From *trivarga* to *puruṣārtha*
A Chapter in Indian Moral Philosophy

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This paper explores the history of two central categories of ancient Indian moral philosophy: *trivarga* and *puruṣārtha*. After an exhaustive analysis of the textual evidence from the earliest times until the middle of the first millennium CE, the paper concludes that the classificatory term *trivarga* requires an implicit referent and that its reference is *artha* in the sense of things that are beneficial. The term *puruṣārtha*, furthermore, is an elaboration of *artha* as the referent of *trivarga*: something that is beneficial to a human being. The term *artha* in the compound *puruṣārtha* does not mean aim or goal, even though that meaning may occasionally seep into it in actual usage especially in later texts. Within this compound *artha* has the same meaning it has in Mīmāṃsā and Kauṭilya: something that is beneficial, as opposed to *anartha:* something that is detrimental. The expression *puruṣārtha* is rare with reference to the *trivarga* in the early literature until at least the middle of the first millennium CE. Its absence in the comprehensive lexicon, the *Amarakośa*, which records the *trivarga* and *caturvarga* (with the inclusion of *mokṣa*), shows its marginal status in the Sanskrit vocabulary relating to *trivarga*. For the authors of the ancient Indian texts, the three concepts—*dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*—comprehended by *trivarga* do not constitute goals or aims of human life, as they are so often depicted in modern scholarship. They represent three major domains of human activities and pursuits that are beneficial to persons who perform them.

In much of the scholarly discussions about moral philosophy and the "goals" of human life in ancient India, two Sanskrit expressions loom large: *trivarga* and *puruṣārtha*. The first refers to a "triple set," a group of three concepts: *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*, whose precise meanings are ambiguous and, as we will see, are defined differently by different authors. The second, often mistranslated as "aims of man," refers to the same set of three, sometimes with the addition of a fourth, *mokṣa* or final liberation. Even scholars who are careful to distinguish the two, giving logical and chronological priority to the former, do not take the next step to ask how that expression came to be transformed into or equated with *puruṣārtha*. They assume that the two are synonyms and often use *puruṣārtha* as a shorthand for these three (or four) concepts.[1] Second, there is a debate as to whether the concepts subsumed under these categories are, in fact, presented as goals to which human beings should aspire or simply a categorization of major human activities and pursuits (Davis 2004). This study

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1. Sharma (1982, 1999) discusses Manu, Yājñavalkya, the *Mahābhārata*, the *Kāmasūtra*, etc., as if they deal with the *puruṣārtha*s, even though, as we will see, the term does not occur in any of them. Even Malamoud (1982) uses the term freely to refer to the *trivarga*. Thus, he says that *KAŚ* 1.7.3–5 (which we will examine below) "states that a puruṣārtha to which one has devoted himself exclusively is detrimental to the other puruṣārthas and to itself" (Malamoud 1982: 39 n. 14). And again he translates *KAŚ* 1.7.7 as "artha is the main (puruṣārtha). For the root of dharma and kāma is artha." K. J. Shah (1982: 56) also comments: "For properly understanding artha as a puruṣārtha, as a goal of life, one must begin perhaps, where Kauṭilya himself begins." The *KAŚ*, of course, never uses the term *puruṣārtha*.

attempts to answer these questions —very tentatively—using a philological scalpel to expose the complicated semantic history of these terms. It will show that many of the scholarly assumptions, with some notable exception, are, from a historical perspective, quite simply wrong.

THE INVENTION OF *TRIVARGA*

I take it as established that *trivarga* is the older and the more original formulation, and this study will further demonstrate it. The compound simply means "a group of three," and the group or set may consist of any three things in some way interrelated. This expression is quite old. The *Sāmavidhāna Brāhmaṇa* (1.4.8 [13]) says *prathamas trivargaḥ*, which, according to the commentator Sāyaṇa, refers to the three Sāmans originating from the verse *ágna ā́ yāhi vītáye* (*SV* 1.1 = *RV* 6.16.10). In the context of a Vedic sacrifice, the *Kātyāyana Śrautasūtra* (8.6.11) uses the term to refer to the two sets of three roofs constructed on the northern portion of the sacrificial hut (*sadas*): *trivargau cottarataḥ*. Likewise, the *Lāṭyāyana Śrautasūtra* (4.12.8), after instructing the sacrificer to give a milk cow and so forth to various priests, says that he should give to the Udgātṛ priests all of the above made into *trivargas* (*sarve trivargāḥ*), that is, each gift is tripled and the gifts are thus made into sets of threes. Clearly, in this early period of its usage, the term referred to any set of three objects.

The meaning of *varga* as a grouping or cluster is made clear by a statement in Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra* about official royal documents: "A *varga* should be made with a minimum of one and a maximum of three words so as not to create an impediment to meaning of the other words" (*KAŚ* 2.10.21: *ekapadāvaras tripadaparaḥ parapadārthānuparodhena vargaḥ kāryaḥ*). As I have pointed out in my translation of this passage (Olivelle 2013: 525–26), here *varga* refers to a clustering of words in a document; after a *varga* there is a stop (*virāma*) probably made by leaving a "white space" between one *varga* and the next (note that in ancient Indian inscriptions and manuscripts there are no white spaces between words; they run together). This is evident in the oldest documents we have from India, the Aśokan inscriptions. As Klaus Janert (1973: 142–43) observes: "In the versions of the edicts under discussion spaces within the lines are frequent and occur particularly after groups of two or more words. It is my conclusion that this spacing can scarcely be anything other than a form of notation for pauses made during recitation of the edicts and which the scribes each recorded in this fashion." Each *varga* is expected to have words that are syntactically related and form a naturally meaningful unit.

The term *varga* thus can mean a category and could refer to any grouping of like objects, individuals, or concepts. Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*, one of the earliest texts to use *trivarga* in its technical meaning with reference to *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*, also uses *varga* to refer to other groups of three or more. In dealing with royal vices, for example, Kauṭilya (*KAŚ* 8.3.4; see also *MDh* 7.52) says that a group of three vices originate from wrath and a group of four originate from pleasure (*kopajas trivargaḥ kāmajaś caturvargaḥ*). Once again, no special or technical meanings are attached to either *trivarga* or *caturvarga*. Nevertheless, these usages reveal that these terms must have a referent, implicit or explicit, outside of them: a set of three makes little sense unless we know to which broader category these three refer. In the above examples, the implicit reference is *vyasana*, vices that afflict kings in a special way. We have an explicit referent in the extended compound *śatruṣaḍvarga* (group of six enemies) at *KAŚ* 1.6.11–12; 12.2.1. In all these expressions, *varga* refers to a group of similar things. So, at *KAŚ* 2.15.14–21 we have various kinds of sweets, salt, juices, spices, vegetables, and the like all referred to as *varga* (*kṣāravarga*, *lavanavarga*, etc.); at *KAŚ*

2.15.63 types of slaves and laborers (*dāsakarmakaravarga*); at *KAŚ* 9.6.56 *upāyacaturvarga* (group of four strategies); and at *KAŚ* 2.17.4–12 the categories or types of various forest produce, plants, medicinal herbs, poisons, and the like (*kupyavarga*, *veṇuvarga*, *vallīvarga*, *valkavarga*, *auṣadhavarga*, *viṣavarga*). In dealing with seducible factions in an enemy's territory, Kauṭilya (*KAŚ* 1.14.2–5) refers to different categories of such people: *kruddha-varga* (angry people), *bhītavarga* (frightened people), *lubdhavarga* (greedy people), and *mānivarga* (proud people). Likewise, in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (2.40.2) we have *suhṛdvarga*, people who are friends, and (2.73.17) *śilpivarga*, those who are artisans.

