Monistic Ideals, Plural Values, and the Limits of Philosophy

by

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Submitted for the Center on Capitalism and Society’s 9th Annual Conference, Philosophical Foundations of Economics and the Good Economy: Individual Values, Human Pursuits, Self-Realization and Becoming
I. Monism & Plural Values: Conceptual Affinities and Empirical Confirmations

With “palpitations of the heart and genuflections of the knees” to quote the inaugural lecture of a professor embarking on a chair in Medieval poetry that I heard many years ago, I cross the threshold from the clear field of philosophy with its straight lines of conceptual boundaries to the gnarled thickets of economics with its introduction of refractory empirical evidence.

It is the distinction between the choices and possibilities provided by conceptual relationships of value terms in a philosophical foray into topics of economics and the limits and options set by the empirical relationships in economic theory and practice that form a major theme of this essay.

In particular, this essay will explore two examples of the distance between conceptual affinities and empirical confirmations. The first example is the examination of the conceptual relations between political freedom and free markets, in comparison and contrast to the empirical connections that have obtained at different periods between free markets and political freedom. The second example is the exploration of the conceptual relations between the choice of targeting economic growth as distinct from the targeting of economic equality as the preferred way to reduce poverty and deprivation in comparison and contrast with the empirical record of societies and policies that have chosen to target growth or to target equality.

Another point of departure is well-worn. At a University Seminar on General Education, also many years ago, Professor Charles Isawi, then of the Columbia Economics Department, opened his discourse on General Education with a flair that affirmed Julius Caesar’s imperial style, both in its literary form and administrative power, by declaring that all curricula are
divided into three parts: the works of God, the works of Man, and the works of the Devil. He proceeded to delineate how physics and geology as describing the sublime features of nature as well as chemistry and biology as descriptions of the diverse materials of the earth and the rich stuff of Life represented the works of God. The humanities, whether in the epic poetry of Homer or Milton, the odes of Horace or Keats, the drama of Shakespeare or Chekhov and the novels of Leo Tolstoy, George Eliot, a.k.a. Mary Ann Evans, or Jane Austen and many other men and women, represented the greatest achievements of humankind. Professor Isawi, whose insight reflected his main work as an economic historian of the Middle East, then proceeded to demonstrate how history, economics, and politics, with their recognition of human motives and human self-destructiveness, embodied the works of the Devil.

Professor Isawi’s dramatic classification of the social sciences among the works of the Devil does not escape the fact that this observation has been rendered trivial through its various reiterations in which politics is identified as the discourse of a Machiavellian profession, history is judged in the Hegelian phrase to be “the bench of the slaughterhouse” and economics is considered to be the “dismal science” or the field that is governed by alternating waves of “fear and greed.” Yet this identification does escape triteness when it is placed in the context of another student of theories of economics—the once-Marxist philosopher Leszek Kolakowski particularly in his essay “Politics and the Devil.”

It may be particularly relevant for a conference whose title includes the phrase “The Good Economy: Individual Values, Human Pursuits, Self-Realization and Becoming” to note that Kolakowski’s argument included the claim that any belief that economic activity was destined to lead to a utopian society and the best life was a seductive illusion of the Devil. In that essay, which was also delivered at a colloquium at Columbia, Kolakowski formulated several episodes
in the career of the Devil throughout Western history from the birth of Christianity to our own times.

The cleverness of the devil, according to Kolakowski, includes his ability to identify groups of human beings who possess moral values and idealistic aspirations, combined with a capacity and inclination to fuse these values and aspirations into a single monistic vision and blueprint for society. The distinctive aspect of this interpretation is that the Devil is not limited to tempting those souls who pursue sinfulness and wrongdoing, but is able to exploit the desires of those human beings who seek goodness and perfection through his strategy of projecting the seductive illusion of the potential for realization of the utopian society. Kolakowski identified the effort in the medieval period to achieve a universal theocracy in the known civilized world as such a seductive illusion. In his own time, the effort of Marxists to establish a universal international egalitarian Marxist society represented the coercive utopianism that was the bitter fruit of the Devil’s work.

Kolakowski’s insight into the vocation of the Devil derived from his own personal experiences with Marxism where he had been an active member of the Communist party in post-war Poland. Subsequently he had become a dissident and was permitted to emigrate, moving first to All Souls College, Oxford, and then to that hotbed of anti-Marxist economic studies, the University of Chicago.

After Kolakowski’s abandonment of Marxism, his major work was his study *Main Currents of Marxism* whose three volumes were titled, respectively, the Founders, the Golden Age, and the Breakdown.

Kolakowski’s encounter with Marxism is not atypical for a number of intellectuals of his generation in Eastern Europe and, indeed, far beyond Eastern Europe. One relevant bit of
confirming evidence for Kolakowski’s thesis regarding the nature of the Devil is available in the career of Mordecai Oren. Oren, a leader of a socialist party in Israel, volunteered to go to Prague to help a trade union leader who was facing criminal charges. In Prague, Oren became enmeshed in the purge of the Communist Leadership and was charged as a subsidiary part of the trial of Rudolf Slansky, the Secretary General of the Czecholovak Communist Party. Oren was tortured and confessed to several charges, becoming a witness against Slansky. He was released after the trial. When Oren was asked at a former colleague’s home in Brooklyn whether his experience had caused him to abandon his faith in Marxist socialism, he replied, “Because I suffered, does Justice cease to exist?”

The paradoxical point in this reply rests on the recognition that his suffering is in itself proof of the existence of injustice within Oren’s own blueprint for justice. Despite that reply, Oren, like Kolakowski, amended his faith and reversed the pro-Soviet line of the faction of the socialist party which he had formerly led.

The references to the change of Kolakowski or Oren’s political commitments, in the context of this essay, can be interpreted as the recognition of the triumph of pluralism contra monism. The fusion of the set of values which included Justice, Equality, the elimination of poverty or deprivation, and progress or growth combined with faith in the inevitable triumph of these values, represented a monistic vision or societal blueprint. The perception that this kind of monism could and did generate injustice and tyranny since it is accompanied by the elimination or diminution of countervailing or limiting plural values can lead to a new appreciation of pluralism.

The importance of the thesis of value pluralism emerges more sharply when it is contrasted with the monist thesis that a group of utopian values can be fused into a single set of
values which function as a blueprint for social progress. This claim is found in the opening verse of “The International,” the Marxist anthem in which this single set of values is combined with a belief in the inevitability of their triumph in future history. The title of the anthem reflects the universality of this set of values as well as a commitment to their support that transcends national boundaries. In one translation, that verse is rendered in the following words: “Arise, ye prisoners of starvation / Awake, ye wretched of the Earth / For Justice thunders condemnation / ‘tis a new world in birth.”

If each of the values in these verses is considered singly, there is no ground for the rejection of any of them, whether it be an explicit appeal to the value of Justice or an implicit appeal to the value of Equality with a desire for the realization of the value of lessening poverty and deprivation as well as an expression of hope for the value of achieving progress. The Marxist thesis in which the ideals of “The International” were formulated, held that these four values—Justice, Equality, Lessening of Poverty and Growth or Progress—were compatible, and in some sense complete, with no contradiction among them and no need for compromise among them. For Marxism, they were to be fused coherently so that their total realization would inevitably take place in the historical future. This thesis formed the monist, philosophical or ideological basis for the cruelties of a coercive utopianism.

Less metaphorically than Kolakowski’s criticism of monism with his reference to the contribution of the Devil and more closely linked to the history of philosophy since its primary target is the monism of Plato, Isaiah Berlin has developed the thesis of moral Pluralism in his essay “The Pursuit of the Ideal.” Berlin’s argument is that any set of ideal values cannot be shown to be coherent, consistent, or complete as the Platonic tradition had maintained. Rather, the development of one particular ideal necessarily blunts an alternative value such that a
compromise among values will take place in the realization of the Good Society. Thus, the competing values that are required in the achievement of a Good Society do not admit of their a priori formulation as a completed blueprint for the best society as illustrated in the case of an ideal Platonic Republic. Plato’s blueprint of a society which possesses the virtues of wisdom, courage, justice, and temperance raises the question of whether these values are compatible with each other in an actual historical society or would require measures of compromise. Plato does not envisage, for example, a need to provide a mechanism for mediating the conflict that historical experience informs us does arise between the rulers who are presumed to possess wisdom and accordingly assert their prerogative of decision-making on protecting the society and the military guardians, who are presumed to embody courage, with the corollary of the prerogative for decision-making in the protection of the society.

Similarly, the completeness of a Platonic set of values, in light of changing demands of human nature and the changing circumstances of history is not confronted. Plato’s list of values is marked by the absence or secondary ranking of the values of freedom, consent of the governed, and democracy. Yet, the harsh consequences that are often experienced by the public as a result of the putatively wise decisions of rulers suggests the historical recognition of a need for some mechanism that permits those who suffer the consequences of a political decision to have a say in the making of the decisions or have recourse for amending or softening the impact of these decisions or to have some other vehicle for venting their frustration. The ideal blueprint must be applied to public institutions such that its ideality is relative to those who make up what Berlin, following Kant, refers to as “the crooked timber of humanity.” Berlin’s anti-utopianism is evident in his appeal to the Kantian aphorism that “Out of the crooked timber of humanity, nothing straight can be made.”
Berlin’s assessment of Platonic utopianism suggests that there cannot be a complete prescription for a good society and that any set of values that are projected as a blueprint for a society will require revision, limitation, amendment, and compromise in their application to reality. In that sense, Berlin has provided an incompleteness theorem for political philosophy which is analogous to the incompleteness theorem that Kurt Gödel demonstrated for logic. Gödel’s theorem demonstrated that if logic ever were to realize the ideal of achieving a Completeness Theorem, that is, a theorem which would be able to compute whether any well-formed sentence in the language is or is not a theorem in the language, such a Completeness Theorem would itself necessarily generate a contradiction in the language. Berlin’s pluralism would suggest that any formulation of a monistic set of ideals would itself generate the recognition of the need for compromise among values within the set or generate recognition of additional values that must be introduced to the initially limited set of values.

Berlin’s argument against monism has its cutting edge against Platonism but it also forms the basis for a confrontation with Marxist monism. In the context of this essay it is relevant to note the degree to which it provides a criticism of any species of economic utopianism. A project for the economic future in which there would be a fusion of values in a single coherent set, say, one that combines freedom and equality with growth and with environmental protection as well as with the maximum reduction of poverty or deprivation, would, for the Pluralist, require the introduction of mechanisms for balance and compromise, as well as the recognition of the necessity to sacrifice some portion of the projected values for the sake of the others.

