



## What Makes a Life Meaningful?

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**Abstract:** Life is meaningful. This is one of the assumptions of the Theory of *Puruṣārthas* in Indian Philosophy. Is this an unquestionable assumption? Is life really meaningful? There is certainly room for this doubt. For, neither the scheme of *puruṣārthas* nor any other theory has explained in isolation all the secrets of the real and ultimate meaning of life. That is to say that the meaning of life is not something that exists already in all clarity; rather, it is something to be created and organized from all that is given within the integral human situation. This is the basic impetus behind our search for the meaning of life as it has been understood and lived out in our major philosophical traditions. Since *puruṣārtha* means 'meaning of life' and form an integral part of Indian world view it is imperative for us to clarify what we mean by 'meaning of life'. In this paper I have tried to give a very general outlook, without any philosophical jargons, about the meaning of life in relation to the Indian theory of *Puruṣārtha*.

What exactly do we mean by meaning of life? Are we using the word 'life' universally or are we looking for the meaning of life of a particular human being? Before looking at this distinction, we need to look into yet another question first: To ask what the meaning of life is, is to assume that life is itself meaningful. But what if, if there are people who doubt whether life has any meaning at all? As a matter of fact, there are philosophers who conclude that life is meaningless.<sup>1</sup> It would have been better if the world had never existed. This is the position of Arthur Schopenhauer. We take this example from the western tradition simply because he is the best known pessimist in philosophy. According to him, life is a business which does not cover its expenses.<sup>2</sup>

His chief metaphysical reason for this philosophical pessimism is the idea that existence is based on will which causes manifold expectations and desires leading ultimately to suffering. And his

empirical reason for pessimism is the fact that the world is full of pain and misery. Now coming to the Indian Tradition, we find that there are some thinkers who bordered on philosophical pessimism. But fortunately they have survived it. Kanāda, a sage and philosopher, founder of the *Vaiśeṣika* System, seems initially to conclude that life is meaningless.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Buddha also felt pessimistic at the sight of pain and misery but later discovered the *arya satyas* (four noble truths) and thus survived the pessimistic outlook on life.

It is not our intention here to go into an appraisal of the types of pessimism just summed up. Rather, it is taken up so that one may not simply assume that life is meaningful without giving some serious thought to it. When our discussion of the meaning of life becomes sharper we may find that philosophical pessimism is irrational. But we must arrive at this conclusion rather than assume it. That we may find that philosophical pessimism is irrational does not, of course, mean that individuals cannot have good reasons for feeling pessimistic concerning their own lives and purposes. The following distinctions we make would clearly show that philosophical pessimism is unsustainable.

### Two Things We Want to Know

Let us now focus the problem this way: what do we want to know when we ask whether life has a meaning? While asking thus, we want to know at least two things. (i). whether a particular person's life has (or had) any meaning. This is asking a different question indeed. For here we are asking whether certain purposes are to be found in his or her life. (ii). The other thing we want to know when we ask whether life has any meaning is: Whether there is a superhuman being who fashioned us humans along with other objects in the world in order to serve some purpose. In other words, to use an analogy, what we want to know is whether our role is

<sup>1</sup> For example, one can read Albert Camus's *Myth of Sisyphus*

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *The world as Will and Idea*, London, 1883, Vol.III, p. 383

<sup>3</sup> Kanāda is the author of the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtras* which are pre-Buddhist. His Sūtras commence to explain virtue (dharma) according to which prosperity (*abhyūdaya*) and salvation (*niśreyasa*) are obtained.



something like that of a string in a lute in a symphony.

### Two Senses

Often than not, we confuse these two things that we want to know while discussing the problem of the meaning life. Much of this confusion can be avoided if we bring in a distinction. For the sake of convenience let us call this distinction the distinction between the cosmic and the human. Let us put it clearly: We come across the word *puruṣa* in the Ṛgveda for the first time. There it is clear that the Vedic Indians use the term *puruṣa* to refer to the universe as well as to man. This usage is parallel to the Vedic use of *Ṛta* meaning the cosmic order as well as the human conduct. This distinction between the Cosmic and the Human is crucial for our understanding of the *puruṣārthas* which when rendered into English means 'meaning of life'.