It is within this context of the *varga* semantics that we must locate and understand the technical use of *trivarga* referring to *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*. Given the other usages of *varga*, we should expect a priori that (1) these three are in some way similar, and (2) there is some other category or concept to which this particular *trivarga* refers, of which these three are subcategories. You simply cannot have a free-standing *trivarga*. A passage in the *Arthaśāstra* (9.7), which is closely followed by Vātsyāyana in his *Kāmasūtra* (6.6), gives us an insight into the thinking of the Arthaśāstric tradition, in which this expression was probably coined,[2] with regard to the referent(s) of the *trivarga*. The context is Kauṭilya's discussion of a king preparing to march into battle. In such a situation, the king has to be cognizant of *artha* (advantages, benefits), *anartha* (disadvantages, material losses), and *saṃśaya* (doubt, uncertainty) with regard to things happening during the military expedition. An example of *artha* is capturing the rear enemy, and of *anartha* is giving troops and money to the neighbor of an enemy. But Kauṭilya knows that what is a seeming advantage may turn out to be a disadvantage, and vice versa: this is doubt.

That is the context within which Kauṭilya presents the threefold classification of these three possible scenarios (*KAŚ* 9.7.60–64):

> *artho dharmaḥ kāma ity arthatrivargaḥ*—"*artha*, *dharma*, and *kāma:* that is the *trivarga* of *artha.*"
> *anartho 'dharmaḥ śoka ity anarthatrivargaḥ*—"*anartha*, *adharma*, and sorrow: that is the *trivarga* of *anartha.*"
> *artho 'nartha iti*, *dharmo 'dharma iti*, *kāmaḥ śoka iti saṃśayatrivargaḥ*—"Is it *artha* or *anartha*? Is it *dharma* or *adharma*? Is it *kāma* or sorrow? That is the *trivarga* of doubt."

After each definition of the first two *trivargas*, Kauṭilya says: "Of that, it is better to encounter each preceding one than each following" (*tasya pūrvaḥ pūrvaḥ śreyān upasaṃprāptum*), while after the *trivarga* of doubt he says: "Of that, it is better to encounter the first alternative after subduing the second" (*tasyottarapakṣasiddhau pūrvapakṣaḥ śreyān upasaṃprāptum*). A few points are worth noting here. The discussion is carried out within the most royal of a king's pursuits: waging war, underscoring the Arthaśāstric provenance of the *trivarga* doctrine. Second, the technical term *trivarga* is ascribed both to *artha* (what is beneficial) and to its opposite, *anartha* (what is detrimental). Third, in the enumeration of the three, *artha* occupies the first place, signaling its centrality within the *trivarga* doctrine of Kauṭilya, who states explicitly (6.7.61) that for the king it is better to encounter *artha* than *dharma*. Finally, the *trivarga* (*artha*, *dharma*, *kāma*) is presented as subcategories of *artha*, presenting an interesting bifurcation of the meaning of *artha*. In the expression *arthatrivarga*, the term *artha* appears to signify an advantage in general or something beneficial and good, while

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2. The earliest inscription to record the term (Prakrit *tivaga*) is the Nasik Cave Inscription of Vasishtiputra of 149 AD. See Sircar 1986: 204.

within the *trivarga* itself, in conjunction with *dharma* and *kāma*, the term refers more clearly to material, political, and/or military advantages. Another significant point in Kauṭilya's discussion is that the opposite—the *anartha*—of *kāma* is not *akāma* but *śoka:* sorrow or grief. As we will presently see, at 1.7.3 the opposite of *kāma* is given as *niḥsukha*, the absence of *sukha* or pleasure, a concept very similar to *śoka*. This conception of *kāma* as the opposite of grief is interesting in light of the use of *prīti* (joy, pleasure) in Śabara's discussion of *puruṣārtha* discussed below. These three are "similar" in that they all are "beneficial" (*artha* in the first sense) and conducive to a person's happiness (*prīti*).

In a very interesting twist, the *Kāmasūtra* (6.6.5–6) cites the definitions of *arthatrivarga* and *anarthatrivarga* verbatim from the *Arthaśāstra*, and also deals with the topic of doubt (*saṃśaya*), all within the context of a courtesan and her activities.

Another discussion of the *trivarga* that gives us an insight into Kauṭilya's views occurs in *KAŚ* 1.7 in the context of secret tests (*upadhā*) administered to ministers and high functionaries of the state to test their honesty and loyalty to the king. The king uses three kinds of tests with reference to the three areas of the *trivarga* (*dharmopadhā*, *arthopadhā*, *kāmopadhā*). In all three, the secret tests are used to find out whether the officials are more loyal to the king than to one of these three: dharmic behavior, wealth, and sexual pleasure (*KAŚ* 1.10.2–12). The reference here is clearly not to any abstract notion of aims of human life but to activities and pursuits that officials value highly or are passionate about. However, in a verse (*KAŚ* 1.10.16) that concludes this section, a verse from the hand of the later redactor,[3] these three are identified as *trivarga*.

It is within the context of these broader discussions of the *trivarga* that we must locate its treatment in the training of a king in chapter seven of the first book of the *Arthaśāstra*. The subject is introduced in a roundabout way by telling the king what he must refrain from:

> *evaṃ vaśyendriyaḥ parastrīdravyahiṃsāś ca varjayet*, *svapnaṃ laulyam anṛtam uddha-taveṣatvam anarthyasaṃyogam adharmasaṃyuktam anarthasaṃyuktaṃ ca vyavahāram*. *KAŚ* 1.7.2.
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> Having thus brought his senses under control, he should shun the wives and property of others and refrain from causing injury, as also from sloth, frivolity, falsehood, wearing lavish clothes, associating with pernicious individuals, and transactions that go against *dharma* or *artha*.

Having introduced *adharma* and *anartha*, Kauṭilya turns to *kāma:*

> *dharmārthāvirodhena kāmaṃ seveta*, *na niḥsukhaḥ syāt. samaṃ vā trivargam anyon-yānubaddham. eko hy atyāsevito dharmārthakāmānām ātmānam itarau ca pīḍayati.* *KAŚ* 1.7.3–5.
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> He should pursue *kāma* without transgressing *dharma* or *artha*; he should not deprive himself of enjoyments (*niḥsukha*). Or rather, he should pursue the *trivarga* equally, each intimately linked to the others. For, among *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*, when one is pursued excessively, it harms itself as well as the other two.