Contrary to the varieties of political utopianism, it can be argued that utopian projections that do not admit of application avoid these difficulties since they are not intended for implementation in any real world. Samuel Butler, in his utopian novel “Eherewon” (like the
original meaning of “utopia”, “Eherewon” has its implicit reference to “nowhere”) did not intend to provide a blueprint for institutional reform when he developed a world in which all criminals were sentenced to spend time in hospitals and all sick persons were required to go to jail. Rather, his intentions were directed against a utopian vision of prison reform. In contrast, Plato provides for ways in which his value set of wisdom, courage, justice and temperance are to be realized in *The Republic*. If a context were to be provided in which the ideal form did not bear within it any requirement of applicability, then an image of the Platonic Republic can be sustained. Thus, the Platonist Philo of Alexandria has accepted on grounds of Reason that Plato’s Republic is the perfect state and also has accepted on grounds of Revelation that the Garden of Eden is the perfect state. It follows that the Garden of Eden and Plato’s Republic are the same. The proof text is the obvious recognition that, just as there are four rivers that water the Garden of Eden, there are four virtues that fructify the Republic, with the recognition that the Bible is not intended to be a textbook in geography, but a text in moral prescription, it is evident that the four rivers are symbolic names for the four Platonic virtues. Yet, unlike Plato’s Republic, which would not provide an ideal life for citizens who value for freedom or democracy, the Garden of Eden does not represent a blueprint for the political life of a society and does not meet any criterion of applicability. The moral of Philo’s transformation is that an Edenic utopia can be understood as a dream of a garden that has long been lost before the inevitable reality of human exile in the real world or as a place that can be reached in an afterlife. It is not interpreted, as Marxist or Platonic utopian programs have been, as a blueprint for a city or state that can be or ought to be realized in the real world.

Berlin’s recognition of pluralism in the pursuit of values that enter into a good society was augmented by the observations in the analysis of language made by the philosopher with
whom he team taught at Oxford, John Austin. Austin had analyzed the plural uses of the same value term in diverse contexts. Austin argued that in the many contexts in which value terms were used, there could be, contra Platonism or the quest of Socrates, no single essential meaning or univocal definition of the term. Rather, its use in different contexts suggested a range of meanings for these value terms. Thus Austin’s language analysis did not seek the single meaning of the term, but the plurality of its uses. This point was made through Austin’s claim, expressed in his own colorful metaphor In Austin’s colorful metaphor, that, in the case of value terms, the correlative opposite term “wore the trousers.”

Thus, if I said that the diamonds are yellow or blue, the predicates, whether yellow or blue, would be univocal. If I said, however, that the diamonds are real, ascribing some value to this reality, the meaning of their reality would depend upon the correlative opposite which is indicated by the context. Some options are that the diamonds are real as opposed to paste, which is distinct from the case where the diamonds are real as opposed to objects of hallucination and that case, in turn, is distinct from the case where the diamonds are real as opposed to the subject of dreams or the fabrications of fiction.

Similarly, the term ‘freedom’ has one meaning when its correlative opposite is slavery, repression, or tyranny, and a different meaning when that correlative opposite is order, security, law, or self-restraint. The illustrations can be multiplied when we consider that the correlative opposite of “free” may be “occupied” in the context of seats at a theatre, just as it may be “having a price” in the context of clean air or clean water. The opposite of a free spirit is a conformist spirit while the opposite of free love is not a conformist love but one that is not bound by legal regulation or marriage license. The opposite of a free thinker, however, is not a conformist thinker or a licensed thinker but a theist thinker, while the assertion that one has
become free may not be a declaration of atheism or agnosticism but the affirmation that one has achieved a cure from an addiction.

The polyguiity of the value term suggests different approaches to social policy. Persons who identify freedom as an opposition to tyranny or slavery are not likely to seek a balance between freedom and slavery but to support the abolition of tyranny and slavery. The identification of freedom with opposition to order or security, however, does not imply the abolition of security or the support of disorder but a search for balance between freedom and order or freedom and security. A famous illustration is provided by Rousseau’s dictum that man is born free but everywhere he is in chains. This observation does not point Rousseau toward the goal of achieving a human being who is “chainless,” that is, with no bonds or ties to society. Rather it leads Rousseau toward self-determination and democracy, that is, toward the theory that a person ought to be chained in a democratic society only by the bonds that he has forged for himself. One illustration that is relevant to the discussion of capitalism and free markets is the ambiguity which is sometimes expressed on correlative opposite term to “the free market.” The correlative opposite to “free” is not regulated so that a free market does not imply an unregulated market. Rather, free markets require opposition to administered prices or to control of market outcomes by monopolies. Thus, a free market may be a regulated market but its prices and its outcomes must be realized through competitive agents.

Similarly, the history of economic liberalism has demonstrated the significance of the distinction that Berlin had conceptualized between the idea of negative liberty as freedom from state intervention and the idea of positive liberty as freedom to realize the self.

Austin’s language analysis reinforces the identification of plural values since singular value terms like freedom, equality, or justice can represent alternative values as clarified in
Thus pluralism requires not only compromise or balance among competing values like the potential conflict between freedom and equality, but also requires compromise among different uses or senses of single value terms like the different senses of “freedom” or the different meanings of “equality.”

The pluralist view that has been summarized in the preceding discussion has been invoked to demonstrate the inadequacy of Platonic monism in the understanding of political values. Consequently, it has provided the basis for criticism of the view that has surfaced in revolutionary periods in which the ideal values or fundamental conditions for a good and just political or economic society can be identified through a “short list” of fundamental values. This criticism can be extended to its opposite pole so that it suggests the existence of an internally related social fabric which is implicit in the survival of the society and cannot be readily separated into “short lists” of constitutive values. Accordingly, there has emerged a division between an emphasis on the presupposed social fabric that can be ruptured in periods of rapid social change which is represented in conservatism and an emphasis on the identification of a “short list” of minimal fundamental values which is represented in liberalism.

In interpreting the lines of that division, the conservative position, as buttressed by social anthropology, would seek to uncover the multiple tacit values which are reflected in the practices of a society.

Thus, even the most primitive form of trade, including barter, presupposes specific traits of human nature such as the ability to communicate as well as the existence of some degree of trust between buyers and sellers. The trader’s market could not be sustained if there were a routine expectation that, after the seller has exposed his wares and the buyer his money, each party will resort to attempted murder of the other. Alongside the practices of trust in the
marketplace, there also must take place the development of the institutions of skeptical mistrust with rules for accountability and for punishment for violations of trust.

Again, no business enterprise could function without some recognition of the value of deportment by the agents of the enterprise as well as their development of an ethic of work habits and some sense of loyalty. Yet, every enterprise would become excessively burdensome if there were no possibility of leaving the enterprise or asserting one’s independence against the establishment. There is some factual basis for the anthropological assertions that the existence of a family unit is a condition for the development of an ethic of responsibility as well as for the practice of deferred consumption that leads to savings and, in a term from the vocabulary of economics, capital formation.

In his sociology of religion, Max Weber developed the thesis that the transformation of the religious ascetic tradition to an inner asceticism in Protestantism generated an ethic which was crucial for the emergence of capitalism in the modern age. More generally, various aspects of human nature can be shown to have a role in the development of economic practices. Thorsten Veblen sought to uncover the basis within the American psyche for the exotic traits of economic behavior that he termed “conspicuous consumption and pecuniary emulation.” Apart from these Veblenesque attributions that counter the prudential aspects of the ethics of capitalism, it is worth recalling Shakespeare’s perennial recognition of the limits of prudential behavior in social practices. Thus, Shakespeare’s denizens of the household challenge the household’s prudential manager with their question: “Dost thou think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?”

The existence of a multiplicity of tacit values that are built into ongoing social practices provides the basis for the recognition by conservative thinkers like Burke or Oakeshott that a
rapid or radical change may, by interrupting the stable function of these values, have unintended and unanticipated negative consequences. Hence, the arguments against rapid or revolutionary change in the recognition of the unrecognized price of disruption of functioning institutions whose tacit values have not been explicitly calculated.

On the other side of the division, critics, reformers, and revolutionaries of any society have identified crucial criteria for a good and just society which have provided the basis for arguments for change, reform, or revolution. Thus, the spectrum of social analysis ranges from the recognition by social anthropologists and political conservatives of the plurality of values that are embedded in the development of social institutions at one pole and the formulation by political liberals, radicals and revolutionaries of the short list of necessary values that must be realized in the society in order for a society to gain justification and legitimacy at the other pole.

The Platonic “short list” in *The Republic* of Wisdom, Courage, Justice, and Temperance has previously been mentioned. The more revolutionary list of liberté, égalité, and fraternité forms a triad which has had extended resonance throughout the modern period. The seventeenth-century theorists that antedated the writing of the American constitution provided a “short list” of natural rights that characteristically included the natural right to life, liberty and property.

The fusion in constitutional law of a “short list” of rights is free from the monistic curse of coercive utopianism since it was embedded within the institutional practices of a traditional society. The absolutist element in a theory of natural rights, in the United States as in Great Britain, for example, was transformed since these rights were subject to judicial procedures with the inevitable result of compromise in cases of conflict among rights as well as expansion or limitation in the interpretation of rights in their application to specific conditions.
The division between the conservative pole that limits rapid social change because it appreciates the tacit values that form the basis for existing social practices and the liberal pole that advances rapid social change because it seeks to realize a short list of fundamental values that may overturn existing social practices, is not resolvable by direct empirical evidence. These two views are not competing hypotheses that are subject to verification or crucial experiment. They reflect underlying attitudes toward society, as well as competing interpretations of major historical events. Consequently, although there are reasons in support of either view, there is no form of verification that can guarantee convergence, consensus or mediation between these opposing perspectives.

In confronting the argument in support of a “short list” of fundamental values pluralism is also required to consider the claim that justice has a special status as a primary virtue. This claim has been celebrated in recent philosophy through the advocacy of John Rawls in his *Theory of Justice*. Rawls has supported his argument for the primacy of justice in terms of Kantian universalist rationality. Accordingly, Rawls developed a new basis for egalitarianism that came to the fore with the disillusionment and loss of faith in the Marxist thesis for an egalitarian classless society that had its origins in Hegelian historicism. Rawls’s account of the primacy of justice identifies Justice as including both the value of liberty and the value of equality. Rawlsian theory avoids the charge of being a coercively utopian egalitarian blueprint for a society since his set of values are formulated in a hypothetical context and are not to be applied without revision to the context to any historical society. Rawls’s formulation of the primacy of justice reads as follows: “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought.”
The pluralist response takes several directions. In accepting Austin’s language analysis with its thesis of the polyguity of value terms, the primacy of justice is confronted by the multiple interpretations of “justice.” These include the understanding of Justice as a general, overarching value that is equivalent to the condition formed by the complete removal of any imperfection or wrong within a society. From this perspective, a just society is necessarily a utopian or maximal ideal, since any imperfection or wrong represents harm to an individual that can be

Alternatively, Justice has been interpreted as a retrospective virtue only, that is, Justice comes into operation after there has been a violation of rules with little relation to the good or the ideal. Accordingly, Justice is “done,” that is, both carried out and completed, when the violation is rectified to an appropriate degree.