In the light of this distinction we can clearly see that there are at least two senses in which we usually employ the expression 'meaning of life' - the cosmic sense and the human sense. If we do not keep this distinction between the cosmic and the human sense of the meaning of life in mind, confusion is likely to arise.

**Cosmic Sense:** For instance, if we do not keep these two senses of the meaning of life apart, it becomes impossible, for those who want to, to defend the position that life can be meaningful even if there is no God and no after life. If we reject the theory of cosmic design we can immediately infer that life is meaningless in the cosmic sense. But from this it does not logically follow that a particular person's life is meaningless in the human sense.

Another example of how this distinction works is: What do we mean, for instance, when we ask whether history has a meaning? To ask this question is to use the expression 'meaning of life' in the cosmic sense. Macbeth was giving a negative answer to this question in the cosmic sense when he exclaimed that life "is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing". What he was pointing out evidently was not that human life is part of a scheme designed by a superhuman idiot but that it is not a part of any design at all.

**Human Sense:** Whereas we are using 'meaning of life' in the human sense when we ask whether a particular person's life has or had any meaning. How do we come to know whether one's life has a meaning? Let us take the obvious example of Swami Vivekananda who devoted himself to the cause of 'Hinduism'. Most of us would not hesitate to admit that Swamiji led a meaningful life. Whether we approve of all that he did or did not is not the point

here. The point here is that we mean at least two things when we say he led a meaningful life. (a). That his life had an overall goal or goals that gave direction and coherence to a great many of his actions. (b). That he did what he did with a special zest that was not obvious before he became attached to his goal(s). Here it may be asked whether a single human life, taken as a whole, can have one meaning, one purpose. It is not impossible for an adult individual to have just one large overriding purpose as is illustrated by Swamiji's life. But this need not be the case with most people. Many people in fact have a variety of purposes proper to different times in their lives. In this connection, it may also be asked: Can the human race as a totality have a goal in life, just as an individual can have one? To think of any such aim is not easy, though communities may have aims in common, for instance, praying for rain in any South Indian temple or hoping to abolish political corruption in India etc..

If commitment to a cause, purposefulness, is what gives meaning to a person's life, then it implies a further distinction between the subjective and objective within the human sense of the meaning of life. In the subjective sense, to say that a person's life is meaningful is to say that he is attached to some goals provided that he does not consider them trivial and that these goals are within his reach. Whereas when we declare that a person's life is meaningful in the objective sense, what we are saying is that he is attached to certain goals which are not only attainable but also of positive value.

**Purposes and Meaningful Purposes:** In order to make this point clearer, we need to bring in one more distinction with regard to individual human purposes. That is, we need to distinguish between purposes and meaningful purposes. When does a purpose become meaningful? A purpose becomes meaningful if it signifies values. If not, it becomes meaningless, trivial. Bringing Narendra Modi to the chair of Indian prime minister so that there would be a corruptionless state run is a meaningful purpose for the Indians. This means that values are what give meaning to life. This, of course, does not mean that there is no place for play, for things trivial, in human life.

### Without God and Immortality

Before we pass on we need to settle a connected question already hinted at: Can life be meaningful, even if there is no God and no after life? There are people who answer this question in the affirmative. Is this position defensible? Does life make sense without the goal of moksha? Right now, let us limit ourselves to the problem of 'meaningful'



life without God and immortality. Without the possibility of eternal life human life can have no meaning. This is the position the character Ivan Karamazov, an atheist, in Dostoevsky's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, takes. For him, meaning is connected with value and value with eternal life. Therefore Ivan believes that the finitude of life is proof that it has no purpose.

### Eternity and Purpose

Thus, while some hold that eternity is what gives meaning to human life, some others argue that even eternal life would be without purpose. Wittgenstein puts this question in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*: Is not the riddle of eternal life itself as much a riddle as our present life?

