

Dharma as a Consequentialism

The threat of Hridayananda das Goswami's
consequentialist moral philosophy to
ISKCON's spiritual identity.

Krishna-kirti das

3/24/2014

This paper shows that Hridayananda Das Goswami's recent statements that question the validity of certain narrations in authorized Vedic scriptures, and which have been accepted by Srila Prabhupada and other acharyas, arise from a moral philosophy called consequentialism. In a 2005 paper titled "Vaisnava Moral Theology and Homosexuality," Maharaja explains his conception consequentialist moral reasoning in detail. His application of it results in a total repudiation of Srila Prabhupada's authority, a repudiation of several acharyas in ISKCON's parampara, and an increase in the numbers of devotees whose Krishna consciousness depends on the repudiation of these acharyas' authority. A non-consequentialist defense of Śrīla Prabhupāda is presented along with recommendations for resolving the existential threat Maharaja's moral reasoning poses to the spiritual well-being of ISKCON's members, the integrity of ISKCON itself, and the authenticity of Srila Prabhupada's spiritual legacy.

Contents

Introduction	1
Dharma as a Consequentialism.....	1
Maharaja’s application of consequentialism to Krishna Consciousness	4
Radical Consequentialism	6
Consequentialism and Cafeteria Krishna Consciousness.....	9
Populism as a Preaching Strategy	10
A Response to Dharma as a Consequentialism.....	12
Recommendations	16
End Notes.....	19

Introduction

In some recent public statements, Hridayananda Maharaja questions the authenticity of the well-known pastimes of Yudhisthira Maharaja having gambled away his wife Draupadi in a match rigged by Shakuni. He also questions the attempted disrobing of Draupadi in the assembly of the Kurus. Given that these pastimes have been accepted by Srila Prabhupada and by other acharyas in our line, Maharaja's statements have caused considerable disturbance. This is not the first time Maharaja has made controversial public statements, nor is it likely to be his last. But what is not well known is what these recent statements have in common with other controversial acts and statements made by him over the years. They are products of a world view that places the moral philosophy of consequentialism above all other forms of Vedic authority. Maharaja's radical application of consequentialism to Krishna consciousness is a form of adharma called abhasa, and it accounts for the deep differences between him and Srila Prabhupada on diverse subjects ranging from Vedic authority and culture to fundamental sexual ethics.¹ Due to efforts over many years by Maharaja and others to propagate this, virtually without impediment, there are now many devotees whose understanding and practice of Krishna consciousness from the very beginning has been formed around adharmic principles.

Dharma as a Consequentialism

Maharaja's method of reasoning, as expressed in statements about Draupadi and Yudhisthira, was first explained in detail in a paper he wrote in 2005 titled "Vaisnava Moral Theology and Homosexuality."² Therein he compares and contrasts two moral philosophies, "one primarily morality in the act itself, the other seeking morality primarily in the consequences of acts." As he explains it, "the first, *deontological ethics*, roughly argues that moral behavior depends on the act itself, regardless of the consequences. The second, *consequentialism*, argues that moral behavior must produce good consequences." Maharaja argues that consequentialism is superior to deontological ethics because sometimes even the rules of scripture are not always enough to help one decide what is right from wrong. After developing his own consequentialist approach to moral reasoning, he argues further that "gay monogamy" is a virtuous act for a certain group of people because it produces a beneficial consequence—namely helping them reduce the frequency of illicit sexual activity. As per Maharaja in a previous statement, it is in "ISKCON's best interests" to offer "serious, formal and public recognition and appreciation" of "gay monogamy."³

In the first half of his paper, Maharaja uses pastimes from the Mahabharata and Srimad-Bhagavatam to show that deontological ethics is a deficient moral philosophy. Because the principles of dharma sometimes come into conflict with one another, citing shastra (scripture) alone is not enough to help guide one's moral behavior. Examples of conflicts between one shastric injunction and another include Arjuna's dilemma of having to satisfy both Draupadi's plea for mercy on Ashvattama and Bhima's insistence that justice be served by his death; Kunti's concern for certain shastra prohibitions, resulting in her refusal to obey her husband Pandu's order despite her religious duty to follow her husband; and the need for kings to practice the art of hunting despite the fact that shastric injunctions against killing

are applicable even to kings. There are also examples which show that the gravity or severity of a sin is relative to the sinner. Maharaja uses these to show that following rules alone are not enough to help one decide the right thing to do, since, according to the great Bhishmavadeva, “scriptures do not give rules for every case.” As such, one must also consider consequences.

The paper’s second half is an exposition on the role of consequences in moral reasoning, as found in Vedic literature. In this section, Maharaja argues that it is necessary to reason from likely outcomes when making moral decisions in complex or uncertain circumstances like those introduced in the first half or in circumstances that shastra does not address at all. To demonstrate the superiority of consequentialism, Maharaja compares and contrasts the young Bhishma’s expressed understanding of dharma with that of the elderly Bhishma, the “mature Bhishma.” Having already taken a vow of celibacy, the young Bhishma refuses to beget children in Vicitravirya’s widows despite the request of his step-mother, Satyavati, for him to do so. “Again, Satyavati, I make the same vow to you,” says Bhishma, “I can give up sovereignty over the three worlds, or yet among the gods, or whatever is greater than that, but in no way can I give up my vow [of celibacy].” But Maharaja Hridayananda criticizes it for what he considers “a lack of concern with consequences.” In deontological ethics, says Maharaja, “Consequences don’t matter. All that does matter is the integrity of an act itself, in this case the act of keeping one’s vow.” Maharaja believes this to be a shortcoming in the young Bhishma’s moral reasoning.

Maharaja presents an alternative:

“There is, however, another approach to morality in which one’s primary concern is with the consequences of an act. The most famous proponent of this pragmatic approach is of course Krishna Himself. Indeed Krishna teaches pragmatic moral philosophy to Bhishma himself at the Battle of Kurukshetra. We then find, in Bhishma’s deathbed teachings, that the Kuru grandsire has learned well Lord Krishna’s lesson on moral philosophy.”

In the Bhagavatam, the dying Bhishma, who is answering Yudhishthira’s inquiries, recalls how Lord Krishna showed him that He was prepared to break His own vow not to take up weapons during the battle in order to protect His devotee and friend Arjuna. In the *Mahabharata*, Krishna also tells Yudhishthira to lie so that he can spare his army from Drona’s wrath. “O Pandava, casting aside dharma, do what is practical for victory so that Drona of the golden car does not kill you all in battle.” Later in the same scene, Krishna tells Yudhishthira, “You yourself save us from Drona. Untruth [in this case] is better than truth. Lies do not pollute one who is speaking them when life is at stake.” In this way, Maharaja argues that in matters of dharma consequences matter more than scripture.