Two points worth noting here are the placement of *dharma* as the first member of the group (also in 1.7, in contrast to 9.7), and the use of the term *anubaddha*. The same term is used in *KAŚ* 9.7.14–15 to show that sometimes an advantage (*artha*) when attained leads to further advantages; it creates a snowballing effect. Here, the mutual increase is with regard to the three members of the *trivarga*. Note, however, that, unlike the Dharmaśāstra texts we

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3. For the compositional history of the *KAŚ*, see Olivelle 2013 and McClish 2019. Briefly, we believe that the original text of Kauṭilya was subjected to a substantial redaction by a person sharing the Dharmaśāstric worldview sometime after the composition of the *MDh*, that is, after the second century CE. In general, the verses that conclude Chapters (*adhyāya*) are the work of the redactor.

will encounter below, Kauṭilya does not create a hierarchy among the three, just indicates that one should not be followed to excess, which would result in harm to the other two. It is important for the king also to pursue *kāma* or pleasure; he is instructed not to be austere and to deprive himself of pleasures. However, the final assertion ascribed to Kauṭilya hints at a disagreement, perhaps with the placement of *dharma* first, thus giving it priority: "*artha* alone is paramount," says Kauṭilya, "for *artha* is the foundation of *dharma* and *kāma*" (*artha eva pradhāna iti kauṭilyaḥ. arthamūlau hi dharmakāmāv iti. KAŚ* 1.7.6–7).

One significant feature of Kauṭilya's discussion is that the three concepts—*artha*, *dharma*, *kāma*—are more often than not discussed on their own and without being identified as part of the technical *trivarga.* The supposition, then, is that these three probably existed individually and as a group before they were given the label *trivarga*, and continued to be discussed on their own even after the invention of the *trivarga* label.[4] This is supported by their appearance without that label in texts going back to the third and second centuries BCE, that is, the Dharmasūtras of Āpastamba and Gautama.

Āpastamba introduces just two of the three—*dharma* and *artha*—in three different contexts. The first (1.4.23) is the obligation of a student to take care of his teacher "with activities connected with *dharma* and *artha*" (*athāhar ahar ācāryaṃ gopāyed dharmārthayuktaiḥ karmabhiḥ*). The next context is the penance for killing certain classes of people (1.24.6– 9), where Āpastamba says (1.24.23) that the same penance applies to a person who "when *dharma* and *artha* are in conflict opts for *artha*" (*dharmārthasaṃnipāte 'rthagrāhiṇa etad eva*). The term *saṃnipāta* is somewhat ambiguous, but it must refer to a situation when the course dictated by *dharma* and the course dictated by *artha* cannot be pursued together; only one can be pursued and the other given up. Finally, Āpastamba (2.10.14) notes that a king's chaplain should be well versed in *dharma* and *artha* (*purohitaṃ dharmārthakuśalam*).

Gautama, on the other hand, introduces all three concepts while enumerating a motley list of duties incumbent upon a Vedic student who has graduated (*snātaka*), that is, a young adult who has completed his Vedic education and performed the concluding ceremonial bath. Gautama (9.46–47) says: "To the best of his ability, he should not make the morning, midday, and afternoon fruitless with respect to *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma.* Among these, however, he should place *dharma* at the forefront" (*na pūrvāhṇamadhaṃdināparāhṇān aphalān kuryād yathāśakti dharmārthakāmebhyaḥ. teṣu tu dharmottaraḥ syāt*). The meaning here is clearly that the man should not waste his day but attend to duties required by *dharma* (such as performing daily rituals), *artha* (engaging in economically productive activities), and *kāma* (sexual and recreational activities). Interestingly, if the three times of day are viewed distributively, then *dharma* is done in the morning, *artha* at midday, and *kāma* in the afternoon. Like Āpastamba, Gautama emphasizes the superiority of *dharma* over the other two. The attempt to present the three in a descending hierarchy is a hallmark of the Dharmaśāstric authors.

Turning to the two other authors of Dharmasūtras, Baudhāyana (1.4.1) gives *dharma* and *artha* as two possible reasons why a teacher may take someone as his pupil: "If *dharma* or *artha* is not present in someone, . . . then he should die with that knowledge; let him not sow it on barren soil" (*dharmārthau yatra na syātām . . . vidyayā saha martavyaṃ na cainām ūṣare vapet*). And Vasiṣṭha (17.77) gives *dharma* and *artha* as reasons why a wife may not want to go to a distant land with her husband (*yadi dharmārthābhyāṃ pravāsaṃ praty anukāmā na syāt*).

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4. We find such discussion in the *KAŚ* itself: see 1.2.11; 1.4.11; 1.17.45–47; 2.7.10; 5.3.2; 5.4.6–7, 11; 8.1.49; 8.3.31–32, 50, 54; 9.7.81; 12.2.2.

In these four texts, which we can say with some confidence predate Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*, the two categories of *dharma* and *artha* are used with some frequency in quite diverse contexts, indicating that the pair was somewhat common as two significant areas of human pursuits and activities. All three occur only in Gautama, and the context there is rather broad: the way a person should conduct himself in his daily activities. In none of them, however, is the technical term *trivarga* used.

I think we can conclude that, even though these terms individually and, to some extent, collectively, were used with reference to beneficial human activities (*artha* as used in *KAŚ* 9.7.60–64), it is, in all likelihood, within the Arthaśāstric tradition that the three coalesced into a tightknit group and were theorized in such a way that they came to be referred to by the technical term *trivarga.* This conclusion, I think, is supported by the use of *trivarga* in Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra* and the Sanskrit epic *Mahābhārata*, in which we find the most extensive use of the term in all of Sanskrit literature.

In no other Sanskrit text does the *trivarga* play as central a role as in Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra.* He opens the book (1.1.1) with the invocation *dharmārthakāmebhyo namaḥ* ("Homage to *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*"), and gives the reason: *śāstraprakṛtatvāt* ("Because they are the subject matter of a/this treatise"). He then devotes the entire second chapter of the first book to the *trivarga.* It constitutes the most extensive discussions of the subject in Sanskrit literature. Given the strong dependence of Vātsyāyana on Kauṭilya (see Olivelle 2013: 29), we must assume that Vātsyāyana thought the *trivarga* doctrine to be central to Kauṭilya's treatise. The discussion for the most part is dependent on Kauṭilya's text, but Vātsyāyana introduces a new concept: each of the three members of the *trivarga* should be followed during the three successive periods of a person's life.

> *śatāryur vai puruṣo vibhajya kālam anyonyānubaddhaṃ parasparasyānupaghātakaṃ trivargaṃ seveta. bālye vidyāgrahaṇādīn arthān. kāmaṃ ca yauvane. sthāvire dharmaṃ mokṣaṃ ca. anityatvād āyuṣo yathopapādaṃ vā seveta* (1.2.1–5).
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> One hundred years, indeed, is a man's lifespan. Dividing that time, he should cultivate the *trivarga*, each intimately linked to the others[5] and none causing harm to the others—during his childhood, *arthas* consisting of knowledge acquisition and the like; during his youth, *kāma*; and during old age, *dharma* and *mokṣa*. Or rather, given the uncertainty of one's lifespan, he should cultivate them as opportune.

