

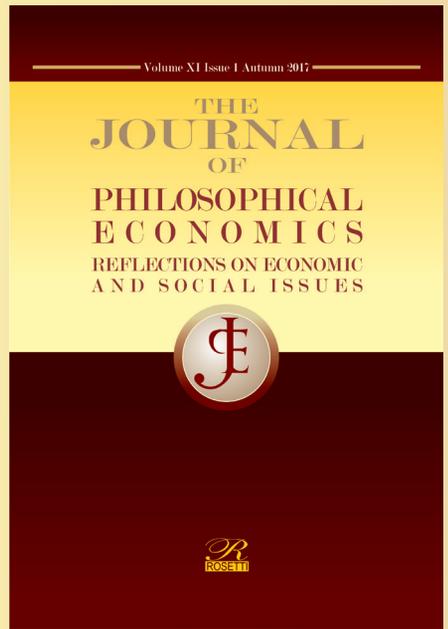
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*Some thoughts on ancient  
civilizations' trinity of philosophy,  
religion and economics*

**Soumitra Sharma**

# Some thoughts on ancient civilizations' trinity of philosophy, religion and economics

*Soumitra Sharma*

**Abstract.** Here are some loud thoughts that reflect upon the relationship that had long existed amidst philosophy, religion and economics in the so-called 'grand' civilizations (that had existed during 3100 BC to the beginning of Christian era). Historically, the visions of intellectuals, rulers, men of faiths, and business people have helped drive these civilizations to their zenith. The philosophies, religions, and economics of the time were deeply involved in this process of development, and seem to have acted in unison. Here is an attempt to provoke some fresh thinking on the subject by re-examining this triad relationship of the fundamental spheres of human life. The logic of this paper attempts to raise doubts, if the relationship was ideal and was based on ethical and moral values, as it was proclaimed by the philosophers, pontiffs, politicians and the business leaders of the time.

**Keywords:** dominance, ethics, economics, God(s), philosophy, 'quad', religion, trinity

## Introduction

In above context, at least three important facts should be recognized. First, that human history is an excellent teacher. It is continuous and there are no gaps in it. If at all, there are, these are the gaps in our memory and knowledge alone. Second, that human nature and behaviour have not changed fundamentally, over the course of history. Over time, factors such as enhancement in individual's knowledge, development in science and technology, political and socio-economic conditions, impact of religion etc. had only partial and temporary effects (see Braudel, 1993). Third, nothing begins from afresh as it has already been there in the past, in some form or the other. Thus, past and future are very much related. Future is just an embryo in the womb of the past. To look at the future one must look at the past.

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This paper, by looking at the history of civilizations, tries to look back at the functioning of the then existing mechanism of socio-economic order by examining the relationship between three fundamental spheres of human life – philosophy, religion and economics. Naturally, the question arises, why to go back to the history? The answer could probably be: Because, for one or the other reason, these civilizations were considered 'great'. Historians suggest various reasons, such as, the vast geographical area these covered, their military might, their economic growth and trade record, their efficient public administration, for their deliverance of socio-economic welfare to larger section of people, or their contributions to architecture, science, medicine, technology, and their cultural legacy etc.

From ancient history, interestingly, enough, we learn that humans have consistently fought to create a better future. Visions of intellectuals, rulers, men of faiths, and business people have helped shape civilizations to progress. But, underneath this progress were also sown the seeds of their downfall, for relatively soon the future visions of an 'endless' progress ended abruptly (in a relative sense) for reasons of wars, natural disasters, poor socio-political management of societies, etc. As continuity and recovery are natural processes, again and again, these civilizations started their rebuilding, but their past determined their future, and rarely any of these rose to its glorious past again.

Human history, further, suggests that *Homo sapiens* have trotted the land for over 250,000 years, but organized civilizations have existed only since 5000 BC. In the dawn of time, some grand civilizations of the ancient world emerged on the banks of great rivers: Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian on the Euphrates and Tigris, Egyptian on the Nile, pre-Indian along the Indus, Chinese along the Yellow River, Dravidian and Aryan in Indus basin and Ganges-Yamuna valley and so on. Only, Israeli and Persian civilizations survived in mountainous and desert lands, but after great struggles. Geographically, in different parts of the 'Old World' these civilizations and cultures produced prosperous societies with highly developed philosophies and religious beliefs of their own.

This short study is organized into four sections: While 'Introduction' sets forth some basic thoughts for consideration, the section on 'Philosophy, Religion, Arts and Economics', tries to examine the ideological structure of a mutual relationship of these segments; the following section, 'The trinity of Philosophy, Religion, and Economics', develops some arguments that put to doubt the claimed thesis of relationship; and the 'Concluding remarks', are gist of the entire exercise.

