival challenge consists within a society that values finances more than humanity. An educational system that emphasizes competitive standardized assessments and prescribes classroom instruction lacks the dimension of thought needed to educate the diverse patterns of students within that society.

In his last *Chronicle of Narnia*, C. S.

***The hierarchy of Western societies has been built on the status quo of a tiered society in Athens, as has the curriculum been built upon those same ideals.***

Lewis (1956) depicts a stable that contains a perpetual multidimensional reality that outlasts an encasing temporary linear reality. Likewise, every individual represents a multidimensional accumulation of thoughts, memories, and hopes. This mental composite shapes the person’s linear daily encounters into a storied identity with meanings that become apparent within different situations. Educators should encourage students’ conceptualization, reflection, and dialogue about human responses to the dimensions of individual realities that modern material society threatens.

This process requires a framework for understanding human identity. Morris’s (1997) description of the four Ancient Greek dimensions to human fulfillment (intellectual, aesthetic, goodness, and spiritual) and the associated goals within these dimensions (truth, beauty, morality, and unity) suggest their relevance to contemporary society. Through this review, we argue that socioeconomic contexts prompt diverse interpretations for pursuing these dimensional pursuits. Education represents a manifestation of the short-attention individualism that challenges the community views espoused by Jesus. Ironically, many religious conservatives call for exclusively conservative policies which run counter to those enunciated by Jesus.

These considerations require an understanding of morality as a community, rather than as an individual process. Morris (1997) clarifies that ethics are “not primarily about avoiding problems at all [but] about creating strength, in an individual person, a family, a community, business relationships, and life” (p. 120). Educators may encourage their students and colleagues to break judgmental bonds imposed by different economic contexts and develop communities among socioeconomic classes that may prompt meaningful dialogues about these issues.

Pursuit of material goals fosters development of transient goods and services that depict the perspectives of those that control material resources. Loewen (1995) and Zinn (2003) counter the unidimensional social histories portrayed in most American textbooks. An open dialogue about the one-dimensional “right and wrong” morality that accommodates an instant gratification society offers hope

for dispelling these mythological pursuits of fulfillment.

Educators should pursue dialogues about these differences and seek their respectful reconciliation. Lucey (2003) argues that economic contexts influence education’s institutional structures, fostering an environment of economic efficiency and academic stagnation. Through such conversations, educators may empower students and colleagues to clarify the artificialities of economic-derived fears that impair creative opportunity (Postman & Weingartner, 1969).

#### ***A Procedural-Based Education System Based on Adherence to Standards Distorts the Conceptualization of Prodigality and Meanness***

On the spectrum between meanness and prodigality, education finds itself at the extremes. Through unsubstantiated biases, such as Payne’s (1995) framework, American education employs a classist system that rewards procedural conformance. This system reinforces such stereotypes by penalizing those who challenge the status-quo. This culture of meanness places high expectations on inhibition and suppression of new ideals that could empower the economically oppressed.

Popular behaviorist classroom philosophies (e.g., Canter & Canter, 1991; Smith, 2004; Wong & Wong, 2004) emphasize concepts of routine and authority; however, these approaches lack authentic bases for their implementation. This culture of classroom management meanness makes for a duty-bound mentality that preaches that the occurrence of good things happen to those who adhere to authority. Espousal of high expectations for students represents more than an academic achievement process by teachers; it also asks them to abandon their ability to conceive and employ democratic classroom processes.

At the same time, we observe a culture of self-indulgence that employs limited interpretations of curricula to preserve the technical knowledge that benefits those already in power. As Jesus interpreted foolishness as allowing wealth to influence one’s decisions and behaviors, we see obsessions with standards as influencing patterns of teaching and learning.

Lucey and Cooter’s (2008) challenge to corporate leaders to purge themselves

of their material extravagances in favor of community benefit applies also to education policy makers. If we construe knowledge as a commodity, a standardized understanding of content based on technical and practical ideals represents a starkly narrow interpretation that limits options for societal longevity. Diamond's (2005) various examples of closed-minded societies illustrate the importance of being receptive to creativity and innovation that goes beyond the boundaries created by the leading few.

The Gospel of Thomas (Pagels, 2004) reminds followers to seek and release one's individual strengths, for "what you do not bring forth will destroy you" (p. 32). Standardization processes prescribe uniform instruction and antiquated assessment (Shepard, 2000), thereby limiting opportunity for a fully participatory society by suppressing student individuality. Dependency on business-focused administrators promotes the death of educational structures by stymieing the creativity that would prompt innovative ideas for societal renewal. As Zinn (2003) describes the hoarding of flour which prompted the riots of 1837, educational settings hoard the vast supplies of multicultural knowledge by suppressing opportunities to inquire into its subjectivity (Postman & Wein-gartner, 1969). To bring about the needed change, educational structures must employ and build upon the commitment and involvement of the stakeholders (parents, teachers, and community) within.

### **The Oppositions of Rural and Urban Contexts Emulate These Differing Ideals**

A 21<sup>st</sup> century environment of increasing urban populations should still recognize the creditability of rural values. Tyack's (2003) observation that various school reform ideas concerning district and policy structures and instructional practice involve rural derivations illustrates how striking these differences are.