By way of commenting on the purposelessness of eternal life, I want to quote from Dr. Jenny Teichman's article, "Philosophy and the Meaning of Life" -

What have time and eternity got to do with purpose? Are they all not completely different things? For what reason should it be supposed that eternal things have more purpose than finite things? For all we know, the universe may be eternal, matter may be eternal, energy may be eternal, but we cannot tell whether they have a purpose, or what such a purpose might be. Asking about the purpose of life, meaning of God's purpose in creating life is much the same as asking about the purpose of matter or the purpose of energy. Although some people have claimed to be able to answer these questions, I will put them to one side as being too difficult altogether.<sup>4</sup>

Dr. Jenny Teichman goes on to make a distinction between the possible purposes of a Creator and the known purpose of mankind. One of the implications of this distinction is: Even if we know for certain that life was not brought into being by a Creator for his own purposes, humanity could and would still have its own purposes and goals.<sup>5</sup>

If this is true, then the connection between the concept of purpose and the concept of eternity is not obvious. If God exists, his purposes are different from ours. This means that there is no logical necessity that there should be God and after life in order for us to have meaningful life. This is not to deny the fact that belief in God and after life might be of use to people as far as their practical life is concerned.

<sup>4</sup> R. Balasubramanian and V. C. Thomas, eds., *Perspectives in Philosophy Religion and Art*, Essays

### Is Happiness the Ultimate Goal?

In spite of the variety of distinctions we have made so far, we haven't yet critically examined the question: What is the ultimate goal of life? What does it mean to live out our lives with meaning? What is the ultimate value that gives human life its value? What makes life worth living? The goal of life is to live and that the *puruṣārthas* are what make life worth living. But there is a strong and widespread view that it is happiness which is the ultimate goal of life. If happiness is what makes life worth living then it comes in conflict with our contention that the ultimate goal of life is to live. Therefore an examination of the view that happiness is the ultimate value is called for before we proceed any further.

That happiness is the ultimate goal and that happiness is what gives human life its value is a Utilitarian view. No matter, whether they are optimists or pessimists. The utilitarianism in general holds that everyone desires happiness above all else. If we ask about people who may have no hope of happiness, then some of them do not even hesitate to suggest that such people should be 'helped to die'. According to their thesis, people who cannot contribute to the happiness of others would also deserve this type of timely help. But this utilitarian thesis does not stand to reason. For the thesis that happiness is the ultimate goal of life is contradicted by the everyday behavior of ordinary people. Let me quote Dr. Jenny Teichman once again:

Ordinary people wish to go on living even when they are very unhappy. In reality people behave as if they believe that just being alive is intrinsically good; in reality ordinary people behave as if life itself is an ultimate value.<sup>6</sup>

One can ask, is not this behavior instinctive? Yes, it may well be. But being instinctive is not unreasonable. The desire for happiness is also instinctive. To attribute ultimate value to happiness is like putting the cart before the horse. The fact is that we instinctively desire to be happy because that helps us to stay alive, and not the other way about. It is not that we instinctively want to stay alive in order to be happy. To use a simple analogy, we do not live in order to eat; rather, we eat in order to live, even though eating makes us happy and content.

If this is true, then it makes perfect sense to believe that life even without happiness is worth

in Honor of Margaret Chatterjee, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, 1993, p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p.65

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



living. This implies that even an unhappy life has value. In fact, this is the position that Philippa Foot, one of the few philosophers who have discussed the question of the intrinsic value of life, has argued for, against utilitarianism. According to her, it makes perfect sense to believe that life without happiness is worth living. In her paper 'Euthanasia' she explains how and why it is possible to regard even an unhappy life as having value.<sup>7</sup> One of her important arguments is this: After all what do we mean by a 'life worth living'? It means a life worth living for the person who is living it. If this important point that Philippa Foot makes is valid, then it does not matter whether or not your life is worth anything to anyone else.