**Table 1** A quick glance at some aspects of ancient civilizations

	<b>China</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>Persia</b>	<b>Mesopotamia</b>	<b>Egypt</b>	<b>Greece</b>	<b>Israel</b>
<b>Geographical Region</b>	Area between the rivers Yang-Tse-kiang and Huang-Ho	Delta of Indus and the valley of Ganges-Yamuna rivers	Empires ruled by the Persians	Delta of rivers Euphrates-Tigris and all north up to Syria, Palestine	Along the river Nile and its delta.	Mainland, Aegean islands and the coast of Mediterranean	The kingdoms of Levant: Israel and Judea
<b>At Its Zenith Since</b>	2300 BC	2500 BC	3400 BC	3500 BC	3100 BC	1200 BC	1200 BC
<b>Well-known Philosophers</b>	Confucius and Mencius	Sankara, Buddha, Mahavir	Zarathustra	Hammurabi	Imhotep, Ptahhotep	Socrates, Plato, Aristotle	Moses
<b>Main Ancient Religion</b>	Buddhist	Hindu, Buddhist, And Jain,	Zoroastrianism	-	-	Hellenic	Jewish
<b>Major Deity(ies)</b>	T'ien (Heaven)	<u>Hindu</u> : Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh <u>Buddha</u> : Gautama <u>Jain</u> : Tirthankara	Abur Mazda	<u>Sumerian</u> : Anu, Enlil, Ea <u>Babylon</u> : Marduk, Ishtar	Ra (Sun) and Pt-ah	Poseidon	JEHWAH
<b>Major Advances in Technology</b>	Gun powder, automated crossbows, and robots	Gold smithly, metallurgy, crafts and sculpture	Persian wheel, production of wines	Weights and measures	Chariot, archery	Archimedes: Heat ray weapon; Mithridates 'the universal antidote against all poisons	Preservation and use of water

Source: author's work

## Philosophy, Religion, Arts and Economics [ 1 ]

Since humans have been able, they have used philosophy, literature, religion, art, music, history and language to understand and record our world. Progress in each field had neither been parallel nor continuous. Each segment did make some strides at one or the other point on the time scale, depending on the political, religious, cultural and economic circumstances.

In historical perspective, religious beliefs have dictated the daily life of the people, for human beings have always sought answers to varieties of questions about themselves and their environment. At least at certain points of time, mankind has always thought that it knew in what it believed (faiths, religion), had the scientific percept (knowledge, philosophy, ethics) and wanted or needed (economics) for its daily life. This inseparable overlapping relationship of themes common to philosophy, religion and economics was like that of a holy trinity. This, however, does not imply the undermining of the role of arts and sciences (technology) as these too have played a significant role in people's lives and thus in the progress of civilizations.

The human mind has always has been gifted with many fundamental desires of which following four can be highlighted as these did create the basic structure of every civilization and its culture. These being:

*I think* (the love for study or pursuit of wisdom or of knowledge of things and their causes, theoretical or practical) = referring to philosophy

*I believe* (faith in Supreme Being) = referring to religion

*I want* (nature and causes of increasing wealth and economic welfare of the people) = referring to economics

*I create* (spirit of invention and creation) = referring to arts, science and technology

Corresponding to the mentioned, human nature and behaviour have taken shape.

It is difficult to determine when the religious beliefs took precedence over philosophy or economics, however, a possible scenario could certainly be that as soon the fear inspired in the heart of humans by the sights of the great commotions of nature such as the volcano, the tempest, the thunderbolt, the earthquake and

the angry seas, it led him to invent the gods and seek consolation. Intellectuals of society came to rescue. While the wisers took the advisory role, the physically strong took the political leadership (e.g. Vedic 'Varna' system, see *The Rig Veda*, 1981). Such leadership provided confidence and faith in the minds of people, stimulated them to toil and create prosperity. But then, the codes of conduct were required. Ethical and Moral philosophies emerged. Growing economies required frameworks and regulations. In order to preserve the set moral and social standards, laws of the societies were framed (e.g. King Hammurabi enacted such a code in Babylon in 1756 BC). Religion and philosophy got involved in day-to-day economics. This happens to be the story of our journey in time.