The stories of Balaka the hunter and Kaushika the brahmana, previously told to Arjuna by Lord Krishna, are also referred to by the mature Bhishma in his discourse with Yudhishthira. The hunter Balaka went to heaven for killing an animal that had the terrible benediction of being able to destroy all creatures. Killing animals is sinful—even for hunters—but Balaka still went to heaven because it was good that he killed that particular creature. Kaushika on the other hand was a brahmana who became famous for his truthfulness but went to hell because his telling the truth on one occasion resulted in the murder of a saintly person. Referring to these two stories, Bhishma says, “Morality (dharma) comes from the act of sustaining (dharana). Thus authorities say that morality sustains living beings. So that which provides

such sustenance is dharma. That is the conclusion.” To further illustrate this, Bhishma describes how one should not be truthful in circumstances in which the truth will cause harm. To protect one’s wealth from robbers, says Bhishma, “It is considered better to speak a lie than to speak the truth. One who does so is freed from the sins of taking a false oath.” Hridayananda Maharaja uses these stories and statements to drive home the point that consequences matter more than scriptural rules.

Maharaja takes all of the evidence he has cited as affirming dharma to be primarily concerned with consequences. Following scriptural rules are accepted as normative at the very least when no apparent or likely harm arises from following them. A rule from scripture should not be followed if it will produce a bad result. But when a rule has a good result, then there is all the more reason to follow it. If a course of action that is not in scripture will produce a good result, then it should also be followed. In this understanding of dharma it is notable that for any given act all three kinds of potential consequences (good, bad, or neutral) are considered before any other factor, including that of scripture. Consequences therefore override shastra whenever there is a difference between the two. To many of ISKCON’s members, and to followers of the Vedas in general, this is a new way of thinking.

Aside from the novelty of Hridayananda Maharaja’s proposition, it is this absolute, superlative weight Maharaja gives to consequences that makes his consequentialist formulation of dharma a specious argument and at the same time radical. Indeed, it is difficult to accommodate Maharaja’s consequentialism, for example, with the failure of Arjuna’s own consequentialist argument against fighting at the start of the Bhagavad-gita. This explains why the Bhagavad-gita does not figure prominently as a source of support for Maharaja’s consequentialist ethics. The Gita does not support it.

This is not to say that consequences are not considered. For example, in the Gita they are considered, but they are considered within the context of an understanding of dharma that is fixed and eternal. They are not superlative as they are in Maharaja’s notion and application of consequentialism. For example, not only in the Gita (18.25) does Lord Krishna say that action in the mode of ignorance is performed “without concern for future bondage or for violence or distress caused to others” but He also says that it is also “in disregard of scriptural injunctions” (paurusham). Indeed, Arjuna wanted to abandon his duty on account of the imminent destruction of his family and the havoc it was likely to cause within society at large. But Krishna rejected his argument and explained to him in so many ways that it would be reprehensible for him to abandon his duty, irrespective of the consequences.⁴

Many times over the years, Maharaja himself has said that a sign of fanaticism is the expressed belief that one can “go off the road” only on one side, not the other. Ironically, Maharaja’s paper “Vaisnava Moral Theology and Homosexuality” is a case study in such thinking. Maharaja does mention Gita verse 18.25 in his paper, but he only mentions it as a pramana for consequences, not for adherence to shastra. Both are necessary, but Maharaja focuses on one and excludes the other.⁵ The excellent example of the failure of Arjuna’s consequentialist argument against fighting is conspicuous by its absence in Maharaja’s discourse. Hence, it is no surprise that over the years, Maharaja has made equally radical statements that correspond closely with the thoughts expressed in his paper.

Maharaja's application of consequentialism to Krishna Consciousness

Soon after the paper's publication in 2005, at the North American GBC/Temple President meetings in New Vrindavan, a scholarly godbrother and colleague told Hridayananda Maharaja that he was "brilliantly wrong." In other words, Maharaja's argument sounds plausible but contains some great mistake in it. It takes a wrong turn on the pathways of logic. Abhasa is specifically an error of logic: an argument that appears plausible but has an incorrect conclusion, a specious argument.⁶ It is called "pretentious" because it "pretends" to be correct. Similarly, a kind of dharma that appears to be plausible but actually is not is called abhasa, "pretentious religion." It is one of five kinds of irreligion that the Bhagavatam (7.15.12) exhorts us to give up. Maharaja is correct to assert that dharma requires that consequences be considered, but he is incorrect to conclude that dharma is primarily concerned with consequences. However important consequences are in deciding what is dharma, they still cannot be the most important consideration.

The reason is simple: How do you tell what is good or what is bad without already having some fixed idea about it to begin with? The answer is you can't, because basic ideas about good and bad are not grounded in experience. Otherwise, without that prior information, any act could be deemed good or bad, pious or impious, dharmic or adharmaic according to one's own purposes. For example, if one were to have intercourse with the wife of one's guru, a "good" result is superficially obtained (her pleasure and one's own). By reasoning only from consequences, the act would have to be considered a great act of dharma.⁷ But this is, of course, always an impious act. The insufficiency of moral reasoning by consequences alone in even the most simple circumstances shows that moral reasoning always depends on the correct apprehension of a body of knowledge that cannot be ascertained by reason.

That body of knowledge is accessed through the medium of shabda (sound), the most reliable of the three general categories of pramanas (instruments of knowledge) accepted by Vaishnavas. In his paper on Vaishnava morality, Hridayananda Maharaja himself accepts its validity, "Sri Prabhupada taught that we must understand the spiritual science through guru, sadhu, and shastra, 'one's teacher, other saintly persons, and revealed scriptures.'" As Sri Prabhupada explains, "the actual center is shastra."⁸ The guru and other saints must be faithful to shastra. They cannot transgress it. Shabda is the most important source of knowledge because it delivers knowledge that is unobtainable by direct perception (pratyaksha) or inference (anumaan). On account of the four defects immanent in a conditioned soul,⁹ things are not always as they seem, so shabda is more reliable than the other pramanas.

Furthermore, only through the guru and previous acharyas¹⁰ can one apprehend the correct meaning of shastra. "The parampara system does not allow one to deviate from the commentaries of the previous acaryas. . . . The false pride that makes one think that he can write better than the previous acaryas will make one's comments faulty."¹¹ Shastra is the "center of all," and the commentaries of the previous acharyas keep one from deviating from the correct understanding of shastra. Both shastra and parampara (disciplic succession) are necessary for the correct apprehension of religious principles.

Although Hridayananda Maharaja accepts this in principle, it is at this point he takes a wrong turn in his argument. Instead of accepting the available evidence from sadhu, shastra, and guru, he declares that none of them have anything to say about homosexuality.¹² "Do Vaishnava Vedic scriptures give specific,

explicit unambiguous rules for dealing with homosexuality, or if not, must we reason our way to a conclusion? . . . The result? There are none. Remarkably, neither the Gita nor the Bhagavatam gives a single explicit reference to mutually consensual homosexuality.” But why just the Gita and Bhagavatam? Are these the *only* shastras Vaishnavas consult? Hardly.