Along other lines, the pluralist can recognize that there have been many other candidates for primacy. These include Thomas Hobbes’s thesis that order is the first necessary virtue of any human society. Accordingly, in some contexts, justice is identified with order and injustice with disorder.

Consistent with a narrower interpretation of justice, David Hume, in the context of the practices of an economy, suggested that the “original” of Justice is not a primary natural intuition of fairness or that Justice is derived from the existence of such natural rights as the right to liberty and the right to property. Rather, for Hume, the rules of justice are a necessary invention in human society that takes place in order to stabilize the “scant resources” of private and public property in a community characterized by “confin’d generosity.” Thus, the importance of Justice is based upon its function in the stabilization of property, for without rules of Justice, these scant
resources that are available would be wasted by the instability that would occur in a society where violations of other persons’ property would not receive appropriate punishment.

Justice, in its early formulations in religion, myth, and literature, was identified with the concept of “poetic justice,” that is, retribution for a violation in both kind and proportion as an aspirational ideal. This model can be generalized into the thesis that Justice requires that every violation of the law or norm receive rectification, restoration, restitution, redress, reparation, redemption or retribution without specifying which of these several forms may be required by Justice. From this perspective, Justice is, as previously noted, a retrospective or reflective virtue. In the absence of violations, the concept of Justice does not obtain. A just system is then equivalent to a system in which everyone who has violated the law receives an appropriate form of rectification, while anyone who is innocent or not guilty of a violation suffers no such rectification or retribution. From such a perspective, there is no role for Justice as an ordering, reforming, or guiding virtue.

This perspective of Justice, which seems to fit a criminal justice system, represents a narrow interpretation of Justice as distinct from the broad interpretation that Justice is the condition of an ideal society such that any flaw or lack of perfection in a society can be identified as an injustice. Thus, an ideal society and a just society have a certain degree of synonymy and a society which falls short of the ideal repairs itself by its struggle against injustice for the realization of the just universe. In such contexts, the just society is conceptually merged with the good society and the ideal society and it is evidenced in the identification of the quest for the just society with the quest for the good society or the ideal society.

Aristotle, like Hume, is a partisan for a narrow, rather than a broad, conception of Justice. Aristotle adds to the conception of legal justice that requires that every violation of the law
receive appropriate rectification, the additional criterion that the law or norm itself may not
discriminate for irrelevant reasons. The principle of formal justice requires that similar cases be
treated similarly and thus a form of equality before the law has been recognized. The logical
contrapositive of Aristotle’s injunction against discrimination for irrelevant reasons permits
differentiation for relevant reasons only. Consequently, Aristotle has justified the principle of
hierarchy and has thereby placed himself in opposition to an interpretation of justice as requiring
substantive equality.

The relationship between Justice and Equality has been essentially contested over the
ages. In many contexts that are relevant to economics, from biblical prophecy and medieval
religious theories to Marxism and to Rawlsian distributive justice, there have been efforts to
establish an intrinsic relationship between the value of justice and the value of equality. Yet, it is
not difficult in some contexts to draw the distinction between justice and equality.

An informal poll of Columbia students indicates intuitive responses that support a
distinction between Justice and Equality in particular contexts. Thus, in the context of whether
there is an injustice if there exists inequalities in talents among persons, using such examples as
whether it is unjust if Einstein is so much more gifted in physics than the students at Columbia or
Mozart so much more gifted in music than even the faculty of composition at Columbia, there is
a clear affirmation that such inequalities are not necessarily unjust. It is an interesting speculation
as to how this intuition would change if it were developed within a framework of genetic
modification so that preferential access to desired genetic qualities in offspring were to be
available.

In the context of grading, students do not accept inequality as unjust in the sense that the
higher grades that are earned by better performance are perceived as just in contrast to an equal
grade distributed to all the students of the class derived from the total point count of exams and papers divided by the number of students. The vocabulary of grades to be earned in an accepted institution of course grading provides the relevant context for this choice of rewarding excellence as distinct from distribution from a fixed asset total to students who are equally worthy of participation in the class.

The pluralist thesis on the issue of the divergent social values in diverse historical contexts is not relativistic but it does not affirm the primacy of any single virtue, whether justice, order, equality or liberty. In different historical contexts, pluralists can recognize that different values will achieve priority. Thus the value of freedom might well receive priority in a society where many individuals suffer from forms of slavery, other forms of servitude, or repression. Yet, in a society where people possess freedom and rights, if large numbers of the population suffer from economic deprivation or starvation, then it is understandable that bringing an end to such deprivation will receive a high priority. Societies that suffer from perennial warfare yearn for peace as the primary value, while societies that live under peaceful conditions for a long time may recognize a summons to ideals that involve risks and danger to the security of human life. Such speculation that has received partial confirmation in historical examples provides a basis for the thesis that there is no antecedent absolute primary value.

The recognition that plural values are relative to particular contexts does not bring with it the implication that the pluralist thesis supports moral relativism. Berlin’s formulation of his philosophical goal as “pluralism without relativism” may not have been realized in the essay “Pursuit of the Ideal” but his rejection of monism did not lead to relativism. The grounds for objectivity of plural values is the requirement that any value statement must be supported by
reasons along with the thesis that statements of reasons are cognitive statements, that is, admit of truth or falsity. The reasons that support a value must be true, relevant and strong reasons.

The history of controversy over value claims confirms that the appeal to reasons provides an objective standard since it excludes an appeal to reasons in cases where supportive reasons are not true or are irrelevant. It is significant for the refutation of relativism in ethics that the worst architects of moral disasters in the 20th century felt themselves obligated to provide a rationale or rationalization for their actions and policies. The reasons that were provided in these rationales and rationalizations were marked by reference to statements that were not factually true as well as their reference to statements that were not relevant to the problems that were being confronted. More generally, the philosophical thesis of “pluralism without relativism” can be supported if the interpretation of a “reason” can be a reference to a cognitive assertion that can be judged to be true.

The preceding commentary on moral pluralism and moral objectivity leads, in this essay, to the examination of two controversial issues in contemporary political economy. These controversies involve the relationship among concepts or conceptual clusters.

The first issue is the connection between free markets, or what has been identified as freedom in the economic sphere, and political freedom, or what has been identified as freedom in the political sphere. In the analysis of this cluster of concepts, the concept of free markets brings with it the idea of economic growth and the concept of political freedom brings with it the idea of the consent of the governed.

The second issue is the priority of targeting equality as a means for the reduction of poverty and deprivation as distinct from targeting economic growth as the preferable means to
such a reduction. In considering this cluster of concepts, there is the related problem of the necessity of limits on economic growth, including the concept of sustainable growth.

In both of these examples there have been philosophical arguments, ideological theses as well as historical evidence regarding the necessary connections or conceptual relations that obtain among the plural values in each cluster of concepts. This essay examines the necessary connections and conceptual relations that have been asserted.

One theme that emerges in the discussion of each these examples is the limits of philosophy in providing a hierarchy among these values. Moreover, there is a significant distance between the philosophical formulation of the possible relations among the concepts that are examined and the empirical facts that provide evidence for the actual relations among these concepts during particular historical moments.

So, any proposed philosophical foundations insofar as they provide guidance for decision-making in economics are limited. Accordingly, it is a familiar and recognized generalization that decision-making would be based upon the priority of values that are accepted at the moment in which decisions are made as well as the perception of empirical realities and the perspectives of alternative policies that are held during the process of decision making. These values and these empirical materials provide the reasons for decisions in economics.

In the analysis of these examples, as in the general theory of pluralism that has been sketched in this section of the essay, there are no philosopher-kings. There are also no economic monarchs. Monarchy has been replaced by what can be termed polyarchy, with its dependence on plural values that require adjudication and compromise. While the rule of philosopher-kings or of monarchs often made claims of infallibility that were not realized, polyarchy also does not avoid fallibility in its decision-making.

The intellectual support for the idea of free markets with the accompanying belief that instituting free markets would lead to an increase in economic growth was related to the greater importance that was ascribed to individual freedom throughout the early modern period. The importance of individual freedom was expressed in modern movements in both religion and science that emphasized freedom of conscience and freedom of inquiry. This expansion of the scope of freedom was also expressed in new political arguments that asserted that the free consent of the governed was a necessary condition for the legitimacy of governmental authority. Thus, the intellectual support for the free market in economics and its connection to economic development in the modern period was related conceptually to the plural values associated with individual freedom as well as with the value of democracy.

The background context for economic theories regarding free markets was various new foundations for the value of individual freedom. According to Kantian theory, the external moral authority ascribed to Natural Law that reflected divine law and was compatible with the ethical commandments of divine revelation, was supplanted by the centrality of the individual, free, rational being. These rational beings, through the exercise of their free will, legislated moral imperatives that were universalizable for a community that was comprised of all rational beings. In this Enlightenment theory, Kant’s Copernican revolution had transferred the “sun” of moral authority from any external source in divine order or in national tradition to the free individual as rational being.

More generally, as derived both from the shared aspects in the modern age of the Protestant Reformation and the scientific revolution, the concept of freedom of the individual
recognized the free individual as obligated only by his own individual conscience on moral and religious questions and bound only by the Natural Light of Reason or the evidence of experimental inquiry in areas of empirical and historical matters. The free individual believer, like the free scientific rational inquirer, stood in sharp contrast to the dutiful individual who was obligated from birth as a member of an historical community, bound by divine command and sacred text as interpreted by religious authority and also bound by inherited traditions of place and time to his position in the social hierarchy.

The heightened value of freedom of the individual is also evident in political and economic thought. In political thought, freedom of the individual generated new theories about the rational citizen who could assert his individual natural rights as an autonomous person, even imagining himself as capable of living outside any political society in a hypothetical state of nature with freedom of contract that would enable him to determine his entrance or exit from the political order. The idea that the individual could relate contractually with a sovereign emphasizes the significance of mechanisms of consent of the governed in the justification of political authority.