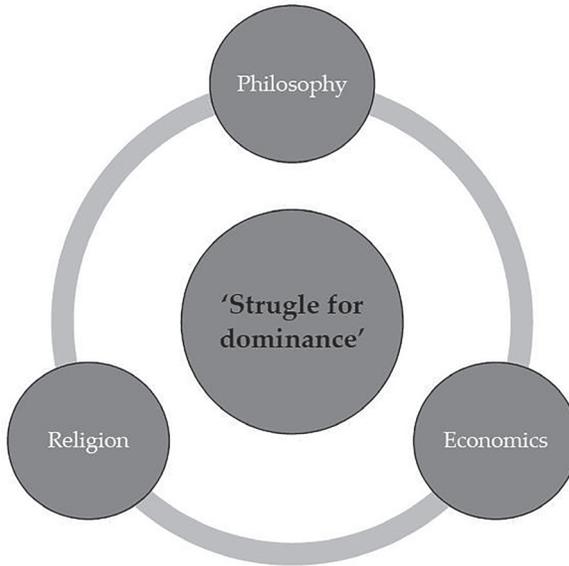
Religious philosophy tries to attempt to understand the concepts involved in religion (e.g. existence, fate, creation, justice, mercy, redemption, God [2] etc.). Philosophers have approached particular religious beliefs while advocating wide-ranging views about philosophy and religion (Vernon et al, 1969). Economics has been considered as a study of human behaviour in his social environment, which among others is also based on religious and philosophical considerations. Philosophers in their search for Truth, Spirit, and Good have also observed and designed the social order. Through the history of humankind, practices of various religious faiths and rites have incorporated philosophies of the time to enhance the economic welfare of the people. Moreover, history is also a witness of the conflicts of beliefs, and economic ambitions of the preferred class. While the warrior kings, who have fought wars and destroyed economies; the intellectuals, on the other hand, have helped protect human rights, develop democracy and create new social orders. At times, intellectuals or religious pontiffs have also seized political power and dictated the economics of time. Economic analysis and moral philosophy have thus been concerned with economics and ethics (Hausman, 1992). Moral philosophy had improved economic analysis and helped design codes of economic conduct.

Through millenniums, though the world, in its outward material aspect, has changed considerably, such that means of communication, manner of utilization of man and material resources, sophisticated scientific discoveries, etc., which greatly enhanced the societies and made economic progress easy; but it is regrettable and unfortunate, that not many great changes took place on the inner spiritual side of the humankind. The fundamental spiritual characteristic of humans is his desire for liberation that inspires him to move forward on the path of self-realization. Human beings want liberation in physical, mental and spiritual realms. In order to free themselves from the relative physical bondage of time, space and person,

humans have developed transportation and communication. In their drive to free themselves from the relative psychic bondage, they have developed scientific knowledge. In the spiritual realm, mankind has searched for absolute freedom from nature. While, generally, the human mind is not conscious of its desire for spiritual freedom, the inspiration, however, derived unconsciously, fuels human expression in social organization, culture, science, literature, politics, economics and others. Any social system must, thus, should/must aim at helping an individual to achieve this ultimate freedom. Nevertheless, it has been observed in the course of history, that one group or class always tried to dominate the fellow beings, and at times, the suffering classes ultimately revolted against the domination. It must, therefore, be acknowledged that the social system is vital in the reorientation of the human minds, as social freedom means political and economic freedom at the same time.

Religious ideas have evolved as an attempt to free human beings from all bondage of limitation, and the purpose of existence of political institutions and other social organizations was meant to provide people with the maximum possible social freedom. The very idea of a system of religion derives from a culture familiar with philosophy. Philosophy speaks in terms of rational propositions or principles that are thought to be universal, and philosophical ethics sets forth the virtues of temperance, prudence, fortitude, and justice on a purely rational basis. Remember, the ideas of great thinkers are never obsolete. They animate the progress that seems to kill them. The most ancient fancies, sometimes, startle us by their strikingly modern character, for insight does not depend on modernity.

Thus, it goes without saying that practically in all civilizations, there had existed a very close bond in philosophy, ethics, religion and economics, and this could safely be called a 'holy' relationship. There were hardly any doubts in the minds of leaders that it would not work. Actually, it did work for centuries. Of course, there were constant conflicts and power-struggles for dominance. But again, for these being an inherent part of human nature, there was nothing to worry about, as the socio-economic system kept floating.



**Figure 1** The 'Holy Trinity'  
Source: Author's work

In philosophical and religious domain some of the questions that dominated practically every ancient civilization's history, and have been frequently discussed were: the existence of God, 'I-consciousness', matter and spirit, self, and moral values etc. (for a detailed discussion on these issues, see Raju, 1982). For the sake of an easy understanding of issues in question, a brief examination is under:

(a) *The existence of God.* The burden of proof of God's existence is exclusively on the individual and is based on beliefs. God has been called by different names in different civilizations. So have been in existence in the early civilizations the traditions of polytheism and monotheism (e.g. while the Sumerian god *Anu*, and the Babylonian god *Shamsh* are the nature gods, the Jewish scriptures mention Abraham's God as an ethical God, 'I am who I Am'; YAHWEH - The Lord - Exodus 3: 14). In most polytheistic faiths, there were multiple gods, but there is the main deity (Supreme Being) who is seen as a craftsman of the universe, and is omnipotent (e.g. while Persians had *Ahur Mazda*, Indian Aryans *Brahma*, and Chinese *Shang-ti*).