The subject of homosexuality is not absent from the shastras, it is just that Maharaja “stacks the deck” with only those shastras that do not explicitly contradict his opinion. Shastras like Manu-samhita, for example, are explicit in declaring homosexual sex to be illicit sex,¹³ and it is self-evident from numerous references in Srila Prabhupada’s commentaries on the Gita and Bhagavatam that Srila Prabhupada considers Manu-samhita to be “revealed scripture.”¹⁴ At the very least, Manu as a shastra supports Srila Prabhupada’s own unequivocal statements on the matter. Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura in his commentary on the Chaitanya-Bhagavata (Adi-khanda 11.43) cites Manu-samhita as being among the Vaishnava smritis.¹⁵ Even the sruti affirms, (Taittiriya Upaniṣad, II.2.10.2): “Whatever Manu says is medicine.” This sruti reference is accepted by Srila Baladeva Vidyabhusanna, who quotes it in his Govinda Bhasya, 2.1.1.1. The Gita and the Bhagavatam are *not* the only scriptures that should be consulted. The dharma-shastras are also relevant, as they should be in a discussion about dharma. By excluding shastras whose authority is accepted by Srila Prabhupada and by that of other previous acharyas, Hridayananda Maharaja commits the logical error of *avyapti*, excluding things from a category in which they should be included.

What about Srila Prabhupada’s own statements on homosexuality? The interesting thing is that in the twenty-four pages of Maharaja’s paper, none of Srila Prabhupada’s statements on the matter is quoted, with the exception of a partially quoted statement in the Srimad-Bhagavatam. It is certain that Maharaja is aware of Prabhupada’s other statements, but he does not believe they have any merit. He says, “Srila Prabhupada also taught unceasingly that his own ultimate qualification, and indeed the qualification of any bona fide guru, is to always faithfully repeat the teachings of Krishna as they are found in revealed scriptures.” Maharaja then tries to demonstrate that Srila Prabhupada does not live up to this. Hence, nothing Prabhupada has said about the matter has any authority. Otherwise, Maharaja cannot ignore Srila Prabhupada’s purport in the Bhagavatam (3.20.26) and would have to accept a conclusion that at heart he rejects.

From the point at which Maharaja declares that “the ultimate qualification of a guru . . . is to always faithfully repeat the teachings of Krishna as they are found in revealed scripture” (page 18), he spends the next three pages in his own paper analyzing the Bhagavatam narration of the demons approaching Lord Brahma for sex. After his analysis, Maharaja concludes that the Bhagavatam does not refer at all to homosexuality.

“Recall that Prabhupada states in his Bhagavatam purport to 3.20.26: ‘It appears here that the homosexual appetite of males for each other is created in this episode of the creation of the demons by Brahma.’ Yet although homosexuality is said to have existed since the dawn of creation, the Bhagavatam does not explicitly describe nor proscribe it.

Maharaja’s argument implies that since the Bhagavatam does not refer to homosexuality, Srila Prabhupada’s statements in his purport about homosexuality are not in line with shastra. Since these

statements are not in line with shastra, Srila Prabhupada falls short of the qualification of a bona fide guru. Since Srila Prabhupada does not act as a bona fide guru, his next statement about homosexuality in his Bhagavatam purport also cannot have any authority. Srila Prabhupada's statement, "In other words, the homosexual appetite of a man for another man is demoniac and is not for any sane male in the ordinary course of life," is not quoted because in Maharaja's view it has no authority. Since Maharaja thinks none of Srila Prabhupada's statements in his purport have authority, he feels he has sufficient grounds to explain away the first one and completely ignore the second—and he does just that.

After having freed himself from the constraints of Srila Prabhupada's own statements, Hridayananda Maharaja finishes his paper by applying the framework of consequentialist moral reasoning he developed earlier in his paper to vindicate his prior, controversial public statement:

"I am not convinced that marriage is the best means in all cases, but some serious, formal and public recognition and appreciation of gay monogamy is, in my view, in the best interest of ISKCON and its members."¹⁶

Radical Consequentialism

Hridayananda Maharaja has put forward a notion of dharma that is primarily concerned with consequences, and he believes it will help a class of people struggling to become devotees. He also believes that dharma fundamentally conceived of as a kind of consequentialism will help devotees generally. But to make this notion plausible, he has had to demonstrate that Srila Prabhupada's statements on the subject have no authority. This has come at what cost?

First, it results in a general dismissal of Srila Prabhupada as a spiritual authority. Hridayananda Maharaja in three pages of his paper tries to demonstrate that Srila Prabhupada's statements are against shastra and against the opinions of previous acharyas. Even when considering the commentaries of other acharyas, it is clear that Maharaja does not give Srila Prabhupada the same standing he gives the others. He does not merely try to say that Prabhupada offers an alternative understanding or an understanding that is true in addition to what the others have said. He asserts that Srila Prabhupada's view is illegitimate, for even an alternative yet legitimate view has to have some basis in shastra. To give Srila Prabhupada's statements the least level of legitimacy would oblige Maharaja to abandon his defense of gay monogamy altogether. His dismissal of Srila Prabhupada's authority is total. Thus if Maharaja's criticism of Srila Prabhupada's own Bhagavatam commentary is acceptable, then we can no longer take for granted Srila Prabhupada's authority in any other place in his books, what to speak of any other context. If we follow Maharaja, we will be making an awful lot of judgment-calls about whether Srila Prabhupada was correct or not when we read any of his texts.

Second, the framework of consequentialist moral reasoning Maharaja has introduced calls into question shastra itself and breaks our parampara. A recent example of this is Maharaja disputing the well-known pastime of Maharaja Yudhisthira gambling away his brothers and wife Draupadi in a match rigged by Shakuni.

If for the sake of discussion we assume that the Kurus did attempt to disrobe Draupadi, then why did Yudhisthira remain silent? In the description of this incident found in the Mahabharata (which Madhvacharya declared to be a highly corrupt text), Yudhisthira falls into the same ethical misunderstanding that Bhishma fell into many years before: act-based ethics. This ethics theory states that moral good lies in the act itself, regardless of the act's consequences. Thus, if you are sworn to tell the truth, then you should tell the truth, even if by doing so you cause terrible suffering to innocent people. Example: without any risk to yourself, if you lie you 'honestly' reveal to Nazi soldiers where Jews are hiding. Consequences don't matter, only the act.

Here we see that Maharaja doubts the authenticity of this pastime because of the deontological (non-consequentialist) moral reasoning extant texts of the Mahabharata ascribe to Yudhisthira. Maharaja says their description of Yudhisthira "falls into the same ethical misunderstanding that Bhishma fell into: act-based ethics." The explanation Maharaja gives in his paper for the fault of "young Bhishma's" act-based, non-consequentialist ethics resurfaces in 2013 as the basis of Maharaja's disputing the description of Yudhisthira in current versions of the Mahabharata. As per Maharaja, since the act ascribed to Yudhisthira has negative consequences and since Maharaja believes that dharma is primarily concerned with consequences, he believes that this narration is a corruption of the original text. Thus we see that the consequentialist moral framework Maharaja developed in his paper reaches far beyond the subject of homosexuality. Indeed, Maharaja uses consequentialism to test whether parts of shastra are authentic or corrupt, what to speak of using it to test the authority of Srila Prabhupada's statements.