It is clear, however, that the three pursuits cannot be exclusively cultivated during these three periods of life, for otherwise the statements about their intimate links and making sure that one does not harm the others would make little sense. The instruction to pursue *artha* in childhood is somewhat anomalous, as also the linking of learning to *artha.* At 1.2.9, Vātsyāyana gives a fuller list of *artha*-related activities: *vidyābhūmihiraṇyapaśudhānya-bhāṇḍopaskaramitrādīnām arjanam arjitasya vivardhanam arthaḥ* ("*artha* is the acquisition of knowledge, land, money, farm animals, grain, utensils, household goods, friends/allies, and the like, and the increase of what has been acquired"). That knowledge can be part of economic activities and can procure wealth is implied in the legal provision on the partitioning of ancestral property. A son living in a joint family need not subject to partitioning any property he has acquired through his learning.[6]

Another anomaly is the listing of *mokṣa* within the enumeration of the triple set, thus creating a list of four. Coming at the end of the sentence, however, it may well be an interpolation or a commentarial gloss that found its way into the text. This assessment is supported

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5. See the use of the identical term *anubaddha* in the *KAŚ* 1.7.3–5 cited above, and my comments there.
6. For this provision, see *MDh* 9.206; *YDh* 2.126.

by the fact that, while Vātsyāyana goes on to define the contents of *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* (in 1.2.7–13), he is completely silent on *mokṣa*. The commentator Yaśodhara (on 1.2.4) also makes the interesting observation that the insertion of *mokṣa* is with reference to the view of an opponent, namely one who asserts the primacy of knowledge and who subscribes to the *caturvarga* theory: *mokṣagrahaṇaṃ paramatāpekṣam. jñānavādināṃ caturvargaḥ puruṣārthaḥ. asminn eva kāle tair apy adhyātmikaṃ cintyam iti.* A point to note is that the *Kāmasūtra* never uses the term *puruṣārtha*, even though scholarly studies take its discussion in the second chapter to be about the *puruṣārtha*s.[7]

Turning to the *Mahābhārata*, I have been able to identify fifty-two passages where *trivarga* appears.[8] Its most frequent use is in the twelfth book, the *Śāntiparvan*, where it occurs thirty-four times, most prominently in Bhīṣma's instruction to Yudhiṣṭhira within the section on the duties of a king (*rājadharmaparvan*). In the first eleven books the term occurs eleven times, and in the last six books it occurs seven times. Even outside of the twelfth book, the context in which the expression appears is almost always discourses centered around a king.[9] So, for example, Śakuntalā in her address to king Duṣyanta, who refused to acknowledge her son as his own, waxes eloquent on the central importance of a wife, using well-known Brahmanical tropes: "Half of a man is his wife. The wife is his most excellent friend. The wife is the root of the *trivarga*. The wife is his friend/ally as he is dying" (*ardhaṃ bhāryā manuṣyasya bhāryā śreṣṭhatamaḥ sakhā | bhāryā mūlaṃ trivargasya bhāryā mitraṃ mariṣyataḥ || MBh* 1.68.40). The connection of *trivarga* to the king and his duty to punish wrongdoers (*daṇḍa*) is repeatedly emphasized. At 12.15.3, for example, Arjuna, in trying to dissuade Yudhiṣṭhira from renouncing his kingship, says: "*daṇḍa* (punishment) protects *dharma*, as well as *artha*, O King; *daṇḍa* protects *kāma; daṇḍa* is said to be the *trivarga*" (*dharmaṃ saṃrakṣate daṇḍas tathaiva-arthaṃ narādhipa | kāmaṃ saṃrakṣate daṇḍas trivargo daṇḍa ucyate ||*). People can pursue the *trivarga* only in a well-ordered and law-abiding society where evildoers are threatened with punishment by a just king.

The expression *trivarga* occurs just twice (1.6.5; 4.37.22) in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and both refer to the well-known triad of *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*, and both times in the context of royal speech.

Even though *trivarga* is closely associated with the king and his duties, yet the discussions in the Dharmasūtras, the *Kāmasūtra*, and the *Mahābhārata* show that the concept is broader than that and encompasses activities of all people, including women such as courtesans. Thus, at *MBh* 5.122.32, Vaiśaṃpāyana says that "undertakings of wise people are associated with the *trivarga*, and when *trivarga* cannot be followed, people stick to *dharma* and *artha*" (*trivargayuktā prājñānām ārambhā bharatarṣabha | dharmārthāv anurudhyante trivargāsaṃbhave narāḥ ||*). And at *MBh* 12.161, moreover, we have a long and detailed discussion about the relative importance of the three members of the *trivarga*. A similar discussion is found in the *Rāmāyaṇa* 4.37.20–22. I will discuss these passages in greater detail below.

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7. See Sharma 1982, 1999; Malamoud 1982.

8. *MBh* 1.68.40; 1.109.23; 1.171.3; 3.119.21;5.121.22; 5.122.32, 36; 6.10.59, 69; 9.4.28; 11.2.19; 12.12.17; 12.15.3; 12.28.42; 12.56.4; 12.57.17; 12.59.30, 38, 76; 12.69.64 (twice), 67 (twice); 12.118.10; 12.121.13; 12.123.5, 8; 12.136.207; 12.137.95; 12.138.57; 12.161.3, 38, 46; 12.183.9; 12.184.10, 17; 12.185.3; 12.187.55; 12.276.15; 12.308.88, 129 (twice); 12.316.47; 13.32.20, 21; 13.118.24; 13.128.56; 13.129.15; 13.131.40; 14.37.14.

9. In *MBh* 12.59.31 there is an interesting extension of *trivarga* to *mokṣa* and to *daṇḍa*. The three associated with *mokṣa* are the three *guṇa*s*: sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The three related to *daṇḍa* are stability, growth, and decline (*sthāna*, *vṛddhi*, *kṣaya*).

The term *trivarga* is rare in the major Dharmaśāstras. As we have seen, it is absent in the four early Dharmasūtras, and it occurs just twice in Manu (2.224; 7.26–27) and once in Yājñavalkya (1.74). At *MDh* 2.224 the discussion is about the duties of a Vedic student. Manu gives three competing views about the superiority of the three items in a way similar to the *KAŚ:* "Some say that *dharma* and *artha* are conducive to welfare; others, *kāma* and *artha;* and still others, *dharma* alone or *artha* alone. But the settled rule is this: the entire *trivarga* is conducive to welfare." (*dharmārthāv ucyate śreyaḥ kāmārthau dharma eva ca | artha eveha vā śreyas trivarga iti tu sthitiḥ*). But at 7.26–27, Manu is clearly speaking to the king: "The proper administrator of punishment, they say, is a king who speaks the truth, acts after careful examination, is wise, and has a masterly grasp of *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*. When a king administers punishment properly, he flourishes with respect to the *trivarga*" (*tasyāhuḥ saṃpraṇetāraṃ rājānaṃ satyavādinam | samīkṣya kāriṇaṃ prājñaṃ darmakāmārthakovidam || taṃ rājā praṇayan samyak trivargeṇābhivardhate |*). Here the *trivarga* is presented both as something in which one can gain intellectual expertise and as activities and pursuits. As in the Dharmasūtras, the three members of the *trivarga* without that label, however, occur more frequently and have a general application with reference to major areas of human activity.