### Life has Intrinsic Value

In short, what makes life worth living is its intrinsic value. This is true even of severely handicapped people. In other words, human life, happy or unhappy, is itself a good and has a value; this indeed is the way most people usually regard their own lives. Though we can confidently say that human life is good in itself, we must hasten to add that it must be an 'ordinary' human life in some minimum sense. What do we mean by this idea of 'ordinary human life'? It means a number of things: It has a minimum of basic human goods; A person is not driven to work far beyond his or her capacity; He/She has the support of a family or community; He or She can hope to satisfy his hunger; He or she has hopes for the future; He or she can lie down to rest; and so on and so forth.

To put it differently, the goal of life is to live. And, to live means that we may not die before our time; that we may survive and that, more than these, we may love our life, love others' lives and love one's and others' right to live. In short, four things that make a life 'ordinary' and thus meaningful are: 1. a sense of purpose (motivation); 2. to have someone to love. 3. To have something to do 4. to have something to look forward (hope). These are some of the things that the *puruṣārthas* denote, as we shall see later. That is why we say that the *puruṣārthas* are what makes the goal of being alive meaningful.

Two things are obvious from the above observations. one is that the intrinsic value of life explicates the conceptual connection between the concept of life and the concept of good. For, the

'ordinary' human life just described above is good in itself and does not necessarily have to be happy to be worth living. The other obvious thing is that Philippa Foot's conclusion concerning the intrinsic value of life fits the feelings which most people have about their own lives. Thus, it also follows common sense - which is not a bad thing at all in philosophy.

### Unexciting Conclusions

Let us now enumerate the main conclusions that emerge from our discussion of the meaning of life. One might find these conclusions quite unexciting. But this unexcitedness is not a reason for rejecting it. For, they help solve many a problem that arises in our interpretation of the *puruṣārthas*. 1. Life is meaningful both in the cosmic as well as in the human sense. 2. Some lives are meaningful both in the subjective and the objective sense. 3. Some lives are meaningful in the subjective sense but may not be meaningful in the objective sense. 4. Some lives are meaningful in the objective sense but may not be meaningful in the subjective sense. 5. Some lives are at certain times not meaningful in either the subjective or objective sense. 6. Individuals can have good reasons for feeling pessimistic, as is illustrated by the character Ivan Karamazov. Philosophical pessimism does not stand to reason. 8. Even if we do not believe in God, life would be meaningful. For example, few Buddhists believe in a god but they believe in the sanctity of life. So is the case with some members of the medical profession. 9. Life can be quite meaningful even if God does not exist and even if there is no immortality and eternity. This is evidenced by the lives of some atheists.

Let us sum up what we have said so far in this section. Life is meaningful in one sense or another. For, life has intrinsic value and therefore its goal is to live. And what give content to this goal is the *puruṣārthas*. How the *puruṣārthas* make meaningful life possible shall become clearer as we go along. For the time being we assume the mutuality of the *puruṣārthas*. Now, we shall examine the theory of *puruṣārthas* in general.

In the previous section we have defended the position that life is meaningful and that '*puruṣārtha*' means meaning of life. We have also argued that the ultimate goal of life is to be alive in its ordinary sense. That is, life has intrinsic value and

<sup>7</sup> As quoted by Dr. Jenny Teichman in "Philosophy and the Meaning of Life" in *Perspectives in Philosophy Religion and Art*, p. 65.



that is what makes it worth living. We shall now take a look at the concept of *puruṣārthas* in general.

The question is: If life has intrinsic value and therefore to be alive is the ultimate goal, what shall we make of the traditional answer that the *puruṣārthas* are the goals of life? What does it mean? How do we know that the *puruṣārthas* constitute the goals of life? One way of knowing this is to see whether life would be life without any one of these goals. The idea is not that life would not be life without the *puruṣārthas* but that life would not be meaningful life without the *puruṣārthas*. If life would not be meaningful without any of these, then these are certainly to be treated as goals.

But before examining the question of whether life makes sense without the *puruṣārthas*, we need to clarify the technical terms we use. What is the traditional understanding of the *puruṣārthas*? How the terms and concept of *puruṣārthas* are traditionally interpreted? To a consideration of these questions we now turn.