In economic thought, the free individual could be recognized as the agent in a free marketplace who would make rational choices that satisfied his needs or maximized his interests. This economic agent possessed freedom of contract in all of his economic relationships, as worker, employer, buyer, and seller, or investor. A strong justification for this degree of economic freedom was that the outcome of these individual choices in a free market would generate, by an invisible hand, optimal prices, including the price of labor or the price of products.
Thus, the free market was considered to be preferable to governance by an authority that obligated persons to fulfill traditional duties toward the common good. These duties included public service and also, with special significance from an economic perspective, the setting and observance of a “just price” for money, goods, or labor. The optimality of the invisible hand of the free market implied economic development for the society, that is, reduction of poverty and deprivation to a degree far beyond that envisaged within the historical tradition of the visible hand that set moral standards for economic practices.

Freedom of the individual was evident in the contextual background of continental liberalism which drew a sharp distinction between the economic sphere that was subject to “private law” and the economic sphere which could be entered into by public law or government. (In this connection, an interesting local referent is the recognition that the current department of “Political Science” at Columbia originally bore the name of the department of “Public Law,” reflecting Columbia’s transformation in the latter part of the nineteenth century.) In private law, the individual agent would pursue his own private interest or special interest. Thus, the landlord or tenant would freely contract for the optimal rent or the optimal services under the terms of the lease, as each party perceived and supported its interests. The public law would exclude any involvement in the negotiation of consent among private interests but would be limited to activities in the public interest. Thus, in the case where the landlord and the tenant respectively pursue their special interests, the public law could assert that contracts which were mutually arrived at after a meeting of the minds could be enforced by governmental action or that the government must guarantee the fixity of the legal tender under which the services were to be provided or the rent to be paid. This distinction between the private interest and the public interest provided the basis for free market activity in Continental Liberalism.
In classical liberalism, the distinction was drawn between the working of the free market or private sector, in which individual agents asserted their property rights and were free to compete in a competitive market place with profit incentives and minimal governmental intervention, and the public sector in which the government’s role was limited to residual functions in the public interest, such as public defense and public education. In both continental liberalism and classical liberalism, the concept of freedom of the individual in economic activities was connected to constraints upon governmental intervention in the economy. The background justification of free markets in the economic theory of classical liberalism was compatible with value pluralism. Adam Smith’s theory of moral sentiment recognized plural moral values, including the value of public education, national security, as well as increasing the wealth of the nation. For Smith, the free market in which the private sector operated existed alongside a public sector and a “not-for-profit” non-governmental sector. The public sector would included responsibilities for public order and national security, public education, as well as controlled investment for necessary or justified activities that could not raise sufficient private capital. The not-for-profit non-governmental sector would include activities of the church as well as eleemosynary institutions that could supply necessary services for the welfare of needy persons, whether in the alleviation of hunger, or in homes for orphans and other public facilities. Thus, the value of economic growth through the private sector for the benefit of the individuals in contemporary society and in future generations was complemented by the recognition of the values of public order, national security, and public education, as well as the values of health and welfare including those that constitute what is currently termed the safety net for the poor and deprived of the society.
The historical record of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Europe and the United States suggested some degree of connection between the support for individual freedom and mechanisms for consent of the governed as they related to support for free markets and their positive impact on economic development. In liberal theory, this conjunction of economic and political freedom, as it were, received extensive commentary but was not developed as a necessary connection or historical law of development. Within doctrines of classical liberalism, and even to some extent the variant reformulations of liberalism, two conditions received emphasis.

The first condition was that governmental intervention in the private sector must be limited and could only represent a small proportion of economic activity. In the later theory of the Austrian economic school, the doctrinal economic thesis emerged that the free market would not function as an instrument for economic growth if the percentage of economic activity that entered into governmental taxation and subsequent expenditure rose above a fixed percentage of the total gross domestic product. While the constraints on the governmental sector remain, classical liberalism did recognize, as noted above, various economic roles for the public sector. In subsequent reformulations of liberalism, governmental activities were extended. Thus, L.T. Hobhouse argued that the Millean restrictions on governmental coercion of individuals and groups in economic affairs could be amended to permit government to constrain the coercive practices of corporations against trade unions when the balance of power between these two contending forces was heavily weighted in favor of the corporations. According to this amended liberalism, governmental intervention in the economy could be supported as consistent with liberal constraint on coercion as long as it was rectifying imbalances against farmers, workers, consumers or significant groups of the population.
Thus, a split developed within liberalism between classical liberals who identified liberalism with limiting governmental intervention for the sake of economic growth that was to be realized through free market activity and the new liberalism that supported government intervention ostensibly for the sake of lessening economic coercion in the market place and in social practices.

The second condition was that the continuing operation of free markets required some recognition of the principle of freedom in political governance as well as in the economic sphere. The thesis of a necessary connection between the values of individual freedom and the operation of free markets has never been completely clarified.

The minimal claim is that the operation of free markets requires the procedures embodied in rule of law and not necessarily the full panoply of individual freedoms and democratic institutions that would constitute a politically free society. The concept of rule of law has been interpreted so as to exclude only extremely arbitrary activity by rulers. The principle of rule of law would still have significant implications for political freedom. Rule of law, for example, is not compatible with economic activities that were carried out under the totalitarian rule of Stalin in the Soviet Union or by the Cultural Revolution of Mao in the People’s Republic of China. Similarly, there is little evidence of rule of law in the revolutionary dictates of Pol Pot and it is questionable whether the economic legislation of President Mugabe in Zimbabwe meets the standard of non-arbitrariness that is necessary for rule of law.

Yet various authoritarian governments which violate many expressions of human rights and also reduce the practices of democracy may still satisfy minimal conditions for the rule of law. Accordingly, the degree of individual freedom or political freedom that is deemed to be the
condition and consequence of free market activity is not univocally available in the arguments for the connection between political freedom and free markets.

Whatever the degree of connection that is asserted between the political and economic spheres, the historical record of many nineteenth and twentieth century states does support affinities and close connections between the values of individual freedom and the consent of the governed in the political sphere and the values of the free market as an instrument for economic development in the economic sphere. The emergence of classical liberalism and continental liberal nationalism in Europe accompanied tendencies toward an increase in individual freedom and the growth of mechanisms of consent in the political history of many European countries. In the twentieth century the movement for the reform of classical liberalism, as in the welfare state in Europe and the New Deal in the United States, as well as tendencies toward democratic socialism, particularly during periods of the perceived failure of free markets, may have represented a criticism of the thesis that economic growth presupposes a limited proportion for public investment as compared to the private sector. Thus, since these reform movements were not repudiations of democracy but were often continuous with parliamentary democracy, they suggest grounds for the refutation of a necessary connection between free markets and the continuation of political freedom and democracy. Yet the record of these democratic socialists or welfare liberal governments does not provide conclusive evidence against the thesis that there is a significant connection between free markets and political freedom and democracy. In part, this is because democratic socialist governments and liberal reformists have never completely abolished a significant degree of free market activity, which functions alongside the continuity of established traditions of individual freedom and political democracy.
In clarification of this issue an appropriate strategy is the examination of a focus on the strong ideological thesis, often attributed to Friedrich von Hayek, that there is a necessary connection between political freedom and free markets.

Thus, Sidney Hook, in his review of Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom*, which was written shortly after his own liberation from Marxist determinism, was concerned as to whether Hayek had adopted an inverse determinism. Just as Marxists had believed in a necessary connection between capitalist economics and the bourgeois political order with the state as “the executive committee of the bourgeoisie,” so Hook expressed concern about any inverse determinism in which a free market would be the necessary condition as well as the necessary consequence for political freedom or democracy. As a democratic socialist at that time, Hook argued that political freedom and democracy were compatible with a socialist economy just as in contrast to the Marxist thesis, political freedom and democracy could be sustained alongside a free market economy.

In Hayek’s numerous writings on history, there is no justification for any form of historical determinism. In the *Constitution of Liberty*, Hayek asserts that a free market economy is not compatible with the absence or breakdown of a rule of law. There is no unambiguous claim, however, that governments that undertake strong measures of economic regulation, a large program of investment or ownership in economic assets and many forms of economic intervention will cross the line into arbitrary intervention, illegal coercion and other violations of political freedom and democracy. Hayek explicitly recognizes that some measures of socialization or nationalization do not necessarily violate rule of law.

There may be a greater potential for dictatorial action when a government possesses instruments of control over the economic affairs of the society and can abolish free markets. The
20th century has demonstrated significant examples of the totalitarian potential that has been made possible by political control of the economic affairs of a society. Yet whether this potential will be realized in all cases is not determined by an historical law of the necessary connection between political freedom and free markets. Hayek’s thesis holds that any government that violates the rule of law will be unable to sustain a free market so that its economy will suffer the consequences in weakened economic growth.

The complexities of history provide both evidence in favor of as well as evidence against the thesis of a “necessary connection.” Thus, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, several imperial regimes sought to follow what they took to be the model of Great Britain in developing free market institutions in their home economies. One example is suggested by the pro-free market reforms that were initiated by Premier Stolypin in Russia between 1906 and 1911 including privatization of land ownership against the state patrimonial rights and the historic privileges of the landed gentry. Stolypin’s agenda did not include political reform alongside his economic reforms. Yet his assassination was apparently supported by pro-Czarist groups who believed that liberal economic reform would necessarily lead to political change that would lessen the absolutism of the authority exercised by the Russian czar. Thus, the thesis of “necessary connection” is supported by the opponents of economic reform while it was denied by the advocate of economic reform.

A more piquant example is the juxtaposition of the manifestly repressive measures taken by the government of Augusto Pinochet in Chile alongside the importation by that regime of economists from the University of Chicago and the implementation of free market economic reforms. The empirical situation remains a conjunction of the political repression of freedom and the strengthening of free markets, even if one were to accept a justification of the coup of
Pinochet. Baroness Thatcher, for example, has argued that Pinochet was legitimately responding to the effort of Premier Allende to extend the one-time electoral plurality of his socialist party into a permanent Castro-like regime with no future free elections, as in the mantra of “one person, one vote – one election.” In such a justification, it is also required that Pinochet would restore democratic elections in Chile after a reasonably short interval. It can further be argued that Pinochet’s implementation of free market economic reforms provided a brake on his dictatorial power, since it excluded his intervention in most economic institutions and activities. The recognition of such a limitation does not mitigate the extreme brutality and excess of the political acts that were committed during the dictatorial regime of Pinochet. The independence of political policy from economic policy is indicated by the decisions of a subsequently elected prime minister of Chile (whose father had been tortured in prison during the Pinochet regime) to continue support for free market economic policy, even as she reversed the political legislation against dissidents. In abandoning the Allende government’s plans for a socialist Chilean state, there would appear to be an element of justification of the connection between free market reforms in Chile and political democracy. Yet the complexity of the episode that has been limned could also support the view that political freedom or dictatorship was independent of socialist of free market economic choices.