All through the centuries, philosophers have always asked whether there is a reason to believe that God exists. They have also considered His nature. According to classical theism, God is primarily the creator. God accounts for there being any world at all. He is causally responsible for the existence of everything other than himself. God is the one who creates 'from nothing' (*ex nihilo*). God makes to be that things are just *there* regardless of what they are *like*. The universe began to exist because God created it. Many theists frequently reject almost all the tenets of classical theism; however, they agree that God is the creator; that He causes things to exist. But they also tend to regard Him as an onlooker who is able to step in and modify how things are?

(b) The subject of '*I* consciousness is best illustrated in the Vedic literature and in the Old Testament:

(i) Originally this [universe] was only the *Ātman* in the form of a person. He looked around and saw Nothing beside him. First, he uttered, 'I am'. Out of it came the word '*I*'. Therefore, when one is asked: 'Who are you', he says first '*I am*' and adds his other name.'

(*Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣada, 1,4,1.*)

(ii) "And God said unto Moses, *I am that I am*, and he said, thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I am hath sent me unto you.'

"And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus, shalt thou say unto children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you; and this is my name forever, and this is my memorial unto all generations'.

(*The Bible, Exodus, 3, 14-15.*)

There are two kinds of knowledge, 'knowledge of being', which is what intuition really is and 'knowledge by cognition', which is generally called mediated knowledge. More or less explicit aim of the *Upaniṣadas* and the implicit aim of the 'grand tradition of the West' are to tell the man what he is to be, and how he can be what he is to be. One is greatly struck by the significance of what God told Moses, viz., that he was simply the I-Am, had no name; equally one is awed by the *Upaniṣadic* statement that the Cosmic Person (*Prajapati*; the Greek *Logos*), the firstborn uttered first '*I am*'. This corresponds with the Judeo-Christian idea that God made man in his own image. Then if God is *Being*, the ontological basis of everything can be discovered by me in my '*I am*'. A rational tracing and explanation

of this mooring constitute true and significant philosophy. It must, however, be noted that in Western philosophy, the study of the *I-consciousness* and to some extent of the Hegelian *ego-consciousness*, is basically neglected. David Hume, his followers – the modern logical positivists and empiricists tend towards denying the existence and reality of the 'I' or the 'Self'.

(c) *Matter and Spirit*. From the time human intellect first penetrated into the mysteries of nature, people have tried to explain the inter-relation between the two. Both philosophers and scientists have looked into the problem from their own perspectives. About two and a half thousand years before, philosophy and science were inseparable entities. These philosophical and scientific views of the relation between matter and spirit have become the basis of many socio-economic-political philosophies. Greek scientists explained the matter as a clearly separate entity from the spirit and pictured it as being made of several building blocks, purely passive and moving in a void, influenced by some force assumed to be of spiritual origin. In this way, an idea of dualism between matter and spirit, mind and body, soul and body became an essential concept in western thought for several centuries. Aristotle evolved his philosophy and scientific view of this universe based on this principle of dualism. He also believed that contemplating God and the human soul was more important than material research. Since, the Christian church, throughout the Middle Ages, supported this Aristotelian concept of the universe, and hence it was not challenged strongly all these years.

(d) *Self*. Western philosophy, through its Greek and Judeo-Christian formulations developed the concept of *spirit* and went beyond its original etymological meaning of breath and air. While, eastern philosophies in general and Indian philosophy, in particular, are referred as spiritual in outlook when compared to western philosophies that are said to be humanistic, natural and scientific. Reason for the indifference of some contemporary philosophers to the problem of spirit may be traced to the bifurcation of philosophy and theology, with the result that, in view of such a contrast, since the reality of spirit is important for religious consciousness; it has become unimportant for philosophy. Similarly, since philosophy claims to be a rational pursuit, theology is considered to be irrational faith. But can philosophy, if it is to be adequate to explain man's life, and can do without the concept of spirit? Indian philosophies look for the answers rather in great detail (Radhakrishnan, 1923).

Although the morality of people and their ethics amount to the same thing, there is a usage that restricts morality to systems such as that of Kant based on notions

such as duty, obligation, and principles of conduct, reserving ethics for the more Aristotelian approach to practical reasoning based on the notion of virtue, and generally avoiding the separation of moral considerations. As far as moral laws are concerned, some theories see the subject in terms of a number of laws (e.g. in the Ten Commandments). The status of these laws may be that they are the edicts of a divine lawmaker, or that they are truths of reason knowable *a priori*.