In fact, our whole thesis can be characterized as a clarification of the term and concept of *puruṣārthas*. For, it is not only a term and therefore a mere concept, but it is also a scheme and a normative orientation to life. In other words it entails a philosophy of life. For, to ask what your philosophy of life is a different way of asking how you understand the *puruṣārthas*, the meaning of life. We shall therefore devote a few subsequent chapters to the scanning of the meaning and history of the concept of the *puruṣārthas*.

This scanning is divided into three areas: Analysis of the concept of *puruṣārthas*, Examination of the *trivarga* meant for our *abhyūdaya* (prosperity), and the question of *mokṣa* which is said to be our *nīśreyasa* (salvation). This division will become more and more evident by the end of this scanning.

### The Concept of 'puruṣārtha'

What does the word *puruṣārtha* mean? It has been rendered into English in several ways: Value of life, goal of life, aim of existence, meaning of life, etc. The word '*puruṣārtha*' is not a term of common usage in Sanskrit and modern Indian languages. This means that it is not a technical term. It is translated by scholars like Hiriyanna as a human value consciously pursued an object of desire.<sup>8</sup> Of

these several renderings, we shall, in our discussion, limit ourselves to the general expression 'meaning of life'.

The literal meaning of the classical expression *puruṣārtha* is 'any object of human striving, human effort'. And, when used adverbially, *puruṣārtha* conveys the nuance 'for the sake of man'. 'on account of man'.<sup>9</sup>

Even etymologically '*Puruṣārtha*' means that which is aimed at or desired. It could be anything that we desire to have (*upadeya*) or to avoid (*heya*). Though it means things we desire to have or to avoid, in classical discussions on *puruṣārthas* the accent usually falls on the things we desire to have. Therefore, we can take the classification of *puruṣārthas* as a classification of what we aim at rather than what we want to avoid.

We have already said that the Vedic Indians used the term '*puruṣa*' to refer to the universe as well as to man. The term *puruṣa* is also a qualifying word in *puruṣārtha*. If *puruṣārtha* literally means what the *puruṣa* desires as good (*artha*) then, in its general expression it signifies all those goals the pursuit of which is expressive of our nature as a whole.

The qualification *puruṣa* has a further meaning: It also means 'human'. Does this meaning suggest that *puruṣārtha* specifically refers to those goals which we humans do not share with other grades of sentient beings? Do the *Puruṣārtha* refer only to human goals? What about the goals enjoyed by animals? What is it that distinguishes humans from animals?

Food, sex-gratification, pleasure etc are some of the goals referred to by the word *puruṣārtha*. These are common goals experienced by any sentient being whatever. If this be true, *puruṣārtha* does not specifically refer to goals which we humans do not share with other animals. If so, it may be asked, what is unique about man? This question may be answered in the language of Hitopadeśa, one of the earliest fables in India. In its 'prastavika' it makes a clear distinction between man and animal: Hunger, sleep, fear and sex are common to all men and animals. What distinguishes man from animal is the knowledge of the right and wrong.

According to Western philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Kant and others, man alone has the capacity of conceiving a goal and of acting

<sup>8</sup>M. Hiriyanna, *The Quest After Perfection*, Kavyalaya Publishes, Mysore, 1952, pp. 22 & 103.

<sup>9</sup> M. Monier-Williams. A Sanskrit - English Dictionary, repr., Oxford, 1970, p. 637;