Maharaja's adoption and use of consequentialism as a moral framework and means of interpreting shastra inevitably challenges the legitimacy of our parampara. In this example, not only has Srila Prabhupada referred to and defended Yudhisthira's gambling away Draupadi in numerous instances, so have other acharyas. In two articles rebutting Hridayananda Maharaja's position, Achintya Chaitanya Das (JPS) provides numerous references to acharyas who accept the account of Yudhisthira that Maharaja disputes. In addition to Srila Prabhupada, these references include Srila Madhvacharya, Srila Sanatana Goswami, Srila Jiva Goswami, Srila Vrindavan Das Thakura and Srila Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakura.^{17,18} It is not possible that a Vaishnava scholar of Maharaja's caliber is unfamiliar with these statements from these authorities on the subject, so his questioning of so many authorities is intentional, not inadvertent. Indeed, he is aware of these specific criticisms leveled against him, but he still stands by his statements.

Since Maharaja has reimagined dharma as a type of consequentialism, wherein primary weight in moral reasoning is given to the anticipated consequences of any act, it is not surprising that Maharaja does not hesitate in disputing this pastime of Yudhisthira and Draupadi despite knowing that other acharyas have accepted it. After all, if consequences are more important than shastra, as Maharaja argues, then consequences are also more important than whatever previous acharyas have said, since their statements are subordinate to shastra. Now that Maharaja has implicated several acharyas in our disciplic succession as being mistaken about Draupadi and Yudhisthira, there is nothing left of the parampara that serves any meaningful purpose in conveying the correct understanding of shastra. By implicating several previous acharyas as fallible and hence untrustworthy, Maharaja's consequentialist reimagining of dharma destroys our parampara—at least for those who adopt his way of thinking.

Third, in ISKCON we now have large numbers of devotees who have adopted Hridayananda Maharaja's consequentialist notion of dharma as the foundation of their Krishna consciousness. In the nine years since Hridayananda Maharaja published his paper, devotees with statuses ranging anywhere from beginners to senior members have brought their way of thinking about dharma in line with Maharaja's. As one such devotee who recently expressed his commitment to Maharaja's way of thinking has said, his affiliation with ISKCON depends on Maharaja's way of thinking about dharma.

"I would recommend Amara Das Wilhelm's work which examines the breadth of Srila Prabhupada's teachings with regard to his own gay disciples and with gay people in general, as well as within the wider context of Sanatana Dharma. As far as Hridayananda Maharaja is concerned, my Gurumaharaja has instructed my wife and I repeatedly to take instruction from him on matters of Shastra and has affirmed HDG's knowledge and position. For me personally, as a bi-sexual devotee, reading the paper [on homosexuality] in question, as well as personal correspondence between, my wife, myself and HDG, affirmed my own involvement with ISKCON. As my wife rightfully says, the "love the sinner, hate sin" argument doesn't work. HDG isn't arguing for illicit sex; he's arguing against self-hatred impeding devotional engagement. Prominent individuals . . . have seen the wisdom in this position and have even issued apologies to gay devotees for homophobia they were unaware they had. It would be fairly easy for HDG to position himself in a much more favorable socio-political environment by taking himself and his disciples out of the GBC equation, much like the far more aggressively progressive Triparari Maharaja has done, but he has not done that. He, in fact, has acquiesced to them in many respects. I could go on, but simply put: I will not be a party to an ISKCON or to a GBC that ostracizes Hridayananda Maharaja; without my Guru Maharaja and Srila Acharyadeva, Alexandra and I would have left years ago."¹⁹

Now that devotees like this are a long-standing part of ISKCON, and by now are numerous, what do you do with them? You don't want them to leave Krishna consciousness because they are devotees. They chant Hare Krishna, they offer their food to Krishna, they do service for Krishna, they want devotee association, and so forth. Some of them are highly committed members and leaders within ISKCON. Nor do you want them to go to other, rival institutions, whether Vaishnava or not. And some have made it clear (eloquently in this case) that they will indeed leave if ISKCON's institutional leaders ostracize Hridayananda Maharaja for his thinking on the matter. But at the same time, their basis of Krishna consciousness is founded on a rejection of Srila Prabhupada's authority, whether that rejection is spoken or implied. That can never be auspicious.

A substantial attempt to correct Maharaja or a public repudiation of his consequentialist hermeneutics might cause large numbers of devotees to leave ISKCON. Many devotees could leave if our leadership speaks out against an adharmas that allows some devotees to maintain modern beliefs about human sexuality and still self-identify as members of ISKCON. The same would be true of others who find Maharaja's opinions against some narrations about Draupadi and Yudhisthira to be more compelling than the conclusions held by Srila Prabhupada and other previous acharyas. There is no easy choice about what to do.

There is, however, a remarkable irony about those who hold fast to a philosophy that undermines the very authority they claim to accept. As we have seen, Hridayananda Maharaja's conception of dharma as a consequentialism totally undermines Srila Prabhupada's credibility as a spiritual authority. It also repudiates the authority of previous acharyas and hence creates a break in the parampara. All that is left are consequences, no guru, no acharyas, not even shastra needs to be followed if it is thought that a

contrary result will be obtained from following it. In consequentialism, all these sources of authority are considered subordinate to consequences—more precisely, subordinate to our expectations of what the consequences should be. But as we know, what we think will be the consequences and what actually turns out to be the consequences are often very different. But despite acknowledging this shortcoming, consequentialists are nonetheless determined to believe in the idea that their own calculations for the outcome of any given act overrule any other consideration.

Consequentialism and Cafeteria Krishna Consciousness

A fundamental problem with the conception of dharma as primarily concerned with consequences is that it differs only in degree, not in kind, from the proposition “the ends justify the means.” When whatever one thinks will be the final outcome of his actions becomes his overriding criterion for his moral reasoning, it becomes all too easy to slip into an “ends justify the means” mentality. Or, as the Christians sometimes say, “the path to Hell is paved with good intentions.”

In this regard, there is a notable statement by a professional philosopher who attempts to provide a consequentialist interpretation of Krishna’s ethics in the Bhagavad-gita (bolding added):

First, the idea that Krishna is a deontologist of some kind has both caused and been caused by a whittling down of the complex ethical philosophy he elaborates in the Gītā into a catch-all formula that sounds quite a lot like something Kant could have said: ‘always do your duty, no matter what the consequences.’⁷⁹ That this maxim is a caricature that misrepresents much of Krishna’s actual reasoning in the Gītā has been shown in this paper. **But one important effect of reducing Krishna’s ethical theory into this simplistic maxim has been to increase vastly the employability, and consequently the appeal, of that theory.** Under the view that this is what Krishna’s ethical teaching amounts to, virtually any action can be justified provided only that some care is taken to ensure that that action can be construed in some way or another as a ‘duty’. In other words, considered as a deontology, Krishna’s ethical theory soon devolves into a thin deontic attitude to be adopted regarding anything that may be considered a duty, howsoever specified.⁸⁰

When, however, it is recognized that Krishna’s is an elaborate consequentialism and not a deontology such as that maxim suggests, his ethical theory will naturally lose much of its appeal to those who ask of an ethical theory no more than that it give them a simple nostrum for their everyday moral ills. By way of compensation, however, we are given a Krishna who is a far more subtle and interesting philosopher, whose ethical theory is both intricate in structure and nuanced in detail.²⁰

The end result of rendering dharma as a consequentialism is that following it becomes impractical for most people. At least, that is what some professional philosophers think. Even in the hands of very adept intellectuals, consequentialism is apt to devolve into a policy of “the ends justify the means” driven by social fads. Thus an outcome of devotees adopting consequentialism as a fundamental part of their spiritual understanding is that the instructions of sadhu, shastra, and guru for the most part become impractical—not because they cannot be taken up but because consequentialists have little need for them. Devotees as consequentialists will follow them only when they are perceived to be suitable for their own purposes. Thus Maharaja’s consequentialism is a prescription for “cafeteria Krishna consciousness,” a watered-down philosophy, whereby people can take what they like from

Krishna consciousness and leave aside what they don't while maintaining the mistaken belief that they are on the path of surrender to Krishna.