Since the dawn of human civilization, humans have among others, inherited a desire to invent, create, and make objects of beauty, aesthetics, and grandeur. The manifestation of this inherent desire to create is called art. Usually, the human mind has drawn inspirations for inventing, creating and making, either from nature or from religious beliefs. These manifestations are the pangs of wandering mind/soul of the human being so as to enjoy the freedom of imagination that usually provides meaningfulness, intellectual pleasure, comfort and satisfaction to the *artist's* soul. Through the creation of art objects, or performances, the creator/performer, and the observer – both enjoy the beauty and form of creation and feel mental pleasure. In certain sense an artist's position is very similar to that of the 'philosopher of science', and thus could safely be called as a 'philosopher of art'.

Historically, the five main ancient arts were painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and poetry. To these can be added the performing arts: theatre and dance. Architecture, sculptures, high quality painted pottery, visual arts (mosaics, prints, calligraphy etc.), nature-man-made aesthetics, (e.g. Japanese *Karesansui* art in Rojan-ji), and paintings are symbols of human perception of a refined judgement.

Another aspect of this creative human desire is manifested in modelling objects and inventing solutions for the necessities in the ordinary daily life of people – farmers, labourers, craftsmen, and others. In this process, usually involved was the primitive or indigenous technology that could easily be called as engineering or science.

Thus, both these aspects of creativity, i.e. art and science had greatly contributed to the richness of ancient cultures and civilization.

Because, the economy is important for the conduct of policies of the individuals and nations, economics became an important part of knowledge, but fairly late in history. Economists got concerned themselves with the grounds and social role of what they have accepted as knowledge. Precisely because of the fact that economics is important, an inquiry into the methodological strengths and weaknesses of the science, and significance of economists' knowledge is always imminent.

*Economics* as a science has four facets: (i) one of these being pure knowledge. As a science, it is concerned with providing information, description and interpretation of the nature of the economy in all its ramifications. Economists use the tools of deductive theory, empirical inference, and the concepts of model and paradigm construction. The objective is positive knowledge and insight into what the economy is about; (ii) Economics is also social control, one of the modes through which in modern societies, a social construction of reality is formulated. Through internalization, however, individualised, the construction provides people with a sense of proper and possible with regard to economy. Economics, then, has both explanation and rationalization, and thus its ideology has come to serve some of the purpose formerly provided by religion. The content and nuances of economic theory is to control the formation of issues (defining problems) and policies (finding solutions); (iii) the third facet of economics is its function as psychic balm for it provides us with a sense of order and sets our mind to rest; and (iv) perhaps the most important dimension of economics is its functioning in everyday life. Economics as a science, in principle, facilitates the allocation of natural and human resources in their best possible use, making the development and progress of societies possible. In fact, this being the essence of Economics, it is a science and art at the same time.

It must, however, be noted that such a modern definition applied to ancient civilizations, is not as apt as one would hope for. *Economics* as a science, in ancient times, did not exist. Simple reasons being the absence of a market (in the modern sense) and competition; lack of transport and communication; the limited spread of knowledge, etc. While the first and second facets of our definition were surely missing, third and fourth might have been in function for these suited to the then existing rudimentary system of taxation and property laws. Since, farming, animal husbandry, fishing, hunting and barter were the main activities of most societies, presumably, no sophisticated scientific knowledge was required. Furthermore, wars of invasion and conquest of territories being a frequent source of accumulation of riches and wealth of nations, for sure, hardly needed scientific knowledge of economics. What was needed, were levies and booties of war. Thus, the economics of the time, if at all it existed, was imperialistic and without a human face.

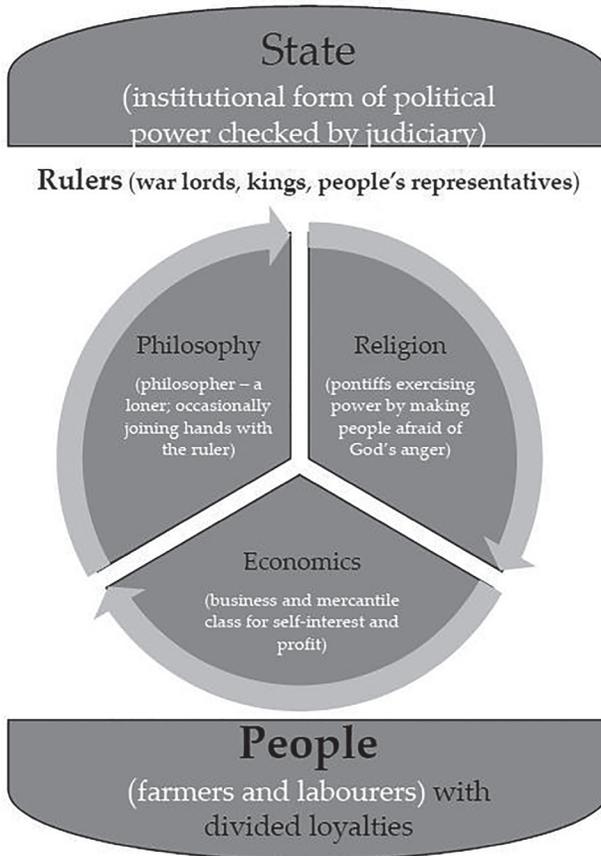
While the Egyptian economy for over 3500 years remained a tightly controlled command economy run by public servants and bureaucrats, the Sumerians – the forerunners of all the Old-World civilizations – developed a model of a free economy based on international trade around 3100 BC. They were the first to develop a system of economic rules (Woolley, 1929, pp 1-194). Chinese philosopher Confucius (551-