P. V. Kane, History of Dhannasastras, Vol.II, pp.1510f, 1626-32



accordingly. By this they do not mean that animals have no purpose. It is set for them by nature and does not therefore involve any conscious choice and determination. Does this way of thinking mean that in the gratification of sensuous inclinations and impulses man cease to be human? No. This is not what the authors mean when they say *puruṣārtha* refers to goals shared by all grades of sentient beings. They explain the qualification *puruṣa* differently. One such explanation given by Balbir Singh, is this: A goal should be such that it reflects therein the spiritual element characteristic of human nature alone. It is the presence of this element in the pursuit that gives the goal a unique meaning.<sup>10</sup> One thing that becomes clear when we look at the concept of *puruṣārtha* is this: It is considered only in the context of the doctrine of four *puruṣārthas*. That is, it is nowhere discussed in its own right. Therefore, the question we need to ask is: What does the concept of *puruṣārtha* mean in the context of the four *puruṣārthas*? This is certainly a problem because '*puruṣārtha*' cannot mean the same thing when applied to these four *puruṣārthas*. In other words, we do not take them all in the same sense. For instance, *artha* is not a *puruṣārtha* in the same sense in which *mokṣa* is a *puruṣārtha*. Therefore without examining the concept of *puruṣārtha* in some detail we would find it difficult to proceed further.

Dr. S. R. Talghatti makes an attempt to clarify this concept.<sup>11</sup> His argument may be summed up as follows: We usually explain our conduct by our 'life-Ideal'. The concept of *puruṣārtha* is another name for this Life-Ideal. Therefore, the significance of the concept of *puruṣārtha* is broadly axiological and especially moral; but as expressed in the doctrine of the four *puruṣārthas*, it forms the basis of a comprehensive philosophy of life.

If we take the etymological meaning of the word *puruṣārtha*, it means 'object of desire'. That is, '*puruṣārtha*' is a goal or end we desire to achieve. If it stands for what is desired by us, then it is a descriptive (and therefore a positive, empirical-psychological) concept rather than a normative (moral) concept. This means that it is intimately related to our practical life governed by goals.

Then how come, it might be asked, we do not call every particular object of desire a *puruṣārtha*? This means that it is not only an object

of desire but is something more. This makes it a lasting ideal that underlies our whole life, In other words, the Life-Ideal is sought through particular objects of desire which the ideal governs. If so, particular purposes must be expressions of the general principle called *puruṣārtha*. Here its ethical significance becomes somewhat manifest. For it implies the distinction between 'desired' and 'desirable'. *Puruṣārtha* means 'desirable' meaning 'what ought to be desired'; and particular objects are what is 'desired'.

This distinction between 'desired' and 'desirable' brings us to another distinction between 'fact and value': This in turn is usually understood as a distinction between 'is' and 'ought'. Now, if *puruṣārtha* is what is desired then it is a fact. But the question is: Are fact and value mutually exclusive? No. For, 'fact' is a condition for value. For, the dictum 'ought to implies can' presuppose 'is'. Thus 'is' is linked to 'ought' through 'can'. If so, we get a twofold meaning of desirable: i) 'can be desired' (factual) and ii) 'ought to be desired' (volitional and ethical). What is factual is a condition for what is ethical. In other words, that something is 'desirable' factually means that it is actually desired.

If this is true, then from the 'objects actually desired' by a people we can know the values they have accepted. In so far as this is so, a value can be defined as that which is desired. In other words, values are grounded in human nature itself and stand for the basic human aspirations. Therefore the definition of *puruṣārtha* as that which we desire is quite in order.

Can we then identify *puruṣārtha* with value? This is not what is meant here, though the above discussion might create such an impression. What we mean to emphasize is only the intimate relation of value and *puruṣārtha* with basic human aspirations. Before we go on any further in this line of argument, let us consider some views concerning the concept of *puruṣārtha*. Here we take two such significant views: These are the views of Hiriyanna and Karl Potter. For, the different theories of the four *puruṣārthas* they have formulated imply different notions of *puruṣārtha*.

First, the view of Hiriyanna,<sup>12</sup> According to him, *puruṣārtha* is not very different from value. Value which he calls '*iṣṭa*' presupposes the 'means' of

<sup>10</sup> *The Conceptual Framework of Indian Philosophy*, Macmillan Company of India Ltd., Delhi. 1976, p.11

<sup>11</sup> In his paper 'The Concept of *Puruṣārtha*' presented at the Seminar on *Puruṣārtha* sponsored by ICPR. Delhi

<sup>12</sup> Hiriyanna, M., *The Quest After Perfection*, Kavyalaya Publishers, Mysore, 1957, p.21



its fulfillment. This means that there are two types of values, viz. intrinsic (absolute) and instrumental. But such values are not only innumerable but also unstable. To overcome these defects the Hindu thinkers introduced the doctrine of four *puruṣārthas*. Accordingly, *dharma* and *mokṣa* are spiritual values, and the other two are secular (defective) values. Of the two spiritual values, *dharma* is instrumental and *mokṣa* is intrinsic; and of the two secular values, *artha* is instrumental and *kāma* is intrinsic.