Populism as a Preaching Strategy

It also should be noted that the consequentialist conception of dharma expressed by the professional philosopher cited above is quite fashionable. Other philosophers have also tried to portray Lord Krishna's moral reasoning as a kind of consequentialism, offering elaborate interpretations of Krishna's statements that are quite incompatible with consequentialism. Part of the reason for this appears to be motivated by sentiment on the part of some to make the Gita more palatable to the sensibilities of Westerners. "This dharma-consequentialism [of Krishna's] probably will not find many adherents in the philosophy departments of Western universities," writes Joseph Dowd. "The majority of Western philosophers are neither Hindus nor Indians." And he further notes that "many Western philosophers are consequentialists."²¹ In response to the hegemony of consequentialism—and to one of its standard-bearers in particular—Sitansu Chakravarti in a paper titled "Consequentialism and the Gita" (2002) writes, "In this paper I would like to contest the readings of the points of view of Sri Krishna and Arjuna by [Amartya] Sen. I would attempt to show that Sri Krishna's position is consequentialistic, and not deontological, contrary to Sen's claim."²² Bending Krishna's philosophy into a consequentialism is an apparent act of acquiescing to the status quo.

By interpreting dharma similarly, it appears that Hridayananda Maharaja himself has joined some of his colleagues in acquiescence. On innumerable occasions Maharaja has stated that it is the duty of ISKCON's members living in the West to make Krishna consciousness more palatable to Westerners. Reinterpreting Krishna's moral philosophy as a type of consequentialism appears to be in pursuit of that objective. Becoming popular (or at least non-objectionable) with the Western gay rights movement by means of putting forward a moral theology that could justify something like gay marriage is a populist act. Indeed, the reasoning in his 2005 paper on Vaisnava morality was a source of inspiration for him in 2008 to take part in a "commitment ceremony" between two homosexual male devotees.

Similarly, by means of the same consequentialist moral theology outlined in his 2005 paper, Maharaja repudiates the descriptions in the Mahabharata of Yudhishthira's gambling away Draupadi in a rigged match and the subsequent attempt to disrobe her. Maharaja repudiates these pastimes because he wants to appear respectable both to his academic colleagues and to mainstream society. Joining the status quo is a time-tested strategy for popularizing a religion. As a means of widely expanding a religion within a society, populism works, and this appears to be Maharaja's strategy going forward.

But Maharaja's Western populism is yet another dreary policy of "the ends justify the means." As has been noted, it comes at the cost of gutting our parampara of any meaningful role it could play in guiding our behavior. In order to embrace consequentialism as a moral philosophy, Maharaja has to repudiate Srila Prabhupada's authority. For him and his followers, it has no currency save and except whatever in it they find palatable, and other previous acharyas have been similarly sidelined wherever they run counter to modern sensibilities. Thus in order to change the details of how Krishna consciousness is expressed, Maharaja also has to change principles.

Other religious societies that have attempted to expand their ranks by joining the mainstream have also ended up changing their own principles. As noted by some scholars, like George Marsden²³ and Clifford Orwin, the expansion of religious societies by way adopting values held by the mainstream eventually turned out to be the source of their undoing. In a 2004 essay titled “The Unraveling of Christianity in America,” Orwin writes,

Since the late nineteenth century and the emergence of the Social Gospel, the typical response of the mainline churches to the challenge of secularism has been to capitulate to it. Every one of these churches has been advancing (or retreating) from Christian orthodoxy down the road of secular progressivism. They have not done so without hesitation and confusion, which have sometimes brought them to the brink of schism. Nonetheless, within each of these churches, certainly at the national level, progressivism has eventually prevailed across the board.

....

Once encouraged to conceive Christianity primarily as a buttress for progressive morality, we might come to see it as superfluous. If we welcome religion only because we cherish liberal social policy, why can't our commitment to the policy roll happily along on its own? Of course, the mainline churches have continued to participate in public debate. If anything, they have defined themselves ever more in terms of their social activism. What they have increasingly lacked is anything distinctively Christian to bring to the table.

Thus, mainline religion, despite its efforts to please, has become merely incidental to the lives of so many who continue to profess it.²⁴

As an intrinsic part of the preaching strategy of mainline American Christian denominations, the “aim to please” ended up compromising their very principles. This raises a very important question for ISCKON's members as well: can we also be populist and yet avoid compromising our principles, as happened with today's mainline Christianity? Preaching means there will necessarily be some adjustment, but it is the scope of the adjustments that are being considered that is in question—especially where it means adjusting our philosophical and theological precepts. The adjustment Maharaja wants us to make with regard to thinking of dharma requires us to read Srila Prabhupada and our previous acharyas in a way that differs appreciably from what Srila Prabhupada himself showed us. We are being asked to change principles in order to adjust details.

To borrow an analogy Hridayananda Maharaja uses on occasion, in a lake with many boats, the fact that we are in our own “Hare Krishna” boat does not spare us from the wind blowing on us in the same way it blows on others. Similarly there is no reason to believe we can always rationally distinguish between what he calls an “ethnic detail” and a “religious principle.” Indeed, the four defects immanent in a conditioned soul, particularly the cheating propensity, makes such attempts at rational discretion a hazardous proposition. That is why Maharaja Yudhisthira says that dry arguments are inconclusive, the Vedas are many-branched, and one philosopher will disagree with another. Therefore, the true principles of religion are hidden in the hearts of the great devotees, and we should therefore follow their instructions—mahajano yena gatah sa panthah.

A Response to Dharma as a Consequentialism

If the idea of dharma as a consequentialism is against *shastra*, then what is the correct conclusion, or *siddhanta*?

One will note that in the Bhagavad-gita, the contingency of elevating devotees who are incapable of following the rules and regulations of *sadhana-bhakti* is covered. In verse 12.10, Lord Krishna declares that if one cannot follow the regulations of *sadhana-bhakti*, then he should just do some work, some sincere service for Krishna, and that will bring him to the perfectional stage—*kurvan siddhim avapsyasi*. We find that Srila Prabhupada himself recommended this very course to a disciple who fell back onto homosexual sex.