479 BC; see his *The Analects*, pp 3-135) should be credited for being the first to create some basic economic notions (e.g. national output, high quality labour force through education, importance of technology for national prosperity etc.) and the first compendium of economics. Later, around 321 BC, the famous Indian strategist Kautilya, produced the first available treatises on statecraft of classical times (*Arthashastra*, pp 42-744)

## The Trinity of Philosophy, Religion, and Economics

For an inquisitive mind, a logical question is, as to whether such an ideal relationship (for it being called 'holy') did exist in reality. Doubts can be expressed. Answers must be sought from the history of these ancient civilizations.

A close look at history suggests that the claimed ideal symbiosis between the three segments was a pure thought. In practice, however, the representatives of each mentioned segment struggled and competed amongst them for supremacy. Subject to circumstances, the winners rotated throughout the history. Naturally, in the struggle for dominance, the claimants often sacrificed the proclaimed ideals, moral and ethical values. Thus, the eternity, holiness or the sacrosanctity, of the triangular relationship can be questioned. In order to prove the point, some arguments can be put forward here:

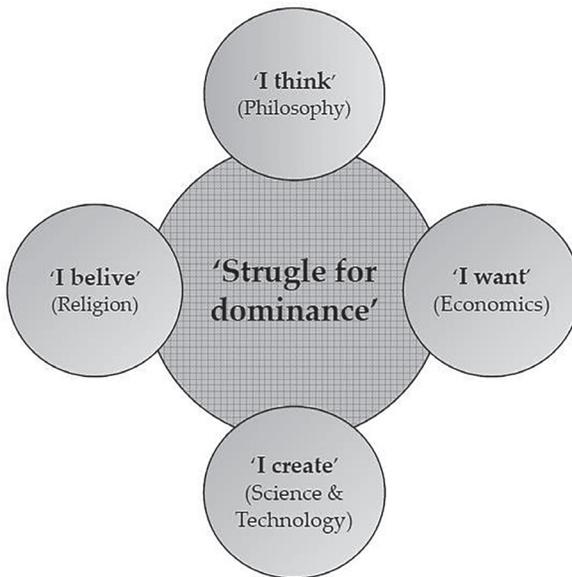


**Figure 2** The 'Unholy Trinity'  
Source: author's work

1. It is rather easy to imagine that at one time, in all civilizations, in principle, at least theoretically, an ideal cooperative relationship would have existed. Scholars have claimed that there had existed such an ideal symbiosis. Historical details and events, however, do not support this contention. This 'ideal virtual relationship', seemingly, could have been a 'pure thought' of philosophical minds as the philosophers must have believed that it 'should' and 'could' exist in any civilization for such an amicable ambient will ensure the 'perfect' functioning of the designed socio-economic order, and uphold the perseverance of moral and ethical standards

that are vital to the existence of societies. Further assumption, presumably, was that wars, natural disasters, intense sufferings by people are not sufficient enough grounds to disturb the claimed harmony. Logically conceived, this ideal (and probably virtual) relationship was envisaged to be manifested in individual human minds through 'I consciousness' that implies three mentioned basics of human *habitus*.

Since above-mentioned elements constitute the very human being, it must have been thought logical to expect that a 'trinity' of philosophy, religion, and economics would be easy to uphold. Seemingly, as the history of civilizations proves it, this was a grand *utopia* and an impossible task to put to practice. It must, however, be added that this fundamental harmony that was supposed to have existed was not a 'triad' character, but a 'quad' relationship. Although, technological factor has not been mentioned in the ancient economic literature (until 321 BC in Kautilya; see his *Arthashastra*, 1992). It would be logical to assume, that the term 'mode of production' implied the use of the then existing level of knowledge, science and technology. Accordingly, this fourth pillar ensuring the stability of the mechanism must be considered as one of the fundamentals of economics and thus given due importance.