This classification by Hiriyanna depends on the definition of *puruṣārtha* in terms of 'value'. But can we really identify *puruṣārtha* with value, asks Talghatti. He argues that such identification is unfounded. For, the concept of value on the one hand is more elastic and wider than the concept of *puruṣārtha*, while, on the other hand, the concept of *puruṣārtha* is more basic than that of value. If more basic, then even the secular values derive their substance from *puruṣārtha*.

Therefore, *puruṣārtha* and 'value' are allied but not identical. It is in this sense that Dr. Talghatti disagrees with Hiriyanna. Dr. Talghatti disagrees also with Karl H. Potter who proposes the 'attitude' theory of *puruṣārtha*. According to Potter, *puruṣārthas* are to be construed more subtly, perhaps as attitudes or 'orientations'.<sup>13</sup> What is the nature of the particular *puruṣārthas*? Potter explains that *kāma* is the attitude of 'passionate concern' towards anything in the world; *artha* is the attitude of 'minimal concern' towards material objects; *dharma* is the attitude of concern for others as a fundamental extension of 'oneself', i.e., attitude directed towards greater and greater concern and less and less attachment, tending towards complete freedom. Potter explains this further thus:

They are 'aims of life' ... just in the sense that they represent capacities for taking things in a certain way. This is what I have in mind in calling them attitudes.<sup>14</sup>

Potter's theory is indeed an ingenious interpretation of the doctrine of the four *puruṣārthas*. But, in so far as we are looking for the meaning of '*puruṣārtha*' this theory does not bring out the essential nature of *puruṣārtha*. '*Puruṣārtha*' does not mean 'attitude'. Rather, it means 'what is desired by man' as we have already said. Hence it is better to keep its commonly accepted meaning of 'aim' or 'goal'.

Retaining this, we can of course look into what these goals are. There is a further problem in

defining *puruṣārthas* in terms of attitudes. For, on closer examination we see that the particular 'attitudes' are not exactly what the respective *puruṣārthas* stand for. For instance, that *kāma* is the attitude of 'passionate concern' is contrary to the prescription that it, coupled with *artha*, should be subject to the control of *dharma*. Similarly, *artha* is not the attitude of 'minimal concern'; rather, it represents great concern in so far as it is instrumental to the attainment of *kāma*. Not only that. This attitude theory seems to put all the *puruṣārthas* on par; if so it obliterates the distinction made by Hiriyanna between spiritual and secular values, and between intrinsic and instrumental values. Of course, in the cases of *dharma* and *mokṣa* attitudes are involved. But it is not a sufficient reason for defining *puruṣārthas* in terms of attitudes. After pointing out the limitations of the theories put forward by Hiriyanna and Potter, Dr. Talghatti proposes 'the ideal of life' theory. *Puruṣārtha* is what is desired by men. But every object of particular desire is not *puruṣārtha*. Particular objects of desires are innumerable. Therefore *puruṣārtha* may be properly understood as that 'aim' which we try to achieve through the satisfaction of all the particular desires.

Thus, *puruṣārtha* is the governor of the world of desires and there through of whole life and behavior. In other words, it is the 'ideal of life' or 'life-ideal' we pursue throughout our life. It is therefore the end or goal of life. If this is the nature of the concept of *puruṣārtha* then it is relevant to ask certain questions regarding the doctrine of four *puruṣārthas*. Are there only four

or as many as four *puruṣārthas*? Are they '*puruṣārtha*' in the same sense and in the same way? How are they interrelated? These are questions that remain to be answered.

<sup>13</sup> Potter, K. H., *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies*, Ch. 1

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.