THE ELUSIVE *PURUṢĀRTHA*

As I have already noted, both in modern scholarship and in medieval Sanskrit sources the term *puruṣārtha* is used often as a synonym of *trivarga*, especially when the latter is expanded to four to include *mokṣa.* Monier-Williams in his *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, for example, defines *puruṣārtha* as "any one of the four objects or aims of existence (viz. *kāma*, the gratification of desire; *artha*, acquirement of wealth; *dharma*, discharge of duty; *moksha*, final emancipation)." Modern scholars invariably refer to the three concepts in *trivarga* as *puruṣārtha* (almost as if the latter is a term of scholarship) and signal that the latter was a central topic of discussion and theorizing in the Brahmanical tradition (see above n. 1). The evidence for this, however, at least in pre-Gupta literature, is meager at best. This scholarly practice entails the real danger of seeing the older category of *trivarga* through the eyes of the much later theory of *puruṣārtha.*

The term *puruṣārtha* in its technical application to these three (or four) concepts is totally absent in the early Brahmanical literature: all the Vedic texts, including the ritual sūtras, the four early Dharmasūtras, the major Dharmaśāstras including Manu and Yājñavalkya, Kauṭilya's *Arthaśāstra*, and Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra;* I will deal with the epics below. The only time it is used in Manu (*puruṣārthaprayojanam*: 7.100) it refers not to these three concepts but to wealth—the fourfold duty of a king to obtain wealth, to protect and increase it, and to distribute it to worthy recipients.

Before turning to the texts that use the term in a variety of senses, I want to deal with the issue of what exactly *puruṣārtha* means, something that scholars who have used the term to examine Indian axiology rarely do. Does it mean, or did it originally mean, goal(s) of a human being—what humans should aspire to—as has been usually taken by modern scholars? I think the evidence points in a different direction.

Whatever meaning we assign to *artha* (and I will deal with it presently), the pivotal issue in interpreting *puruṣārtha* centers around what sort of a Sanskrit compound it is? The two possibilities are Tatpuruṣa (dependent determinative: "*artha* of a person") and Bahuvrīhi (possessive or exocentric: "[an object or act] whose *artha* is a person"), with the added possibility that in its usage in Mīmāṃsā it may be what the grammarians call Nityasamāsa.[10] If

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10. This is a type of compound whose meaning cannot be explained by simply dissolving its constituent words, as is done in other kinds of compounds. One example is *kumbhakāra*, which cannot be explained as *kumbhaṃ kāraḥ*,

puruṣārtha is taken to refer to goals of human beings or something similar, then it must be taken as a Tatpuruṣa compound and thus as a substantive rather than an adjective, which is what Böhtlingk and Roth do with the definition "das Ziel des Menschen." The use of the compound *puruṣartha* within the context of the *trivarga*, however, is, in all likelihood, dependent on its use in the tradition of Mīmāṃsā, where, indeed, it makes its earliest textual appearance. In Mīmāṃsā the compound, whether we take it as a Bahuvrīhi or Nityasamāsa, is adjectival (thus certainly not Tatpuruṣa) and refers to ritual acts that are for the benefit of the human being performing the ritual (Malamoud 1982: 39 n. 13). The connection to Mīmāṃsā is evident in Manu's commentator Medhātithi's comment on *puruṣārtha* discussed below connecting it with *puruṣaprīti*, joy or happiness of man. And *prīti* is used also in the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* 4.1.1–2 to explain the Mīmāṃsā technical terms *puruṣārtha* and *kratvartha*.

The *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* 4.1.1 reads *athātaḥ kratvarthapuruṣārthayor jijñāsā*—"Next, the desire to know what is *kratvartha* and what is *puruṣārtha.*" This terse statement is explained by the fifth-century commentator, Śabara. His comments clearly points to an adjectival compound: *kratave yaḥ sa kratvarthaḥ puruṣāya yaḥ sa puruṣārthaḥ*—"That which is for the sake of a rite is *kratvartha*, and that which is for the sake of a person is *puruṣārtha.*" The dative of purpose points to an act performed for the sake of *kratu* (the rite) or *puruṣa* (person performing the rite). But what is it whose *artha* is the man? The next *sūtra*, *PMS* 4.1.2, points it out: *yasmin prītiḥ puruṣasya tasya lipsārthalakṣaṇāvibhaktatvāt*. Śabara explains this difficult sūtra: *yasmin kṛte padārthe puruṣasya prītir bhavati sa puruṣārthaḥ padārthaḥ*—"That act in which, when it is performed, (is found) the happiness of a person, is an act whose *artha* is the person." The unstated substantive to which *puruṣārtha* refers is now disclosed as *padārtha*, and this technical term of Mīmāṃsā (demonstrating the infuriatingly wide semantic compass of the term *artha*) refers to an action, especially a ritual action. It is this action, when carried out (*kṛte* of Śabara), that causes joy, happiness, and perhaps satisfaction (*prīti*) in a man, and it is this action that is *puruṣārtha.* The latter is distinguished from *kratvartha*, something beneficial to the action itself, especially ritual action (*kratu*), which is said to be subsidiary (*aṅga*), while *puruṣārtha* is principal; the former produces happiness indirectly, and the latter directly. The centrality of *prīti* in the definition of *puruṣārtha* is shown by Śabara's comment on the term *avibhakta* ('not separate') in the *sūtra*. He says that *puruṣārtha* cannot be separated from *prīti;* whatever is instrumental in producing *prīti* is ipso facto *puruṣārtha* (*avibhakto hi puruṣārthaḥ prītyā, yo yaḥ prītisādhanaḥ sa puruṣārthaḥ*).