**Figure 3** The 'Quad'  
Source: author's work

2. Think of a scenario. Would it not be logical for scholars to assume that these fundamental questions must have first taken roots in philosopher's minds? Most likely yes. But, since, philosophers are never taken seriously, and often branded as crazy, and even sentenced to death for their noble ideas (e.g. in 399 BC, the enemies and detractors of crimes against the State in the Athenian court of king Archon, accused Socrates of 'impiety', 'undermining the established religion', and 'corruption of the young' and put him to death. Plato in his *Death of Socrates* (1992) narrates through dialogues the entire incident). It is natural to expect that the philosophers must have tried to win over and convince the rulers in support of their ideas. This must have made possible that in some great civilizations philosophers (intellectuals) became close advisers to the rulers (e.g. to the kings of VI Egyptian dynasty, Ptah-hotep, 2200 BC; Confucius, to Prince of Lu, 503 BC; Kautilya to Emperor Chandragupta, 321 BC), and some basic ideas of these intellectual minds must have been tried (maybe with limited success only). It is also logical to assume that the above-mentioned aspects must have had in focus the common human socio-economic behaviour, and thus easy to further assume, that it should be made mandatory to preserve the moral, ethical and social standards, that were vital for the progress of the societies. To make it possible, the philosophers and rulers must have also sought the help of religious leaders to convince the masses, for usually they have always commanded immense influence and respect among the masses. Thus, moral, ethical, socio-economic and legal issues must have become a fertile breeding ground for promoting the desire for dominance eventually leading to struggle for power.

Religions have often dealt with certain fundamental questions such as creation and existence (e.g. *Rig Veda*, *Holy Bible*, *Avesta* and many other holy texts), fate, justice, money, redistribution, etc. This has always been in context to the preservation of social order through search for truth, spirit and good. Naturally, both – the philosophers and the priests – have approached these themes scientifically and with reason. Now, by a simple conjecture one can assume that in the 'interest of preserving and smooth functioning of the socio-economic order', these issues were interpreted as per personal affinities and whims of the intellectuals, rulers, priests and even business lords. People were supposed to follow the rules. Codes of conduct, courts, and judges were appointed by the rulers to sort out disputes and sanction the offenders. Forced labour, levies, land or crop ownership, high interest rates, widespread temple prostitution, and merciless punishments for crimes were not uncommon as instruments of repression. Egyptian, Sumerian, and Chinese history are full of such examples.

Religious leaders (either the kings themselves or the priests) have tried to establish theocratic states and considered themselves as the representatives of god on earth (e.g. in Egypt (Dunand et al., 2004), Sumer and Babylon, there were the regional and local gods. Mostly, the priests had declared themselves as the gods, and in reality, they were the kings (moreover, the tradition of kings declaring themselves as gods had continued long e.g. the Roman Emperor Augustus, BC 27-14 AD, declared himself as god and ordered his own worships in temples specially constructed throughout the empire). The usual justification given was that human ruler is simply the representative of God(s) on earth to enforce His will. The deification of the kings on-carried leads to the logical conclusion that they did rule in the name of God(s). Conversely, the high priest of one of the larger temples used to be a person of great political importance and was often chosen from the royal house. Temple and State were so inextricably mingled that while the state has to be regarded as a theocracy, the Temple must be regarded as a political institution and the State Religion as a political instrument. Civil and ecclesiastical offices were not clearly distinguished.

3. In past history, there had existed a variety of models of this close relationship of intellectuals, rulers, priests and even business lords that have been adopted in different civilizations in the past. Historical proofs suggest that these forms varied from intense collusion to intense competition or enmity to the extent of wars, or bureaucratic tyranny (e.g. in times of Egyptian Pharaohs, and Early Chinese Emperors: Xi, 1818-1776 BC, and Chou, 1776-1123 BC). The warlords, with ritual blessings of God's representatives – the priests (and of course, with the financial support of business class), waged wars of invasion (Thutmose III, 1479-1425 BC; Darius 550-486 BC; Alexander 336-323 BC) engaging massive armies inflicting death, devastation and misery upon common people. Against such a collusive model common was one that of intense rivalry infighting for dominance in the society. Philosophers (intellectuals, advisers) in rivalry with the priests, usually stood by political rulers, who usually also had large armies at their disposal. It is also noticeable that at times, priests having the support of the masses declared themselves as rulers (e.g. in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Roman Emperor Constantine I, 306-337 AD, started appointing the Popes. During the Holy Roman Empire, 539-638 AD, the European Kings participated in the appointment of the Pope. Later, the trend was reversed such that the confirmation of kingships by Pope became mandatory (since 1059 AD). In modern times too this tradition continues (e.g. King of Thailand, HM Queen of Britain, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama (although in exile), are secular and political heads at the same time). In such cases, a conflict would have been

imminent. The conflicts did arise, who won, we can only guess and look back for the historical examples.