While Aristotle and Xenophon wrestled with their contextually based ideas of duty, Jesus provided a response that challenged the urban encroachment on the rural. So too, early 21<sup>st</sup> century educators face a responsibility of challenging an urban laden institution that derives from rural values. Lagemann's (2000) description of the historical marginalization of educational research by the public, non-education scholars, and government officials illustrates the urban bias in criticizing humanitarian-based community practices such as cooperation, sharing, and permissiveness.

Contrast these ideas with the urban values of competition, individual accomplishment, and precision and one realizes the polarization of these alternate concepts. Kozol's (2005) observation of education as a tool that controls or is controlled by the learner can be traced respectively to communities of Black and White; it also represents a pattern of rich and poor. The former survive a learning culture of drill and control in stark contrast to the latter who encounter settings of curricular exploration and intrigue.

As Jesus challenged a patron-based urban system, educators should consider their responsibilities to confront the hierarchical bureaucracies that characterize postmodern educational institutions. Cuban and Anderson's (2007) description of preservation motivated institutional obstacles to social justice service learning illustrates how early 21<sup>st</sup> century education differs little in structure from the urban networks of first century Rome.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Our literature review finds that education structures experience a philosophical challenge of contextually inappropriate educational philosophies. How educators resolve this foundational issue presents important societal consequences. The future of a multicultural democracy depends on the nature of the citizenship skills that its educators foster within its youth. The employment of standardized learning and evaluation perpetuates a system of economically biased judgment.

To what extent would the masses in the United States or any developed country acknowledge that Plato (trans. 1956) was correct in his assigning the gold, silver, and bronze categories to the rich, the middle class, and the lower socioeconomic class? Is a person from the "gold" class more important and deserving of better education, opportunity, and recompense than from the other classes? The hierarchy of Western societies has been built on the status quo of a tiered society in Athens, as has the curriculum been built upon those same ideals.

Educators may recognize the diversity prompted by economic contexts and associated social relationships, developmental patterns, and related curriculum and instruction issues. While Banks (2004) recognizes social class as a major identity group, additional research is needed to examine the pedagogical disparities among economic classes. Such efforts may challenge the stereotypes fostered by unscholarly commercial efforts such as

Ruby Payne's (1995). We offer the following recommendations for practice.

### **Classroom Structures**

Multicultural educators should re-evaluate their classroom structures and related decision-making processes in consideration of the biases that might result. Traditional seating arrangements foster bases for interpersonal judgments among students. We recommend varied seating arrangements that employ heterogeneous groupings. In addition, random student selection processes may protect against unintended bias. The rule "*You Can't Say, You Can't Play*" (Paley, 1992) applies in the classroom as well as on the playground.

### **Curricular Content**

Educators should encourage studies of history that examine all social classes, rather than key government and military figures. Drawing from resources such as Zinn (2003) and Diamond (2005), educators should foster environments that explore the economic bases of immorality and discuss ideas for empowering underrepresented populations.

In addition, classroom discussions could explore inequitable treatment of criminals based on their economic status. For example, students could discuss the different prison conditions for white-collar and blue-collar criminals. Finally, debating the merits of a legal system that penalizes on a percentage of income or revenue bases, versus one based on a level fee basis, could bring awareness to the economic inequities that our society employs.

### **Technology Use**

Educators should employ student-centered processes to prompt technology-based inquiries of economic patterns in populations and related citizenship issues. Lucey and Grant's (2005) lesson plan enables students to explore relationships between populations and locations of major polluters, stimulating conversation about the causes for relationships between living conditions and population traits. A global consideration of the use of water can reveal to students the gross inequities of water access among the richer and poorer (Agnello & Lucey, 2008).

Multicultural educators should enable students the use of the Internet to discover the statistics that document consequences of societal decisions. They could then use authoring software to communicate their findings, associated implications, and recommendations for change.

## Professional Involvement

Hierarchical structures threaten opportunities for equitable learning when school district decision makers base decisions on dollars rather than on genuine learner needs. Educators should reexamine the organizational structures that they occupy and their effects on student learning, network with colleagues and community, and initiate processes for change. Such efforts may set goals and objects designed to change the decision-making structures and enable equitable decision-making involving all stakeholders.

Early 21<sup>st</sup> century's guilt-and-innocent-oriented society experiences challenges implementing Jesus' message of equality and economic parity. Society distorts the message of Jesus as a behavior handbook on the road to salvation. It is easier for a society focused on material acquisitions to repackage a message of simple human decency to be consistent with how it *wants* life to be. Spending in excess of one's means is encouraged rather than discouraged in our consumer society.

## Final Thoughts

We acknowledge an obvious potential criticism of this article: the apparent comparison of ideas developed and communicated approximately four centuries apart. Contrasting the ideas of Alastair MacIntyre and John Calvin would prompt similar problems. However, we assert that ancient Greek philosophies provided the basis for Roman ideals. Jesus responded to an increasingly urban setting that challenged the community framework of rural societies. Although four centuries separated the originations of these ideas, urban societies had not changed significantly during these years.

The manners by which society reconciles the philosophies of Aristotle, Xenophon, and Jesus present strong implications for multicultural education. All social and economic perspectives inform education policy, ideally requiring meaningful input from all societal participants. Likewise, the content and authors legitimated through the American canon and classical education should be read alongside Xenophon and Jesus.

Educators who embrace social transformation work to change an undemocratic economy into an economic democracy. Such a transformation requires a breadth of knowledge of democratic economic life, including that espoused by Xenophon and Jesus, as a counterbalance to the elite male-dominant polis glorified by the dominant discourse of Aristotelian philosophy.

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