The compound *puruṣārtha*, then, refers to an activity (*padārtha*) that a person undertakes. But what is the meaning of *artha* within the compound *puruṣārtha.* If we take it as a Nityasamāsa, it has simply the meaning of a dative of purpose. Yet, I think *artha* here should be taken with a stronger meaning than simply a dative of purpose, especially when we take *puruṣārtha* within the context of the *trivarga.* In that context it makes much better sense to take the compound as a Bahuvrīhi. Ganganath Jha, in translating the sūtra (*PMS* 4.1.1) and Śabara's commentary on it, uses the expression "subserves the purposes of man" to translate *puruṣārtha*, even though he presents the compound as a Bahuvrīhi. I think his choice of "purpose" was influenced by the general meaning of *artha* as aim or purpose. Malamoud (1982: 43) defines *artha* as motive, which is more problematic because it involves the internal psychological state of the actor. For the possible meaning of *artha* in this context, however, we must look to the Mīmāṃsā usage of *artha* in a similar context. Fortunately, we do not have far to search. At the very opening of the *PMS* (1.1.2) the term is used in the definition of *dharma*, the central concept both in Mīmāṃsā and in Dharmaśāstra: *codanālakṣaṇo 'rtho*

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but as *kumbhaṃ karoti saḥ.* One kind of Nityasamāsa consists of compounds ending in -*artha*, which has the same meaning as a dative of purpose. See Abhyankar and Shukla 1986: 219–20.

dharmaḥ. In the understanding of Śabara and other commentators, the sūtra means: "*dharma* is something beneficial (*artha*) disclosed by a Vedic injunction." Śabara (p. 21) explains: "The beneficial (*artha*) and the detrimental (*anartha*)—both are here disclosed by injunctions" (*ubhayam iha codanayā lakṣyate 'rtho 'narthaś ceti*). This very juxtaposition of *artha* and *anartha* shows that *artha* cannot mean motive or purpose, for then what would *anartha* mean? Vedic injunctions may prescribe some rites that are conducive to and some that are detrimental to human felicity (*niḥśreyas*), such as various kinds of sorcery. The meaning of *dharma* is thus restricted to prescribed rites that are beneficial (*artha*). This distinction recalls Kauṭilya's distinction of *arthatrivarga* and *anarthatrivarga* that we have already noted (*KAŚ* 9.7.60–63). We will see below the use of *anartha* by Aśvaghoṣa within a very similar context in his *Buddhacarita.* It is not a stretch, I think, to see *puruṣārtha* as an extension and elaboration of the Kauṭilyan *artha* in the context of the *trivarga.* A longer compound would thus be: *puruṣārthatrivarga*, "the triple set of things beneficial to a human being."

Given that *puruṣārtha* in Mīmāṃsā refers to an activity, especially ritual activity (*padārtha*), which is governed by an injunction (*codanā* or *niyama*), and given the parallels in Kauṭilya and Aśvaghoṣa, it is legitimate to take *artha* in *puruṣārtha* to have the same or similar connotation as *artha* in the definition of *dharma.* Thus *puruṣārtha* means an activity that confers a beneficial result, that is, happiness or joy (*prīti*), on the person performing that activity.

With this understanding of *puruṣārtha* gleaned from Mīmāṃsā, we can turn to the early sources where the term is used. Given the frequent use of *trivarga* in the *Mahābhārata*, we would have expected it also to use the companion term *puruṣārtha.* And, indeed, it uses the term nine times, but not generally within the context of the elements of the *trivarga.* At 3.176.27, for example, the term means human effort (*pauruṣa*) as opposed to fate (*daiva*); at 5.133.29 it appears to refer to manly enterprise (Sharma 1982: 1). The only place where it appears more likely to have been used within the *trivarga* context is 1.109.19. In the well-known story of a seer and his wife taking on the forms of deer and doe to engage in sexual intercourse, the sage-deer, shot by King Pāṇḍu, says: *puruṣārthaphalaṃ kāntaṃ yat tvayā vitathaṃ kṛtam* ("in that you have stymied the fruit of *puruṣārtha*"), in all likelihood referring to *kāma*, because his intercourse with his wife has been rendered fruitless. A reference to *trivarga* is made by the sage-deer again at 1.109.23. The expression *puruṣārthaphala* then means the fruit of an act (i.e., sexual intercourse) that is for the benefit of the person (i.e., begetting children).

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* also, where the expression occurs three times,[11] it does not refer to elements in the *trivarga.* At 6.103.6, for example, *puruṣārtha* is given in a passage that also uses *pauruṣa* and *mānuṣya* (as opposed to *daiva*) with the identical meaning of human effort. Note that, with this meaning, *artha* has the sense of activity: *puruṣārtha* = human activity, much like the Mīmāṃsā term *padārtha.*

So, the much discussed term *puruṣārtha*, according to scholars the lynchpin of Brahmanical discussion about the aims or goals of human beings and of Hindu axiology,[12] is very rare or entirely absent in the vocabulary of most ancient Indian texts. And, of course, it does not refer to goals or aims of human life. Thus, it is ironic that the only ancient text to use the term *puruṣārtha* with a modicum of frequency within the context of the *trivarga* is a Bud-

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11. 1.6.5; 4.37.22; 6.103.6.

12. For a survery of modern scholarship on the issue, see Davis 2004, who argues, correctly I think, that the *puruṣārtha*s are not values at all or even aims, goals, or motives. For these arguments, see Potter 1963; Koller 1968; Flood 2000.

dhist text, Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita.* When Siddhārtha, the future Buddha, decides to leave home and adopt the life of a wandering mendicant, his father, King Śuddhodana, attempted various strategies to bring his son back. The *trivarga* doctrine is used as a strategy by King Śreṇiya of Magadha (10.28), a friend of Śuddhodana. Śreṇiya asks Siddhārtha to devote himself to *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* and not to upturn the *trivarga* by taking to renunciation too early in life. He goes on to advise Siddhārtha (10.30):

> *tasmāt trivargasya niṣevaṇena*
>   *tvaṃ rūpam etat saphalaṃ kuruṣva |*
> *dharmārthakāmādhigamaṃ hy anūnaṃ*
>   *nṛṇām anūnaṃ puruṣārtham āhuḥ ||*
> By pursuing, therefore, the *trivarga*,
>   make this lovely body of yours bear fruit.
> For when a man gains in their entirety
>   *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*, they say,
>   he has achieved the *puruṣārtha*
>   of men in its entirety.

Here too *puruṣārtha* does not mean goal of human life but simply what is good or beneficial for a human being, the highest human good, somewhat similar to the use of *artha* in Mīmāṃsā and *KAŚ* 9.7.60–64. This is confirmed by Siddhārtha's reply to Śreṇiya, where he uses the alternative *manuṣyārtha* (11.58–59) and contrasts it with *anartha* in a way similar to Kauṭilya:

> *trivargasevāṃ nṛpa yat tu kṛtsnataḥ*
>   *paro manuṣyārtha iti tvam āttha mām |*
> *anartha ity eva mamātra darśanaṃ*
>   *kṣayī trivargo hi na cāpi tarpakaḥ ||*
> *pade tu yasmin na jarā na bhīr na ruṅ*
>   *na janma naivoparamo na cādhayaḥ |*
> *tam eva manye puruṣārtham uttamaṃ*
>   *na vidyate yatra punaḥ punaḥ kriyā ||*
> As to what you said to me, that the *trivarga*
>   when followed in its entirety
>   is the highest *manuṣyārtha*;
> My view on this is that it is truly an *anartha*,
>   for the *trivarga* is transient,
>   and it fails to satisfy.
> The state in which there is no old age and no fear,
>   no sickness and no birth, no death and no distress,
> That alone I consider the highest *puruṣārtha*,
>   in which there is no repeated activity.