Despite the ambiguity of the historical record, a relevant feature of the examination of the thesis of the necessary connection between institutions of political freedom or democracy and the economic institutions that relate to market freedom has been the pervasive belief at particular periods that there exists a “necessary connection.” Thus, by the last decade of the twentieth century, there was a widespread perception that socialist economic regimes had experienced a high degree of economic failure. The Soviet Union was considered to be economically stagnant
over several decades. During the same period, Maoist China was considered to have failed to lessen poverty among its vast population and the subsequent revelations of famine were already hinted at in reports from China. The economic systems of the communist East European states including East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and the Baltic Republics were also judged to have suffered a lack of economic growth under the rule of their respective communist parties. This general attitude was sharpened when there was convergence upon an economic verdict that slow growth had taken place in economies of major countries that had been influenced by socialist theories and policies, such as India in its early decades of independence as well as many of the newly independent and self-declared socialist states of Africa, like Ghana during of Kwame Nkrumah’s rule, Guinea during the governance of Sékou Touré and Tanzania under the leadership of Julius Nyerere.

The extent of the belief in some version of a necessary connection between the economic performance of free markets and the institutions of political freedom in the last decades of the twentieth century was dramatically demonstrated in the history of the last decade of the Soviet Union. During that period, Yuri Andropov, the head of the KGB in the Soviet Union, had observed the economic stagnation of the Soviet economy under Breznnev and undertook to realize greater economic growth. Andropov was apparently among those who considered the situation of the Soviet Union to be that of possessing a “First-World” military capacity which could not be sustained over the long run by its “Third-World” economic capacity. The relevant point for this context is that the amelioration of the Soviet Union’s economic deficiency would require, in the view of Andropov, reform of its political institutions in the direction of greater individual freedom and democracy. Consequently, Andropov supported the appointment of Gorbachev to be the President of the Soviet Union and also supported his policies his liberal reforms. From this
perspective, the originating motivation for the initiation of political reforms under President Gorbachev was not a belief in the intrinsic value of individual freedom and political democracy but a belief that political reform was a condition for improvement in the economic performance of the Soviet Union.

The thesis of the necessary connection between the political and economic spheres was further evidenced in the optimism of Russian political and economic policy in the early years of the Yeltsin government. There was a widespread belief that privatization and free markets would go forward in tandem with the realization of democracy in Russia.

During roughly the same period, the Chinese Communist Party undertook the effort to reverse Maoist socialist programs through the introduction of free market reforms and the institutions of a capitalist economy, including privatization of collectivist agriculture and nationalized industries as well as support for foreign capital investment. In undertaking this new economic policy, the Chinese Communist Party leadership recognized that these changes would be accompanied by lessening the severity of the controls that had been exerted on cultural life, economic decisions and individual freedom in China. The degree of political change that accompanied economic reforms was limited, but in order to realize its improved economic performance, the Chinese government was required to move toward the institutions of the “rule of law.” A prerequisite for foreign investment, for example, was the adoption of procedures that allowed adjudication of contractual agreements in accordance with the impartial standards of the rule of law. The growth of foreign trade and investment presupposed a greater degree of transparency and openness within the Chinese economy and society.

Along these lines, economic reforms in a number of formerly Communist societies in the last decade of the twentieth century were connected to political reform. The thesis of the
necessary connection between free markets with higher rates of economic growth and political freedom with greater democracy was sustained by a record of economic improvement in some former Socialist countries, highlighted by the extraordinary economic growth rates of post-Maoist China. Moreover, in several East European states, like Poland or Estonia, there was evidence of the realization of both the institutions of political democracy and the institutions of free markets.

An additional confirmation of the strength of the contemporaneous belief in the connection between political freedom and economic free markets may be found in an essay of that period, which achieved a striking degree of resonance in the public forum. Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History* suggested that the ideologies that had supported political dictatorship and economic socialism had lost their standing. The end of intellectual debate between the Communist ideology as it had been implemented in the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China and the ideology that espoused the union of free markets and political democracy marked the end of the major historical conflict of the post-war period. The “end of history” that had been envisaged by Hegel a century and a half earlier had taken place. Fukuyama’s use of the phrase, the “end of history” indicated his conclusion that there could be and would be no new doctrine that would contest the belief in political freedom and economic free markets at which global society had arrived. (The thesis of the end of history does not exclude the continuation of numerous historical episodes including multiple small wars or acts of terrorism, many of which were viewed as relics of past religious, nationalist or ideological beliefs.)

Just as the preceding prophecy of the end of ideology in the late 1950’s (Daniel Bell’s book *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*, was published in
1960) was confronted by the rise of the ideology of the New Left in the late 1960’s, so the thesis of the end of history was confronted by the reversal of support of political freedom and free markets in Russia after the decade of Yeltsin’s rule. The perceived failure of the privatization process and other measures of economic reform during the Yeltsin period were to resurrect a corpus of historical beliefs in a familiar litany against “capitalist democracy.” In their restored form, these post-Yeltsin views branded political freedom as anarchic and incapable of carrying out political control of aggressive capitalist, oligarchic behavior or of implementing the necessary balance between order and freedom. From this perspective, free markets were not capable of limiting excessive inequality or providing the needed safety net for a large number of the population.

The reaction to the democratic reforms of Yeltsin that led to the triumph of President Vladimir Putin and his policies did not take place in Communist China, in part because the Chinese Communist party leadership had never abandoned its control of the political and economic institutions of China. Thus, the system of domination by a single Communist party was maintained with its constraints of both political freedom and free market economic activity. In contemporary Russia and China, the values of social order and stability have been asserted as countervailing values against any movement toward individual freedom and political democracy.

Despite the record of the reversal of political and economic reform in Russia and of the continuity of single-party rule in China, the thesis of the necessary connection between political freedom and free markets has retained a measure of verification. In both these societies, a greater degree of individual freedom and political democracy has accompanied an increase in free markets and private ownership of the means of production. Thus, some steps toward the rule of law were undertaken in both of these societies as conditions for the improvement of economic
performance and growth. Yet, the recognized degree of symbiosis between economic reform and political change in Russia and in China falls short of a confirmation of a strong version of an Hayekian vision of the historical convergence of free market institutions and the accompanying institutions of political freedom and democracy.

There has been no adequate historical analysis of the failure of the economic and democratic reforms of the Yeltsin period in Russia. Accordingly, there has been no clarification of the degree to which the failure of the Yeltsin program could be attributed to a failure in the implementation of economic privatization and democratic reform, or whether it should be attributed to structural features of the former Soviet Union, or even to deeper roots in aspects of Russian history. Such an historical analysis could contribute to the current effort within Russian society as of 2011 to aspire to a post-Putin Russia with greater potential for economic growth and greater democratic freedom. The clarification of the conditions under which a movement toward free markets and political democracy failed in Russia, while the continuation of one-party rule and economic privatization appeared to succeed in China, would also help to resolve the connections that can be said to exist between free markets and political freedom.

The perception of the limits upon the movement toward free markets and political democracy in former Communist societies, particularly in the People’s Republic of China, has provided the basis for a counterargument against the necessary connection between free markets and political freedom. In Ian Bremmer’s ironically-titled book The End of the Free Market, the interpretation of the Financial Crisis of 2008 supports the contrary view. Bremmer’s argument is that the previous widespread perception of a connection between political freedom and economic development received a stunning and permanent reversal during the economic crisis of 2008. According to this line of argument, the barely averted collapse of the banking system of the
United States and the ensuing recession in the United States and Europe demonstrated that the institutions of politically free societies were inadequate for the necessary regulation of economic markets, particularly global financial markets. They were unable to contain the activities of special interest groups in manipulating market behavior with the results that brought about economic regression rather than economic progress and development for many countries.

In sharp contrast to the failure of the Western model during this recent period of financial crisis, the success of the Chinese model in maintaining economic growth was evident. Again, from this perspective, this success demonstrated that government intervention and control of the activities of economic markets, as exercised in China was preferable, to the unregulated anarchy or freewheeling interest group activity of the American or European marketplace. By this comparative pragmatic test, the Chinese model was more effective in realizing economic growth than the model of democratic political freedom cum free markets.

Bremmer speculates on the implications of his argument that greater economic growth can be realized in societies in which governments exercise greater economic controls as compared to societies in which free markets operate with more limited regulation. Thus, Bremmer suggests the possibility that the pendulum of global public opinion, as it were, has shifted from support for free markets and political freedom that characterized the last decades of the twentieth century toward governmental intervention and control of markets after the Financial Crisis of 2008. This shift of opinion toward the rejection of the thesis of the connection between free markets and political freedom does not, however, disprove the thesis, but may point toward a more ominous future in which constraints on political freedom and limits on free market activities will take place with negative results for human progress and welfare. The current tendencies toward strong governmental regulation of the economy and a large public
sector within a number of developing countries as well as within the newer, revolutionary regimes of the Arab world, even as elections for governmental offices increase in those countries, will provide numerous test cases for the hypothesis for the connection between free markets and political freedom in the near future.

The ongoing historical events that will provide a degree of confirmation or refutation for the thesis of a necessary connection will differ from the opinions that are based upon a snapshot comparison as of 2008 between the economically developed societies such as the United States or Western Europe and the emerging societies, such as China, India or Brazil. Economic historians, like Professor Niall Ferguson, who project the continued growth of the Chinese economy so that its Gross Domestic Product surpasses that of the United States before 2025 do not thereby necessarily support or advocate the superiority of the current Chinese model over Western models like that of the United States. Among other grounds for this distinction between a prediction of continued economic growth in China and advocacy for the superiority of the Chinese model of political control of the economy, is the possibility that, in order to realize the prediction of greater economic growth, reform in the practices of rule of law, the scope of political freedom and in the transparency of economic institutions will be required in China during the next two decades. Professor Ferguson has recently asserted that the weakness of the rule of law, as well as the excessive limits on operation of free markets in China, will have negative consequences for the economic and societal progress of China in the future, despite its currently continuing high economic growth rate.