4. To qualify for a 'great' ancient civilization, there must be a successful, flourishing and well-organized economy. Although, every economy functions by its own laws, it is also governed by social and moral codes (e.g. tax and property laws), and religious beliefs (e.g. charity, rejection of the rate of interest by Islam), and target goals of the society. Accordingly, it has to devise a particular economic model (e.g. the command economy of the Egyptian type; autocratic model of early Chinese emperors; or open economy like that of the Sumerian (Woolley, 1929) and of Indus Valley). For any civilization, the symbol of its prosperity, among others, is its portfolio of gross monetary and real assets, and the income-wealth structure of the population. In ancient civilizations, money (bullion, coins and jewels) had been a synthetic indicator of the wealth of a nation. While, its growth was measured in terms of output of the primary sector, and its extensive international trade, its sustainability over a long period of time showed its robustness and strength. The quality of life, occupational structure, level of poverty and income distribution, infrastructure, trade, organization of bureaucracy, urbanization etc. are some of the litmus test indicators of the level of advancement of any society. Accordingly, all ancient civilizations that are considered to have been 'great' must pass through these tests.

Unfortunately, very little economic data is available on these mentioned issues. Thus, it is rather difficult, better say impossible, to make any reliable comparative study. A simple fact, however, can be learnt from the history, which is that the achieved annual rates of economic growth of these societies were constantly low and fluctuated around zero. Farming, animal husbandry, carpentry, smithy, fishing, and international trade usually contributed to the major share of national incomes. Economies were mostly controlled by the State. Riches were shared among rulers, bureaucrats and traders who commanded the wealth, property and trade of any economy. Common people (farmers, labourers and slaves) toiled and suffered from hunger, disease and widespread poverty, low living standard, exploitation, high interest rates on loans (e.g. in Sumer, interest on loans varied between 20-33 percent per year), and high taxes (e.g. in Ancient China, the agricultural tax was fixed at 12.5 percent of the annual yield.), etc. Thus, the question is as to what was so 'great' to admire about in the economics of these civilizations?

5. Every economy, in any time period, depends upon the state of technology. Technological precedence of a civilization over other, in any given period of time, is an indicator of its advance. In history, every civilization, at one time or the other

has its technological edge over others. This edge was demonstrated in its sciences (astronomy, literature, mathematics, geometry, medicine, architecture, warfare etc.), philosophy (ethics, logic, metaphysics etc.). Archaeological, anthropological and historical studies demonstrate that most of these ancient civilizations have contributed their fair share at one time or the other. The only question is why the progress in science and technology (in the modern sense), as compared to the modern age (the last 250 years) was so slow? Was there lack of inventive minds or the patrons of society intentionally kept it at such low levels as to maintain their dominant position? Why the thoughtful minds did not help in this process is the question that needs to be explored?

## Concluding remarks

Based upon above partial analysis, one can simply conclude three things. Firstly, all civilizations had grown, stagnated or declined in their path of continuity over time. So had their history. Unfortunately, the lack of proper record of facts of history makes any such study practically impossible, or at least fairly difficult. Some of the mentioned civilizations have come to be known in history as 'great' for their achievements. However, we must note that these contributions though remarkable, were only 'marginal' and products of few intellectual minds i.e. 'philosophers of science' and 'philosophers of arts' (in terms of numbers, for sure, these people could have been only a few per tens of million people, and had appeared rarely on a time scale).

Secondly, it can be argued that it is logical to assume that throughout the ancient age, the upholders of the so-called 'holy' relationship between the mentioned fields bothered little about the fate of the common masses. The political system, ruling elite and the business leaders of the time, took most care of their vested interests only. There were revolutions from time to time but were crushed mercilessly and eventually these brought only restricted reforms. The resulting advancement of societies was based on an unethical and unjust relationship based upon the desire for dominance, power struggles, conflicts, repression, religious manipulations of masses, massive poverty accompanied with unequal distribution of incomes and wealth, forced labour, and so on. Thus, the question is, as to how such a relationship, as it existed, can be called 'holy'; and if it was at all, then on what grounds it can be defended. However, if a final judgement is to be passed, the trinity could easily be called 'totally unholy' and 'unfair'!

Finally, based upon some of the presented thoughts above, it would rather be wrong to conclude that the ancient civilizations did not contribute their due share to the development of human life in general, or did not have some spectacular achievements in humanities, arts, sciences, religion, and culture. On the contrary, had not been these achievements of the past; humans would not have been what they are today.

## Endnotes

[1] Matter of this section heavily draws upon Chapters: 1. Religion, Philosophy and Economics (pp. 1-11); and 2. Philosophical and Historical Perspective of Religion and Economics (pp 13-85), of my (2010) book.

[2] In scientific literature, it is customary to use capital letter ('God') referred in monotheistic religions and small letter ('god(s)' or 'goddess(es)') in polytheist religions. We shall use both the forms, as and when needed.

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