The statement that the *trivarga* even when followed to perfection is not the ultimate *puruṣārtha* indicates the clash between the "worldly" pursuits encapsuled in the *trivarga* and the freedom from the world and from birth and death that drove people to adopt the itinerant and mendicant way of life. Later, as we will see, this latter pursuit was also, somewhat awkwardly, incorporated into the triple category making it a fourfold one.

  The fact that *puruṣārtha* was not a strong presence in the Sanskrit vocabulary at least until the middle of the first millennium is demonstrated by its absence in the *Amarakośa*, the

earliest Sanskrit lexicon and thesaurus probably composed in the fifth-to-sixth c. CE, in its presentation of *trivarga* discussed below. The earliest technical use of the term I have been able to find within the Brahmanical literature is in Medhātithi's (ninth c. CE) commentary on Manu. In introducing *MDh* 4.176 he says: *uktas trivargaḥ puruṣārthaḥ* ("the *trivarga* beneficial to a person has been explained"), where *puruṣārtha* is clearly a Bahuvrīhi compound qualifying *trivarga*. On *MDh* 2.224, a verse that contains the three concepts of *trivarga* but not that term itself, Medhātithi says that, according to some, *kāma* is the chief *puruṣārtha* (*kāmas tāvan mukhya eva puruṣārthaḥ*), while, according to the Cārvākas, *kāma* is not just the chief but the only *puruṣārtha* (*kāma evaikaḥ puruṣārthaḥ*). Here, for the first time, we have an apparent use of *puruṣārtha* as a substantive, where the compound is probably used as a Tatpuruṣa.

There has been some scholarly attention paid to the connections or correlations between the *trivarga–puruṣārtha* complex and other Brahmanical classificatory systems, most notably the four *varṇa*s and the four *āśrama*s. Malamoud,[13] for example, devotes an appendix to his study of the *puruṣārtha*s (1982: 49–52) to the correspondence between these three classificatory systems. So also does Sharma (1982: 16–17). Sharma presents the clearest charting of correspondences between the three institutions:

Varṇa	Puruṣārtha	Āśrama
brāhmaṇa	*dharma, mokṣa*	all four
kṣatriya	*dharma, artha*	*brahmacarya, gṛhastha, vānaprastha*
vaiśya	*artha, kāma*	*brahmacarya, gṛhastha, vānaprastha*
śūdra	*kāma*	*gṛhastha*

This and similar correlations are drawn out of thin air; they do not correspond to any ideas found in the ancient sources. For example, that Kṣatriyas are unconcerned about *kāma* is totally contrary to what Kauṭilya says. These classifications are distinct and address various imperatives of ancient Indian social and religious thought; with the exception of the claim that only Brahmins are entitled to become *saṃnyāsin*s, the ancient thinkers themselves never deemd it necessary to bring them into some kind of correlation. Neither should we.

In medieval times "Puruṣārtha" occurs in the titles of works in the genre of Dharmanibandha (Digest of Law). Kane (I-II: 1065) lists five such works: *Puruṣārthacintāmaṇi*, *Puruṣārthaprabodha*, *Puruṣārthaprabodhinī*, *Puruṣārtharatnākara*, and *Puruṣārthasudhānidhi*. These, however, do not deal with the "aims of man" but rather with rituals that must be performed during certains times of the day and during certain days of the liturgical year.

EXPANSION OF AND DEBATES OVER THE *TRIVARGA*

The scholarly consensus is that the original *trivarga* became expanded into four with the addition of *mokṣa*. Malamoud (1982: 37), in dealing with the Indian penchant for the 3 + 1 scheme, says: "In the series of man's four aims, mokṣa is obviously the + 1. The structure shows through first of all in the formal indications of the terminology: the first three puruṣārtha[14] . . . together make up the trivarga; this 'triple group' becomes transformed into

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13. Malamoud refers to an article by Syrkin written in Russian that is a "semiotic study of the place of the puruṣārthas in the totality of representations forming the latticework of ancient Indian culture" (Malamoud 1982: 52): A.Ia. "K sistematizacii nekotorykh poniatti v sanskrite" (Contribution a la systématisation de certains concepts en sanscrit). *Semiotiklo i vostocnyie iazyki* (*Semiotique et langues orientales*), Moscow: Nauka, 1967, pp. 146–64.

14. Note his use of *puruṣārtha* here, even though sources never use that term.

caturvarga, where is added a fourth term, which is invariably mokṣa." In confirmation of this observation, Malamoud cites the *Amarakoṣa* (II: Brahmavarga 57), which reads: *trivargo dharmakāmārthaiś caturvargaḥ samokṣakaiḥ* ("The *trivarga* with *dharma*, *kāma*, and *artha*, and, together with *mokṣa*, *caturvarga*"). Significantly, this fifth-to-sixth century text is the earliest that I have been able find where the term *caturvarga* occurs, contrary to Malamoud, however, without the use of the term *puruṣārtha*, which is never used in the *Amarakośa*.

The addition of *mokṣa* to the three is not recorded in any Dharmaśāstra. The only places in the early literature that this addition is found are the Śāntiparvan of the *Mahābhārata* and Vātsyāyana's *Kāmasūtra*. At *MBh* 12.59.29–30, in the description of the text composed by the Self-Arisen One, the author says:

> *yatra dharmas tathaivārthaḥ kāmaś caivānuvarṇitaḥ |*
> *trivarga iti vikhyāto gaṇa eṣa svayaṃbhuvā |*
> *caturtho mokṣa ity eva pṛthag arthaḥ pṛthag gaṇaḥ ||*
> In which *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma* were described. This group was called *trivarga* by the Self-Arisen One. There is a separate fourth *artha* and a separate group: *mokṣa.*

The only other place where *mokṣa* is introduced into the *trivarga* is at *MBh* 12.123.5, where it is said that sense objects serve to procure food. That is the root of the *trivarga* (*mūlaṃ trivargasya*). It goes on to say: *nivṛttir mokṣa ucyate* ("their cessation is *mokṣa*"). Nowhere, however, is the term *caturvarga* used.

In the long discussion of the *trivarga* in the second chapter of the first book of the *Kāmasūtra* that we have already surveyed, Vātsyāyana directs a person to divide his lifespan into three and pursue one of the three in each (1.2.1–4). As I have already noted, the introduction of a fourth category, *mokṣa*, may well be a later interpolation for the reasons I have already mentioned and also because this is the only time this term is used in the entire text.

So, the conclusion is that the expansion of the three into four was not a matter of great concern to the authors of these early texts. The fixed insertion of *mokṣa* to make a group of four must have happened sometime before the middle of the millennium, since it is noted in the *Amarakośa*. The four appear together as a group in medieval Dharmaśāstric texts. A ninth-century commentary on the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti*—a long fragment of which exists in a single manuscript in Nepal[15] and whose author remains unknown—gives the following "etymological" definition of "veda": *vedayate 'smin dharmārthakāmamokṣā iti vedaḥ* ("The term *veda* is derive from the fact that in it *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa* are made known" [p. 6a]).