“I am very sorry that you have taken to homosex. It will not help you advance in your attempt for spiritual life. In fact, it will only hamper your advancement. I do not know why you have taken to such abominable activities. What can I say? Anyway, try to render whatever service you can to Krishna. Even though you are in a very degraded condition Krishna, being pleased with your service attitude, can pick you up from your fallen state.”²⁵

The reason an arrangement like “gay monogamy” is not purifying is that it is not sanctioned by *shastra*. Nor is heterosexual sex for purposes other than procreation sanctioned. If we accept for argument’s sake that a monogamous, gay relationship is purifying because it limits one’s sexual partners, would it also be the case for heterosexuals, too? Should we start advocating some social arrangement that resembles marriage but is not really marriage for heterosexual partners who will not marry? Why should this arrangement benefit only gays? Perhaps we should also introduce a “going steady” ceremony to help people limit their boyfriends or girlfriends. This proposal is, of course, absurd on its face, and its absurdity should help explain why the proposal for gay monogamy is absurd. Only sex for procreation within marriage is sanctioned.

Why won’t some arrangement like limiting the sex life of gay couples to one partner help them make spiritual advancement? Hridayananda Maharaja gave the example of Mrigari the Hunter, who half-killed animals but instead on the order of Narada Muni fully killed them and made spiritual advancement. He also argued that drug rehabilitation programs also help wean people off of drugs. Why won’t the same strategy work with sex?

It is not necessarily the case that externally decreasing sinful activity results in a reduction in desire for it. The Gita itself (2.59) declares that restricting people from sense enjoyment does not decrease desire for sense gratification. In the Bhagavatam, Narada Muni says to Maharaja Yudhisthira, “My dear King, if an agricultural field is cultivated again and again, the power of its production decreases, and whatever seeds are sown there are lost. Just as drops of ghee on a fire never extinguish the fire but a flood of ghee will, similarly, overindulgence in lusty desires mitigates such desires entirely” (SB 7.11.34). In the purport, Srila Prabhupada comments, “those who are too sinful and have thus been born in the lower classes are allowed to enjoy sinful activities fully, for thus there is a chance that these activities will become detestful to them, and they will get the opportunity to be purified.”

As per statistics available from the U.S. Center for Disease Control, gay people (men, at least) tend to be very sexually active.

“Gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM) represent approximately 2% of the United States population, yet are the population most severely affected by HIV. In 2010, young MSM (aged 13-24 years) accounted for 72% of new HIV infections among all persons aged 13 to 24, and 30% of new infections among all MSM. At the end of 2010, an estimated 489,121 (56%) persons living with an HIV diagnosis in the United States were MSM or MSM-IDU.”²⁶

Two-percent of the population of the United States accounts for more than half of all U.S. infections of AIDS, a sexually transmitted disease. This strongly suggests that reduction in sexual activity by some artificial arrangement that resembles marriage is unlikely to be in the best spiritual interests of gay people.

There is also evidence in the literature of psychology that habits that are rewarded only occasionally are notoriously more ingrained than habits that are rewarded continuously. For example, pigeons trained to peck at a lighted button to get some food under a schedule of continuous reinforcement (each peck delivers some food) will “unlearn” their behavior after pecking the button 100 times without reward. But if after learning the sequence of behavior and the pigeon gets food sometimes by pecking the button but not all the time, then the pigeon “unlearns” the pecking behavior after pecking the button 1000 times without reward.²⁷ This phenomenon is called “partial reinforcement.” It’s like the gambler’s fallacy: the gambler thinks, “maybe next time I’ll be lucky,” and he subsequently finds it very difficult to give up his gambling habit.

“Behaviors not reinforced on every occasion are far more persistent than those that are (Kimble, 1961). The effect is surprising (intuitively, less frequent reinforcement should produce weaker responses) and has a host of explanations (see Houston, 1991), but it is the effect itself, not the reasons for it, that is relevant here. Gambling involves partial reinforcement, and it is evident to even a casual observer in Las Vegas that such behaviors are extraordinarily persistent. In fact gambling addictions, especially when bingo, lotteries, and so on are taken into account, are so common that they probably affect far more lives adversely than do the more publicized ones of alcohol or drugs.”²⁸

From this it appears that an arrangement like gay monogamy would make sex desire more persistent, not less. This confirms the Srimad-Bhagavatam’s position that for very sinful people, sense-gratification in small doses will not extinguish the desire for it but a “flood of ghee” will. It is better to do some sincere service for Lord Krishna, as the Lord Himself and Srila Prabhupada recommend, and not invent new religious rules and ceremonies.

Consequentialism is based primarily on pratyaksha and anumana, direct perception and inference, but these pramanas are inferior to shabda. Shabda indicates shastra, but shastra itself is understood through the medium of the parampara, represented by the guru and other authorized acharyas. In his paper on Vaishnava morality, Maharaja mentions Gita verse 18.25 (action in the mode of ignorance) only in reference to consequences. But he fails to mention that in the same verse action that is paurusham (man-made, speculative, outside of shastra) is also a characteristic of action in the mode of ignorance. Maharaja considers Srila Prabhupada’s own statements on the subject of homosexuality to

be paurusham, but this is his great mistake because Srila prabhupada makes these statements as a representative of the parampara. Hence, they are parampara explanations of shastra.

Acharyas are not just verbatim reciters of shastra. They also explain it and interpret where unclear in order to clarify its meaning. That is why the words of the guru and the previous acharyas come in the category of shabda. Otherwise, if acharyas are only repeaters of shastra, then there would be no need at all for them to write commentaries, since everyone who encounters Krishna's words directly in the shastras would perfectly understand what Krishna intends to say. The meaning immanent in shastra is not always directly expressed, and that requires clarification. Srila Prabhupada's statements are disagreeable to Hridayananda Maharaja, so he tries to find fault in Srila Prabhupada by implying that he does not faithfully repeat shastra.

Hridayananda Maharaja's fault in his concept of dharma as a consequentialism arises out of trying to surpass a superior personality—the offense of maryada-vyatikrama. In his paper, he tries to strip Srila Prabhupada of his role as someone who interprets and explains shastra. In order to make his consequentialist argument work, it is necessary for him to dismiss whatever Srila Prabhupada says on the matter that Maharaja disagrees with. But in doing so, he not only dismisses Srila Prabhupada, later on by applying his consequentialist moral reasoning to the interpretation of shastra he challenges the legitimacy of several acharyas in our parampara, all of whom stand by the narrations of Draupadi and Yudhishthira that Maharaja disputes.

The discussion between Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and Sri Vallabha Bhatta with regard to the latter's commentary on Srimad-Bhagavatam is relevant here:

Lord Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu said, "You are both a greatly learned scholar and a great devotee. Wherever there are two such attributes, there cannot be a mountain of false pride. You have dared criticize Śrīdhara Svāmī, and you have begun your own commentary on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, not accepting his authority. That is your false pride. Śrīdhara Svāmī is the spiritual master of the entire world because by his mercy we can understand Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam. I therefore accept him as a spiritual master. Whatever you might write due to false pride, trying to surpass Śrīdhara Svāmī, would carry a contrary purport. Therefore no one would pay attention to it. One who comments on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam following in the footsteps of Śrīdhara Svāmī will be honored and accepted by everyone. Put forth your explanation of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam following in the footsteps of Śrīdhara Svāmī. Giving up your false pride, worship the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kṛṣṇa. Abandoning your offenses, chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra, the holy names of the Lord. Then very soon you will achieve shelter at the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa."²⁹

Maharaja in his own commentary has committed the same kind of offense against Srila Prabhupada. But if Maharaja can be convinced of this, and if he repudiates his own statements and speculative, consequentialist approach to reading shastra, then all can be forgiven.