The plural values of individual freedom and consent of the governed in the political sphere as well as the values of free markets and economic growth in the economic sphere can be justified independently from each other. The justification of each of these plural values depends
upon the reasons that can be provided for their support. The grounds of support for each of these values may include the claim that each is a condition or consequence of the other, as is has been argued for in the thesis of the necessary connection between free markets and political freedom. Yet, the connections among these values would not be the only reason for their justification.

The recognition of the requirement of the independent justification for each value claim leads us back to the philosophical thesis of moral pluralism that was identified in Part I of this essay. The argument for pluralism leads toward skepticism regarding the desirability of a unitary political vision. This skepticism has been expressed in rhetorical flourishes against utopianism, social engineering and large-scale technological planning in political theory and practice. Accordingly, moral pluralism tends toward an emphasis in political theory and practice on balance, compromise and reconciliation among competing values and conflicting interests.

Affinities and connections among plural values, however, can receive a degree of empirical confirmation. The plural values that have formed the focus for this discussion, that is, individual freedom, consent of the governed, free markets and economic growth, have been considered to be intrinsically valuable with their justification supported by reasons that are judged to be relevant, true and strong. At the same time, they have also been considered as means for the achievement of a good society and a just political or economic order. The confirmation or refutation of the importance of these values and of their continued place as elements of a good and just society, in light of recent historical developments that have brought new emphases on other values, such as the new stress on social cohesion and group solidarity, which may challenge a belief in free markets, or a new balance between secular values and historic religious traditions, which may challenge the belief in individual freedom, remains unresolved. The thesis that there has been significant connection between free markets and
individual freedom throughout several historical periods and in diverse societies remains reasonably demonstrable.
III. Pluralism and the Limits of Philosophy: The Example of Conceptual Relations among Equality, Growth, Lessening of Poverty or Deprivation and Sustainability

The value of freedom, whether in personal, political, or economic dimensions, has conventionally confronted the value of equality. The basis for this confrontation is the historical experience that the realization of equality has tended to require constraints on freedom. These constraints on freedom, for the sake of social or economic equality, can be recognized even if it is conceded that a free society could not be constituted unless it also recognized some value like an equality of concern for all human beings. The identification of a conflict among these two fundamental values has not deterred the formulation of a political or social ideal in which freedom and equality are conjoined.

In the context of economic policy, the question of the conflict or complementarity between the values of liberty and equality has involved a significant shift of focus. One focus that has emerged is whether the targeting of economic growth or the targeting of economic equality should have priority as a means toward the lessening of poverty or deprivation.

A preliminary survey of the philosophical literature on equality seems to indicate that it contrasts with the economic discussion of equality in that less attention is directed toward the role of economic growth as a means for the reduction of poverty or deprivation. The Rawlsian effort to provide a standard for distributive justice, for example, involves a definition of justice that includes the priority of both liberty and equality independent of the question of economic growth. In one significant Rawlsian formulation, justice for a hypothetical society requires acceptance of the Difference Principle. The Difference Principle states that inequalities are arbitrary except when they are for the benefit of the most disadvantaged. An extremely literal reading of the Difference Principle would suggest that the offering of an unequal scholarship to
Einstein for physics or to Mozart for musical composition would be unjust unless it could be proven that these scholarships (presumably awarded in order to foster the potential contribution of Einstein to physics or of Mozart to music) would benefit the most disadvantaged persons in the society. In a less strictly literal interpretation of the Difference Principle in the context of executive compensation, extreme inequalities between the salaries of the top executives in a business enterprise and those whose salaries are at the bottom could be justified if such inequalities led to the economic growth of the enterprise with the result that the bottom salaries were greater than they would have been in an egalitarian enterprise with no gap between those at the top and those at the bottom.

The general intuition, as previously noted, that scholarships based on merit or potential contribution do not violate justice suggests that inequalities can be justified even if they are not, in a direct sense, for the benefit of the most disadvantaged because of the acceptance of values other than economic rewards or benefits. The example of differential executive compensation that is justified if it results in the economic growth of the enterprise suggests that inequalities are accepted if these inequalities lead to economic growth which may reduce poverty or deprivation. Economic growth that leads to a lessening of poverty or deprivation seems to accord with the Difference Principle, although only in some cases may it be shown that it actually provides benefits for the most disadvantaged. There would be an element of paradox in the demonstration that the Difference Principle, which is intended to foster substantive equality, could be used to justify inequality whenever such inequality leads to economic growth that may, in turn, possibly benefit the most disadvantaged. This discussion of the Difference Principle in suggested context of application, however, does not confront the Rawlsian use of this Principle, since Rawls develops this Principle in the context of a negotiation of the principles of a just society, rather
than the context of criteria of application to alternative options for distribution of assets or income in specified circumstances.

In a less complex and more straightforward quasi-historical illustration, the Constitution of Sparta represents a perennial ideal of equality without concern for economic growth. Plato may have adopted this Spartan model for the rules governing the ownership of property by the Guardians in the Republic, although this implementation of Sparta in the Republic may have been carried out with an ambiguous degree of irony. This “Spartan” or “Platonic” model formed part of the heritage of the egalitarian tradition carried out in monastic societies, agricultural collective societies, and urban communes at different historic periods. The idea of Sparta had combined a reference of the term to group solidarity and shared military virtue with its economic reference to simplicity, austerity, and the avoidance of luxury. There is some evidence that proponents of the Spartan model believed that economic growth would generate economic inequality, and there is more explicit evidence that they connected economic growth with the corruption of society and of the individual. In experiments in egalitarian group living, the reference to military solidarity was abandoned while primacy among virtues was ascribed to the value of equality.

(A propos of Spartan virtues, there is a defensive support for the austerity of the Spartan way of life narrated by Plutarch without any hint of irony. Since barrack quarters were a feature of housing in Sparta, there was often a lack of private space available for newlywed couples. Plutarch suggests the sweetness in the use of this adversity. Since the lack of private space does not allow the satisfaction of sexual appetites, the desire of the newlyweds is not slaked. The result is perceived as beneficial for the marriage since it prolongs the duration of the intense longing that binds the married couple.)
In most forms of modern egalitarianism, the bareness and austerity associated with Spartan egalitarianism are viewed as a negation of the promise of equality rather than as its fulfillment. In Marxism, for example, the “social forces of production” that have been fettered by the capitalist class relations of production are liberated so that the overcoming of the inequalities of capitalist society will lead to an affluent egalitarian society rather than to a Spartan egalitarianism. Thus, for Marxism, economic growth is a condition for the realization of the vision of an egalitarian commonwealth.

Independent of the Marxist connection between growth and equality, Bernard Williams has interpreted the idea of equality along lines which support a major extension of the welfare state, without the presupposition of a connection between equality and economic growth. In his essay, *The Idea of Equality*, Williams undertook the application of the method of ordinary language analysis which had been previously developed in the context of issues in metaphysics and epistemology by philosophers like Ludwig Wittgenstein, Gilbert Ryle, and John Austin, into the area of social and political philosophy.

Williams’s argument was that the idea of equality could be legitimately transposed from its minimalist interpretation in the Aristotelian thesis that formal equality requires that there be no differentiation for irrelevant reasons to a maximal thesis of substantive equality in the sense of “to each according to his need.” The transposition was carried out by Williams’s example in the context of health care. Williams argued that, in the treatment of illness, need was the “sole relevant reason” for receiving treatment. Accordingly, the minimal criterion for equality, namely, differentiation for relevant reasons, would lead to an egalitarian approach in which need would be the sole relevant reason for the distribution of health care.
Ability to pay was not a relevant reason for treatment of the illness. Williams recognized that ability to pay be could be understood as a “causally necessary condition of securing the right” to treatment. Yet, the ability to pay was not deemed to be a relevant reason.

Accordingly, an egalitarian healthcare system is justified on the grounds that it is a rational system, that is, a system in which the differentiations of treatment are determined by relevant reasons only. Consider as an illustration of this rationality, the example of a person who would request the services of a heart surgeon for a manicure and be prepared to pay the appropriate fee for this service. The implementation of this arrangement would represent medical irrationality, since the surgeon’s service would not be provided for the relevant reason of a heart ailment. The notion of rationality applied to medical contexts, however, can lead to the recognition of the legitimacy of economic rationality. Along such lines, a healthcare system must consider the economic arrangements that would be required in order for it to achieve the goal of having the sole relevant reason for the treatment of illness be the need of the patient. These arrangements would include incentives for the recruitment and retention of a medical profession, fostering the development of a productive pharmaceutical industry, or support for the maintenance of an effective system of hospitals. If a healthcare system were to be organized so that it could not provide a structure which would make possible the viability of the institutions that are necessary for health care, such as a medical profession, a pharmaceutical industry or a system of hospitals, it could be judged to be lacking in some form of financial or economic rationality.

The idea that need is the sole relevant reason for treatment must confront various challenges in its application. In the hypothetical case of infinite resources, there would appear to be little or no grounds for opposing a health care system which would endorse need as the sole
relevant reason. In the realistic cases of finite resources, alternative reasons other than need characteristically emerge as relevant.

When supply is greatly outstripped by demand, as in the case of various organ transplants, then relevant reasons other than need are introduced in decisions on the criteria which are used to evaluate patients who receive priority for transplants. This can be observed in the consideration of such reasons as the length of life after the transplant, the quality of life after the transplant, and even negligence or other grounds that led to the transplant as relevant reasons in the matching of the scarce resource with the waiting lists of clients.

Apart from this kind of special case, if Williams’s argument were accepted for a healthcare system, so that need would be the sole relevant reason for treatment of an illness of any individual, then experience has shown that the system would have to undertake rigorous measures in containment of costs. A significant political division exists at present between the proponents of hope who argue that such cost containment can be realized without drastic reduction of services and the proponents of experience who argue the unsustainability of the current perennial increases in the costs of health care.

More significantly for the context of this essay, a high rate of economic growth would be a condition for being able to sustain a health care system in which need would become the sole relevant reason for treatment of the illness of an individual. If the growth rate of the economy were to be far less than the growth rate of medical costs, it would become virtually impossible to carry out the rational practice of need as the sole relevant reason for treating the illness of the patient. In the absence of a strong measure of cost containment or a high rate of economic growth, the healthcare system would approach the situation projected long ago in the Jules Romain play, “Knock.” In that farce, Dr. Knock (acted inimitably by Louis Juvet), who holds
that nothing can be more important to a sick person than his health, looks forward with pleasure to the inevitable arrival at the situation where healthcare expenditures are equivalent to the entire Gross Product generated by the labor of the hardy peasants who live in the region of his medical practice. Thus, Bernard Williams’s interpretation of the idea of equality, in its effort to reduce deprivation in healthcare, must confront, in its application to empirical circumstances, the relationship between equality and economic growth.