That Dharmaśāstras deal with all four areas of the *caturvarga* is explicitly stated in Viśvarūpa's (ninth c. CE) commentary on the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti.* He states (pp. 3–4) that the text aims to provide instruction in the *caturvarga*, noting that the term *dharma* in Dharmaśāstra is a synecdoche intended to include also *artha*, *kāma*, and *mokṣa.* He also explains (p. 2) that these four implicitly refer also to their opposites as well, which also can be learnt from the Dharmaśāstras. Viśvarūpa, thus, states that these texts have as their object the *aṣṭavarga*, the set of eight. This is the largest expansion of the original *trivarga* I have encountered.

The category of *mokṣa*, however, rests uneasily in the company of the other three (Krishna 1986). As we saw, many authors recommend that the *trivarga* should be followed as a whole; none should be ignored and none should undermine the others. The fourth category, however, requires the person who is dedicated to it to abandon the other three: *nivṛtti* or cessation, as

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15. National Archives, Kathmandu, Nepal, Manuscript No. B432/19.

the above passage of the *Mahābhārata* points out. All four of these cannot be carried out together.

Of greater concern to these early authors is the relative value of the three pursuits of *trivarga*. Which is more important? Can a person follow one to the detriment of the other two? Is there a hierarchy among these three? As already pointed out, the earliest author to deal with this is Gautama (9.46–47): "To the best of his ability, he should not make the morning, midday, and afternoon fruitless with respect to *dharma*, *artha*, and *kāma*. Among these, however, he should place *dharma* at the forefront." Giving priority to *dharma* is common in the Dharmaśāstras, as is only to be expected. Manu (2.224) gives three opinions about which of them is superior: "*dharma* and *artha* are said to be superior, or *kāma* and *artha*, or just *dharma*; or here just *artha*. The settled rule, however, is that it is the *trivarga*" (*dharmārthāv ucyate śreyaḥ kāmārthau dharma eva vā | artha eveha vā śreyas trivarga iti tu sthitiḥ ||*). More clearly at 4.176, Manu establishes the superiority of *dharma:* "He should give up completely *artha* and *kāma* that is devoid of *dharma*" (*parityajed arthakāmau yau syātāṃ dharmavarjitau*).

Kauṭilya (*KAŚ* 1.7.6–7) also engages in this debate, as we saw above, and he comes down in favor of the supremacy of *artha*, because *dharma* and *kāma* have *artha* as their foundation, and Manu may indeed be referring to this passage when he says that some take *artha* to be the best.

The longest and most detailed discussion of this topic is found in the *Mahābhārata* (12.161.2), where Yudhiṣṭhira asks Vidura explicitly which of the three is most important, which is the middling, and which is lowest in rank. Vidura's reply occupies the whole of the chapter. The bottom line here is that *dharma* is the best; next comes *artha;* and *kāma* is the lowest—the same thesis that we find in the Dharmaśāstras. In the *Rāmāyaṇa* (4.37.20–22) also, *dharma* is presented as the highest of the three; the others can be followed only if they do not hinder *dharma*.

In spite of this theological debate, it is clear that *trivarga* was generally viewed as a single group of activities that, when pursued together, are wholesome and confer benefits (*artha*) on human beings. Kauṭilya (*KAŚ* 1.7.2) is clear: "(The king) should pursue the *trivarga* equally, each intimately linked to the others." They are not some abstract and theoretical goals or "ends of man" but three major areas of wholesome human activity and engagement to which a person should pay attention.

CONCLUDING POSTSCRIPT

On the basis of this study, then, we can posit a few general conclusions with respect to *trivarga* and *puruṣārtha* as they are presented and explained in texts preceding the middle of the first millennium CE.

(1) The classificatory term *trivarga*, just like its counterparts *ṣaḍvarga* and the like, requires an implicit referent: *what* is it that contains this triple grouping? Kauṭilya provides the answer with the compound *arthatrivarga*, showing that *artha*, in the sense of things that are beneficial, is the referent of *trivarga*. Thus, *artha* as a component of the *trivarga* has a different meaning, referring to success in the economic and political arenas, that is, wealth and power.

(2) The term *puruṣārtha* is an elaboration of *artha* as the referent of *trivarga:* something that is beneficial to a human being. In its original and earliest usage within the Mīmāṃsā tradition, *puruṣārtha* is a Bahuvrīhi compound (or possibly a Nityasamāsa) referring to a ritual act (*padārtha*): something that is of benefit to the human performer, as opposed to

kratvartha: something that is of benefit to the act itself. So, cutting vegetables benefits the act of cooking, while the act of cooking itself benefits the human who will consume what is cooked. Within the context of *trivarga*, the compound means "the triple set that is of benefit to a human being."

(3) The term *artha* in the compound *puruṣārtha* does not mean aim or goal, even though that meaning may occasionally seep into it in actual usage especially in later texts. Within this compound *artha* has the same meaning it has in Mīmāṃsā and Kauṭilya: something that is beneficial, as opposed to *anartha*: something that is detrimental.

(4) The expression *puruṣārtha* is rare with reference to the *trivarga* in the early literature until at least the middle of the first millennium CE. Its absence in the comprehensive lexicon, the *Amarakośa*, which records the *trivarga* and *caturvarga* (with the inclusion of *mokṣa*), shows its marginal status in the Sanskrit vocabulary relating to *trivarga.*

(5) The three concepts—*dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*—comprehended by *trivarga* do not constitute goals or aims of human life, as they are so often depicted in modern scholarship. They represent three major domains of human activities and pursuits that are beneficial to persons who perform them. A balanced and wholesome human life requires that an individual pursue all three of these in a balanced manner: such a person can be said to have lived a *good life*. In this sense, one can say that the doctrine of *trivarga* constitutes—or at least contains the germs of—a moral philosophy or a philosophy of life.

Scholarly discussions of *trivarga* and *puruṣārtha* frequently conflate, or do not adequately distinguish, three levels of analysis: (1) Historical, which is the level of analysis in this paper; (2) Philosophical/theological, based on other areas of Indian philosophical and religious traditions, thus attempting to "understand more fully" these concepts by locating them within a larger context; and (3) The construction of a new axiology or philosophy of value and a new soteriology or a doctrine of ultimate salvation/liberation. The latter two are not illegitimate intellectual activities, but must be kept distinguished from the first if we are to gain an accurate historical understanding of these categories.

ABBREVIATIONS

KAŚ	Kauṭilya, *Arthaśāstra*
MDh	*Mānava Dharmaśāstra*
MBh	*Mahābhārata*
NSm	*Nārada Smṛti*
PMS	*Pūrva Mīmāṃsā Sūtra*
Rām	*Rāmāyaṇa*
SV	*Sāma Veda*
YDh	*Yājñavalkya Dharmaśāstra*

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