But the first thing Maharaja must concede is that dharma is *not* primarily apprehended by reasoning about consequences. Since the guru and other acharyas not only recite shastra but also explain it, holding fast to their explanations is necessary in order to properly apprehend dharma. But dharma reimagined as a consequentialism closes itself off to shastra because it tries to subordinate or supersede the parampara, thus converting dharma into a speculative enterprise: tarko 'pratishthah.³⁰

tarko 'pratishthah srutayo vibhinna
nasav rishir yasya matam na bhinnam
dharmasya tattvam nihitam guhayam
mahajano yena gatah sa panthah

'Dry arguments are inconclusive. A great personality whose opinion does not differ from others is not considered a great sage. Simply by studying the Vedas, which are variegated, one cannot come to the right path by which religious principles are understood. The solid truth of religious principles is hidden in the heart of an unadulterated, self-realized person. Consequently, as the sastras confirm, one should accept whatever progressive path the mahajanas advocate' (Mahabharata, Vana-parva 313.117).³¹

The conclusion of this verse is underscored by two pastimes in the Mahabharata—Yudhishthira's gambling of Draupadi, as noted by Hridayananda Maharaja in his polemics against non-consequentialist moral philosophy, and another ignored by him, namely Arjuna's argument in the Gita against fighting. In a public letter commenting on Yudhishthira, Hridayananda Maharaja writes,

He is officially Dharma-rajā, but no one, including Draupadi, respects him anymore. She constantly berates and insults him during their forest exile. To make matters worse, Yudhishthira completely fails in the one chance he has later to redeem himself. Draupadi begs for protection from the lecherous Kicaka during the Pandavas' incognito stay in Virat. Yudhishthira insults Draupadi and again refuses to protect her. I don't believe this is the real Dharma-rajā. How could a great war be fought to put such a man on the throne? I think Dharama-rajā really is Dharma-rajā, and that's why Krishna enthroned him.³²

Maharaja does not believe this is the real Dharma-rajā because the apparent consequences of his acts are negative. But Maharaja's mention of Draupadi berating Yudhishthira is incomplete. When seen in the context of Yudhishthira's response, the limitations of consequentialism come into focus. "Influenced by acts men are placed in different situations of life," says Draupadi to Yudhishthira. "Acts, therefore, produce consequences that are inevitable; emancipation is desired from mere folly." And then she reprimands him for losing his kingdom gained by great sacrifices to "the vice of gambling."³³ But in response, Yudhishthira reproaches Draupadi. "Thou speakest, however, the language of atheism," says Yudhishthira. "O princess, I never act, solicitous of the fruits of my actions. I give away, because it is my duty to give; I sacrifice because it is my duty to sacrifice!" Here is a key principle enunciated by Lord Krishna in the Gita, "Perform your duty equipoised, abandoning all attachment to success or failure. Such equanimity is called yoga" (2.48). Such an approach to action is incompatible with consequentialism.

It is also to be noted that in the Srimad-Bhagavatam Sukadeva Goswami himself vindicates Maharaja Yudhishthira's gambling. "Yudhishthira, who was born without any enemy, was unfairly defeated in gambling. But because he had taken the vow of truthfulness, he went off to the forest. When he came back in due course and begged the return of his rightful share of the kingdom, he was refused by Dhrtarastra, who was overwhelmed by illusion" (SB 3.1.8 trans). The verse mentions adharmā, but it is not attributed to Maharaja Yudhishthira. Instead, Sukadeva Goswami refers to Maharaja Yudhishthira only with high words—as ajata-shatru (one who had no enemy) and sadhu (saintly person). There is no indication whatsoever that Maharaja Yudhishthira had transgressed dharma, yet Sukadeva Goswami himself attributes to Yudhishthira the very act that Hridayananda Maharaja believes is inauthentic. Not all courses of action that are good can be understood by reasoning about them, simply because there are

limits to our ability to make inferences about outcomes. This is sometimes called the “Law of Unintended Consequences.” The stark difference between Sukadeva Goswami on the one hand and Hridayananda Maharaja on the other shows why one must accept whatever the Mahajanas prescribe.

Consequentialism is the language of atheism because it is incapable of identifying acts that must be undertaken and whose purposes and outcomes are only fully known by God. At the start of the Gita, Arjuna offers Krishna a consequentialist argument for not fighting. But because he was a great devotee of Lord Krishna, he could understand that the dilemma he faced was beyond his ability to reason about it—thus he surrendered to Lord Krishna and His instruction. A consequentialist depends primarily on his ability to correctly ascertain the future consequences of any course of action he might pursue. That is because consequentialism, by definition, is “seeking morality primarily in the consequences of acts.”³⁴ A consequentialist therefore does not accept an authority higher than his own mind and intelligence. Otherwise, if he accepts some authority that is superior to his own ability to reason about possible consequences, he would not be a consequentialist. A consequentialist is an atheist because he does not accept an authority higher than himself.³⁵

Hridayananda Maharaja’s negative, consequentialist assessment of Yudhisthira is questionable in light of the good fortune of the Pandavas’ during thirteen years of exile in the Kamyaka and Dvaita forests. While in exile, many things happen that will prove both auspicious and necessary for their victory over the Kauravas at Kurukshetra. During this time, Arjuna goes to Heaven and receives celestial weapons he will use in the coming battle. The curse he receives from the celestial Urvasi for refusing her romantic overtures, and subsequently reduced in duration by Lord Indra to a year, turns out to be a boon. “O giver of proper respect, the curse that Urvasi hath denounced on thee will be to thy benefit,” said Indra to Arjuna. Because Arjuna would have to pass his last year in exile incognito, the curse of being a eunuch would be the perfect disguise. Indeed, during their time in the forest, the Pandavas encountered and slayed many demons and had many enlightening discussions amongst themselves about dharma. All this happened in the aftermath of Yudhisthira’s loss of his kingdom, his brothers, and his wife Draupadi in gambling. In the end, the consequences were good, but more importantly they could not be ascertained beforehand by consequentialist reasoning. And because such outcomes could not have been ascertained beforehand, reasoning about morality from consequences would have resulted in misguidance, adharma.

Recommendations

The fact that Hridayananda Maharaja is renowned as a scholar both within and outside of ISKCON and is also a long-standing, initiating spiritual master means that many devotees will accept whatever he says as a matter of faith. He is very dear to many devotees. Consequently, many have imbibed Maharaja’s alternative, consequentialist notion of dharma and have made it the foundation of their own Krishna consciousness. Since Maharaja’s approach to thinking about dharma attempts to surpass Srila Prabhupada and other acharyas, it necessarily challenges the legitimacy of our guru-parampara and therefore undermines the devotional service of devotees who are inclined to follow him. In the long term it constitutes an existential threat to ISKCON’s own integrity. ISKCON will eventually break or be rendered mundane by trying to accommodate large numbers of devotees who have no faith in Srila

Prabhupada or his parampara. ISKCON's GBC body therefore has a duty to correct this situation, both for the sake of his followers and for the sake of everyone else in ISKCON.