The policy decision between targeting equality or targeting growth in order to reduce poverty would depend upon empirical knowledge of the consequences for the reduction of poverty by adoption of either of these alternatives in a particular circumstance. Background knowledge of the relationship between targeting equality or targeting growth and the reduction of poverty is insufficient for decision-making. Yet in the context of this essay, a review of several of the background factors that would be relevant for a decision between targeting equality or targeting growth can be presented.

Thus, there is some preliminary relevance and some degree of conceptual clarification in the recognition that there are contexts in which the targeting of growth can lead to a greater reduction of poverty. In simple and abstract terms, this can be illustrated by charting different consequences for poverty when differing growth rates are ascribed to different societies. A society whose rate of growth is negative or low and whose members have equal incomes will contain more poor persons than a society with a much higher growth rate in which there is a large gap between the incomes of the top members and lower members of the society.

Further, a relevant background generalization refers to the apparent difficulty of sustaining equality alongside a high rate of growth in most organized structures or parts of an organism. When growth is large or rapid, it would seem that there are often some parts of the
institution or the organism that experience spurts or rapid growth and other parts of the institution or organism that undergo slower growth. In the history of economic development within a society, the pattern that appears to emerge reflects a denial of an equal change throughout all parts, like the legendary case of the “One Horse Shay.” Rather, some portion of the whole moves rapidly at one point in time and may be overtaken by a lagging portion, which spurts at a later time. The conceptual possibility that growth brings with it inequality in the circumstances of historical change provides a background for decisions about the targeting of economic growth versus the targeting of economic equality in realizing the goal of the reduction of poverty.

Apart from these generalizations, the claim for the priority of targeting growth over the claim for targeting equality has been advanced by an interpretation of the relevant experience of twentieth century economic history. Many of those who support the case for the preference or priority of targeting economic growth consider the paradigmatic twentieth century socialist societies, like the Soviet Union under Lenin and Stalin and the People’s Republic of China under Mao, to be classless societies that have targeted equality. Accordingly, the economic stagnation that occurred in these societies and their failure to reduce poverty and deprivation is used to support the thesis that the targeting of economic equality does not bring about a reduction of poverty. This interpretation of the historical evidence proceeds to the argument that the non-socialist societies, particularly the United States, did realize a greater reduction of poverty in the course of the twentieth century. A universalization that is derived from this interpretation of this comparative history supports the policy that would target economic growth as preferable to targeting economic equality for the sake of reducing poverty.
The confirmation of this conclusion on the relative preference from targeting growth over targeting equality that has been derived from this interpretation of history is open to challenge. The evidence for stagnation during the last decades of the Soviet Union or of Maoist rule in China is strong, but the poor economic performance of the decade of the Yeltsin era, during which economic growth was targeted without reduction of poverty, must also receive an appropriate explanation.

The superlative growth rates of China after its turn away from Maoism with its consequent record of accomplishment in the abolition of poverty provides a measure of confirmation for targeting growth through a turn toward freer markets. Similarly, the improvement in the poverty statistics of India, with its apparent turn to an emphasis on economic growth, rather than its previous policy that appeared to target economic equality, seems to provide additional confirmation. The economic historian of these emerging states, however, may discover that economic variables that cannot be confined to a debate between targeting equality or targeting growth have greater relevance for the historical record of change in these states.

There has been a degree of ideological contest over the question of targeting economic growth versus targeting economic equality for the reduction of poverty in the case of Africa. Lord Bauer has condemned the policies that have pursued what he has termed “the Holy Grail of equality” in the effort to overcome extreme poverty in Africa. Along with others, he has argued that foreign aid aimed at realizing a greater degree of equality between Third World incomes and First World incomes has been counterproductive. From this perspective, economic development requires each individual African state to unleash its own mechanism for economic growth by discovering those areas in which it has “comparative advantage” and permitting the private sector to grow in those areas. There has been a degree of convergence between those who had
historically argued for policies of economic growth and those who have supported policies aimed at realizing equality. This consensus has arisen through their shared recognition of the importance of better governance, including the obvious criterion of the elimination of civil war and the reduction of governmental corruption. Despite that convergence, the disagreement in policy that reflects the emphasis on the targeting of equality versus an emphasis on the targeting of growth as a means for the reduction of poverty remains unresolved.

The “exceptional” character that is ascribed to American egalitarianism by the conventional reference to the “American Dream” bears a relationship to the issue of whether policies that target economic growth or those that target economic equality should be preferred in charting economic policies. The interpretation of the “American Dream” as representing a justified social and economic ideal includes the recognition that this ideal is consistent with inequality in the sense of a great gap between the income or assets of persons at the top of the society compared to the income or assets of those at the bottom. Accordingly, the “American Dream” as a representation of American egalitarianism negates substantive equality and various other interpretations of equality as the standard for an egalitarian society.

One interpretation of equality is the relatively minimal standard of “equality before the law.” This form of equality excludes various kinds of racial, religious or sexual discrimination. Equality before the law would not satisfy the norm of equality of opportunity, with its assumption of an equal starting point for all who participate in the chase. The egalitarianism of the “American Dream” accepts the standard of “equality before the law,” but does not presuppose the standard of “equality of opportunity.” Similarly, the “American Dream” has not sought to meet the standard of “fair equality of opportunity.” “Fair equality of opportunity” has been formulated as an interpretation of equality which would seek to provide affirmative action
to assist members of groups that have suffered historical deprivation to share equal opportunities with other groups that have not suffered historical deprivation. It also includes affirmative action, on grounds of diversity, to assist members of groups that have not been represented in the upper ranks of social institutions to realize opportunities for inclusion in these upper ranks.

There are certain circumstances in spheres of the American economy where equality before the law can be considered as meeting the standard of equality of opportunity. These circumstances are suggested by the analogy to different horse races. In the standard race, equality of opportunity, despite its recognition of the same starting point for all entrants, must also recognize the inequality of opportunities for victory that arise from differences in genetics or training. In a steeplechase event, however, the numerous obstacles and challenges of different types, the frequency of accidents and the role of luck may equalize the opportunities for victory of diverse entrants, despite their genetic differences or their differences in training. Some features of success in American economic life may demonstrate aspects of this analogy.

The major value that is affirmed within the “American Dream” after “equality before the law” is upward mobility. Within the “American Dream,” the belief in upward mobility includes the view that some persons will be able to rise from the lowest quintile of American income or assets to the highest quintile within one generation. It also includes the belief that significant numbers of persons will rise from the lower quintiles to the upper quintiles of income or assets within a generation. In addition, the upward mobility thesis includes the claim that there are multiple opportunities available, as well as many different ladders of upward mobility. The diversity of the upward ladders of mobility is important since it means that persons may rise in the scale of economic distribution in large numbers without being limited by the narrower funnel.
of entry through elite academic institutions, like Oxford or Cambridge, or constrained by the channels of ascent through limited vocational opportunities such as banking, law or medicine.

It is recognized that, if upward mobility is to take place, then there will also occur instances of downward mobility, so that some persons in the higher quintiles will descend to the lower quintiles. The most significant single test for the viability of the “American Dream” appears to be that a very large proportion of persons of each generation believes, on reasonable grounds, that it is better off than the preceding generation. The analysis of the “American Dream” indicates that equality before the law combined with a high degree of upward mobility can represent an interpretation of American egalitarianism that is independent of such values as equality of opportunity or substantive equality and can accept the inequality involved in a large gap between the top rungs of a society and the bottom rungs of the society.

It is also part of the understanding of the “American Dream” that the changes in the distribution of income and assets that are realized through upward mobility do not stem from economic redistribution. Accordingly, the continuation of upward mobility across generations would presuppose a significant measure of continual economic growth. It may be possible to transpose this vague “conceptual” account of the egalitarianism of the “American Dream” into an empirical formulation which would provide the specific figures for the rate of growth and for the number of years which are pre-requisites for a criterion of sufficient upward mobility.

Skeptics of this form of egalitarianism can pursue different lines of criticism. One line of criticism is the thesis that, whatever might be the past record, the current and future rate of growth of the economy and frequency of recessions will fail to meet the envisaged criterion for upward mobility or standard of “The American Dream.” A second line of criticism is that the value of equality should be interpreted with sufficient normative integrity such that it excludes a
system which justifies a great gap between those at the top and those at the bottom of the scale, even if this system satisfies criteria like upward mobility or reduction of poverty for large numbers of members of the society. A third line of criticism is that the “American Dream” has always ignored or minimized recognition of the conditions of those persons who live for shorter or longer periods at the bottom rungs of the economic ladder without sufficient regard for the alternative, egalitarian policies that could ameliorate their suffering. Among those who advance any one of these three lines of criticism, the interpretation of equality leads to advocacy for greater equality of opportunity or for fair equality of opportunity or for redistributive initiatives toward a realization of substantive equality.

Among economic theorists, a disagreement can be identified in the policy recommendations, particularly in taxation policy, between those who support targeting economic growth, even when it is accompanied by the increase of inequality as a means for the reduction of poverty, and those who advocate policies, including taxation policies that are aimed at the lessening of inequality as a prescription for an increase in growth with a consequent reduction in unemployment and, presumably, in poverty. The disagreement between the two approaches does not seem to involve an explicit disagreement over values, but is apparently based on economic theories and empirical evidence regarding the consequences of lowering taxes on investment that is aimed at increasing supply and, therefore, economic growth versus the consequences of lowering taxes on consumption that is aimed at increasing demand and, therefore, economic growth. Within this disagreement, there is an implicit element of value disagreement, since the former position does not aim at a reduction of inequality, but asserts that it would lead to a reduction of poverty, while the latter position asserts that its implementation would lead to a reduction of inequality. From the perspective of this essay, it is evident that the relationship
among such concepts as growth, equality and the reduction of poverty would require confirmation or refutation on empirical evidence alongside the resolution of any disagreement over values in order to emerge as part of a set of reasons for economic policies that would either aim to target growth or to target equality.

The consideration of targeting equality versus targeting economic growth as means toward the reduction of poverty does not comprehend the independent valuation that could be placed upon equality or upon growth. Well-known philosophical views have placed a high value on growth as self-realization or a quest for excellence for reasons which necessarily result in the demotion of equality within the hierarchy of values. Alternatively, the primacy of equality has been justified even if it were demonstrable that the implementation of equality would increase poverty within a society. Among the justifications for equality is the argument that economic inequality leads to a breakdown in social cohesion with a lack of individual voluntary participation in civil society and negative consequences for social order. Most of the champions of equality, including those who would rank it above values such as excellence, self-realization or the reduction of poverty, seldom explicitly confront the possibility that equality may be in conflict with these values. Rather, the assumption characteristically held by proponents of equality identifies equality as a means toward both human welfare and human excellence.

With the stress that has been placed on the value of growth, a pluralist examination of values would not only confront the correlative opposite of equality that has been considered, but would also explore diverse, countervailing or balancing values. A straightforward opposing candidate to “growth” in colloquial terms is “shrinkage” or “regression,” which bear a pejorative taint. Other terms of negation reflect the vocabulary of economics, including, “recession,” “stagnation,” the innovative economic term of art “stagflation” and possibly J.P. Morgan’s
realistic recognition of “fluctuation.” The mathematical or philosophical concept of limits can
suggest a more positive search for balance. One optimistic, perhaps optimal, term in the
vocabulary of critics of growth has been “sustainable growth” as opposed to anarchic, rampant or
unsustainable growth.

The philosophical literature provides abundant sources on the connections among various
concepts of growth. One background philosophical context for the evaluation of the concept of
growth is the division between a finite universe and an infinite universe. Aristotle has been the
champion of the value of growth while recognizing the limits set by the recognition of finitude or
fixed ends. Aristotle’s ontological vision has often been interpreted as a metaphor of biological
growth with fixed kinds and proper ends applied to all processes in the universe. The standard
admonition to investors in a market economy that “trees do not grow to the sky” has an
additional element of redundancy for the Aristotelian whose finitism asserts that every kind of
tree, whether oak, olive, or tulip, can only grow to its proper height.

Thus, for Aristotle, even the stone moves naturally from its stereis or void to its proper
place just as the acorn becomes an oak and the human being can realize his end as a man, which
is his excellence qua human being. The entire natural universe from its lowest rungs which are
dynamis or potentialities to its highest rung which is Being as a principle of Actuality that
necessarily exists can be represented as the domain of the actualization of potentialities.
Excellence as located in the mean or proper limit guarantees the lack of virtue at the extremes,
thereby excluding the unsustainable quests for the infinite.

Aristotelian theory did not of course tame the passion for excess in the ancient world. It
has been a perennial source of fascination to recognize that Aristotle considered the size of the
polis or state to have a natural maximum at 4400 or 5500 persons, which represented the reach of
the human voice and the limits for reciprocity between the rulers and the ruled, while his most notable student Alexander created an empire which stretched from the cosmopolitan city of Alexandria that he had founded in Egypt to the outskirts of Samarkand and the Bactrian province of India over which he held some sway for a period. Aristotle could account for such disruptions and discrepancies since, in addition to the teleological movements of Nature (physis), which include the actualization of potentialities toward their proper ends or teloi, and the creativity of human beings in their arts and crafts (poesis) which generally seeks to imitate nature, there also exist such fateful factors as Necessity, Spontaneity, and Chance, which are not teleological. Thus, while natural growth would arrive at its proper end, the growth that is the result of Necessity, Spontaneity, and Chance can be unsustainable, catastrophic, deformed or self-destructive, even in the universe of Aristotle.

The infinite dimensions of nature that are part of the modern scientific worldview, like the infinite possibilities of experience that were celebrated in modern romanticism, did not project the sense of limits that was derived from the finitude of the Aristotelian and medieval universe. The negation of the concept of hubris like the breakdown of the value ascribed to the recognition of necessary limits for human ambition was part of the change to modernity. This is evident in many fields of inquiry.

In economics, the theory that justice in human society originates with a quest for economic stability in a condition which David Hume identified as one of “scant resources” and “confin’d generosity” had as one of its consequences an economic vision of the expansion of “scant resources” to much greater resources through the application of human knowledge and entrepreneurial activity. For the Scottish Enlightenment, such an expansion would never arrive at infinite resources. The assumption of the existence of infinite resources was contrary to the
originating conditions of Justice within human society, since the concept of Justice presupposed a need to control and stabilize finite resources. Yet, in the Continental enlightenment as in Condorcet’s sketch for historical progress, the process of expansion of economic resources, even including the duration of human life, could be extended without limit. The theme that the progress of knowledge was limitless was sounded by the protagonists of the European Enlightenment and has resounded among American champions of scientific method, including the Pragmatic movement in philosophy.

Despite the faith in the progress of knowledge and in its ameliorative consequences for human life, that was advanced especially within American Pragmatism, there was realistic recognition and appraisal of the historical evidence of inevitable costs of progress and of societal losses that took place alongside technological improvements. The Pragmatists believed that the scientific method was competent to evaluate the competing claims of progress versus conservation through an appeal to their predictive consequences. Without conceding the Malthusian sense of limits as given by the inevitable facts of nature, pragmatic pluralists recognized limitations on values that had to be taken or chosen for the survival or extension of other values.

The value of Freedom, for example, was considered by Dewey to be among the most cherished of human values. Yet, Dewey recognized that freedom in various substantive domains could be justifiably limited so that freedom of speech could be limited when it reached incitement to violence and freedom of market activity could be limited in dire economic circumstances.

Dewey’s belief, that the social sciences could provide rational methods for economic planning that would supplant many free market decisions, appears to have been an excessively
optimistic projection of the future course of the social sciences. In the current context, Dewey’s faith that scientific inquiry could provide a method for mediating the conflict between growth and limits remains unresolved.

Within Pragmatic pluralism, only one value was supported as absolute or without limits, namely the methodological value of critical inquiry itself. Critical inquiry could not be limited, since it was the instrument for adjudicating between conflicting hypotheses and the method for justifying the extension or limitation of all values. Thus, freedom of inquiry possessed a privileged methodological role in contrast to any substantive value, including other forms of freedom.

The examples of the use of science and technology for immoral purposes in the twentieth century have led to new approaches on the issue of the limits of free inquiry. The cancellation of technological projects, like research on different kinds of bombs, that could lead to new knowledge in physics has been justified on the grounds that the risks of misuse of the technology are of greater concern than the potential benefits derivable from the new knowledge. The use of human subjects in biological research that has taken place has resulted in greater sensitivity. Thus, evidence that the use of human subjects in biological experiments could extend human knowledge might well be trumped by moral considerations regarding these practices, even when cases where there is voluntary and informed consent by the subjects. The knowledge to be gained does not necessarily override the values that are being lost in the process of scientific inquiry. The perennial challenge of “drawing the line” excludes some scientific inquiries and includes others. Recent examples of “drawing the line” have been the exclusion of human cloning and the inclusion of embryonic stem cell research. The cloning of human beings has been considered excluded as beyond the appropriate limit for current scientific inquiry, while the use of
embryonic stem cell research has been included within these limits. In both cases, the recognition that limits can be drawn to freedom of inquiry for true, relevant, and strong reasons, has been vindicated. From this perspective, freedom of inquiry is not an absolute value. Like other plural values, it is justified by an appeal to its consequences and the strength and truth of the reasons that can be given in support of this value, as compared to the alternative of setting limits on inquiry.

The background recognition that there have been periods in human history in which growth has been conceived as taking place within a framework of infinite possibilities and that there have also been historical periods in which growth has been conceived as taking place within a framework of finite limits does not determine the resolution of any conflict of priorities between the need to realize greater growth versus the need to set limits on growth. The concept of sustainable growth, as envisaged by its supporters in current circumstances that refer to an increase in global warming, confronts a dilemma. On the one hand, it must limit growth in order to lessen the possibility of a predicted catastrophe. On the other hand, it must stimulate growth in order to lessen the actuality of continuing deprivation.

The resolution of this dilemma confronts contrary attitudes. The criticism of Marxist monistic theory, which was sketched at the outset of this essay, was related to the criticism of the Marxist economic theory that was partially embodied in the practice of Marxist socialist states. This criticism, which was directed against large-scale planning and “social engineering” projects that were aimed at the rapid realization of economic growth, can similarly be directed against long-range planning for new energy resources and long-term global projects for setting limits on growth. The contrary response from the advocates of sustainable growth throughout the planet is that the risks of the unforeseeable and unanticipated consequences should not outweigh the risks
of the predicted consequences that are derived from current scientific knowledge (albeit fallible knowledge) of the global environment. The visible hand of the political process that must successfully mediate these conflicting attitudes and ultimately resolve the dilemma raised by the effort to set limits to economic growth in a world in which there is sustained deprivation caused by lack of economic growth goes far beyond the invisible hand of market forces which theoretically provides optimal outcomes for contending positions. Further, this political process is only minimally related to the idealized process of convergence among competing hypotheses advanced by rational agents within a community of free inquiry.

**IV. Concluding Comment: Concepts, Percepts & Reasons**

Conceptual analysis of plural values can indicate possible affinities or connections, correlative opposites or potential conflicts and various options for determining choices among these values. The disagreement that was evident in the discussion of the values formulated in the two examples that were developed in this essay do not reflect only differences in attitudes, competing visions of the good life or conflicting conceptual frameworks or alternative points of departure. They also depend upon differing interpretations of empirical evidence that can be partly overcome by continuing empirical research. Hence, the significance of the Kantian dictum which sought to state the contending claims of conceptual analysis and empirical investigation: “Concepts without percepts are empty; percepts without concepts are blind.”

The recognition of the affinities and the potential conflicts among values in the developing of alternative concepts, as in the examples discussed of political freedom and free markets or economic equality and economic growth, indicates that concepts without percepts are not completely empty. Conceptual analysis may not provide philosophical foundations, but it can serve as a frame of reference for the process of decision-making among values.
Decision-making between values is not determined by conceptual analysis, but requires and admits of the possibility of relevant, empirical substantiation of competing claims. Moreover, empirical substantiation does not consist of data that are blind, in the sense that they lack any element of conceptual interpretation. Their grasp on empirical realities presupposes some degree of conceptual framing of the given. Hence, percepts without concepts are not completely blind and they can be further framed so as to function as partial confirmation or refutation of differing value claims.

The quest for objectivity and for convergence in decision-making among plural values has diverse components. There is a component of conceptual clarification which aims to resolve differences in the ways in which value claims are conceived, structured or interpreted in the context of disagreement between values. There is a component of mediation of conflicting attitudes, which aims at elucidating the sources of these attitudes, including the beliefs that may provide the grounds or sources for the differing attitudes. There is a component of empirical or factual resolution which aims at agreement through the discoveries of further research or the re-examination of the empirical evidence. As a generalization for many contexts of moral disagreement and with particular reference to the examples discussed in this essay, the clarification of concepts, the analysis of underlying attitudes and the investigation of the empirical data provide the relevant reasons, whose strength or truth should decide priorities among plural values.