The objective of such an effort is not abstract: Maharaja has to publicly repudiate his own 2005 paper and also repudiate statements like those he has made recently on the pastimes of Draupadi and Yudhisthira. He must repudiate his consequentialist notion of dharma. A simple apology is insufficient, for his 2005 paper is publicly available from innumerable places on the internet.

In 2009, in compliance with the GBC, Hridayananda Maharaja publicly agreed not to preach gay monogamy. However, no attempt was made by the GBC to nullify the influence of his 2005 paper that offers his justification for it. In a published letter (April 11, 2009), Maharaja writes,

"I am writing to reaffirm that I uphold the Krishna conscious principle that sexual union is for procreation within marriage, and that no spiritual leader should encourage or endorse any other form of sexual relation."³⁶

But on numerous occasions before and after this letter, Maharaja has expressed his determination to stand by his convictions as expressed in his paper.

For example,

----- Forwarded Message -----

Text D:229159 (29 lines)
From: Hridayananda Dasa Goswami
Date: 18-Feb-09 13:56 (08:56 -0500)
To: Prabhupada Disciples [11762]
Subject: Re: Hari

Trivikrama Swami:

> May I ask you Maharaja what exactly you are apologizing for? Is it for
> disturbing the minds of some devotees, or is it for promoting something
that
> is basically apasiddhanta? In other words do you think that gay monogamy
is
> still a good idea, but that ISKCON just isn't ready for it yet because of
> it's irrational fears?

As I pointed out in my essay on Vaishnava morality, there is an inevitable tension between competing moral values, such as justice and mercy; also, at times what is natural for an individual may be unnatural for society, and this too is a source of tension in every human society.

I have also repeatedly explained the need for a reasonable, thoughtful, approach to Srila Prabhupada's statements.

Srila Prabhupada built a house in which the whole world can live, and in the world we find, inevitably, different approaches to life, different ways of understanding, even among faithful Vaishnavas who are dedicating their lives to Srila Prabhupada's mission. In terms of practical action, I will submit to Srila Prabhupada's will and follow the laws of ISKCON as enacted by Prabhupada's GBC.

I cannot hope to convince or satisfy everyone, but I am satisfied that I have explained myself in a clear and reasonable way, and this is confirmed to me by the positive, encouraging feedback I continually receive from many excellent, thoughtful devotees.

Thus at this point, in order to avoid endless debate, and wishing all the faithful followers of Srila Prabhupada success, I respectfully withdraw from the discussion.

Your servant,
Hridayananda das Goswami
(Text D:229159) -----

The fact that Maharaja himself continues to make his 2005 paper Vaishnava morality publicly available from his own websites shows that he never really followed either the letter or spirit of his public agreement with the GBC, unless the agreement is something other than what could be reasonable inferred from a straightforward reading of his April 2009 statement.

Gay monogamy, however, is only an issue of secondary concern. The real issue is Hridayananda Maharaja's philosophy of consequentialism and his impertinence in trying surpass Srila Prabhupada in order to justify it. This the GBC missed completely. Consequently, his writing on the subject to this day remains untouched and publicly available, and it remains influential within ISKCON. Nothing short of Maharaja repudiating his own paper with another paper explaining the fault in his own advocacy of consequentialism will suffice as atonement.

On this matter, I have lobbied the GBC for years and in doing so I have become acquainted with some GBC members who are genuinely concerned about this.³⁷ And some of them have indeed made good-faith efforts to remedy the situation. However, most other GBC members appear to keep themselves purposefully aloof from such matters. Two GBC members recently told me they had never heard of Maharaja's paper on Vaishnava morality and homosexuality. This is not a good thing, since it is circumstances like this that only members of the GBC have the institutional authority society wide to take on.

If the GBC continues to give insufficient attention to this matter, then the destruction of ISKCON is assured. In a recent statement, Maharaja has made an appeal that devotees with liberal and conservative views should somehow learn to get along with each other. But what scope is there for devotees who see Srila Prabhupada as an authority and those who do not to get along in the same community that openly says it places Srila Prabhupada in the center? None, really. Maharaja's own views on certain matters, as discussed here, depend on making selective judgment calls on the authority of Srila Prabhupada. It is like pulling on a thread in a knitted garment, you pull on it, and the whole garment unravels. Similarly, if you invalidate the authority of Srila Prabhupada on any matter pertaining to spiritual life, as Maharaja has, you invalidate his spiritual authority in its entirety. Srila Prabhupada cannot be the center of a society or institution that tries to accommodate views that oppose his own. Hence, trying to accommodate Maharaja and his followers within ISKCON without reform is tantamount to agreeing to ISKCON's own dissolution. "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

The GBC needs to decide whether Maharaja's sustained advocacy of consequentialism constitutes a dharma or an adharm, and subsequently whether they will support it or oppose it. Inaction will be taken as support, inasmuch as silence implies consent. Some people will have to change, or they will have make plans to depart from ISKCON. Whether those people are Maharaja and his followers, or the rest of us, is up to the GBC now.

In a letter to one of his GBC men, Srila Prabhupada writes about the gravity of maintaining the fidelity of all of ISKCON's members to guru and Krishna:

Yes, this attitude of surrendering to the Spiritual Master is the best qualification of spreading this movement of Lord Caitanya. That is the Vedic way. One should have unflinching faith in Krsna and similarly in the Spiritual Master. That is the way of understanding the secret of Krsna Consciousness.

Unfortunately, attempt has been made lately in our Society to shake this formula. This mischievous attempt has done a great harm, but if you the members of the Governing Body Commission can rectify this mischievous attempt, then still there is hope of making our progress uninterruptedly. I hope Krsna will help us.

There are two verses in the Canakya Sloka how a family or an institution can be glorified or burned into ashes by one person. The Canakya Pandit says that if there is one tree in the forest producing nice aromatic flower, that one tree can glorify the whole forest by the flavor of its flower. Similarly if there is one tree in whose cavity there is a little fire, that one tree can burn into ashes the whole forest.

So this simile is applicable anywhere. In a family if there is one good boy, he can glorify the whole family and similarly if there is bad boy he can turn the whole family into ashes. Similarly in this institution if there is a bad disciple he can burn the whole institution into ashes.

The Governing Body Commission's duty is therefore to see that every member is following the rules and regulations and chanting sixteen round regularly on the beads. I hope the GBC in cooperation with the Sannyasis in their touring program will be able to keep vigilance systematically in order to keep the Society as pure as possible.³⁸

End Notes

¹ Abhasa, otherwise known as "pretentious religion," is listed in the Srimad-Bhagavatam (7.15.12) as one of five kinds of irreligion that must be given up.

² Hridayananda Goswami, "Vaisnava Moral Theology and Homosexuality," (California, Feb 2005) viewed on 31 Jan. 2014 <http://www.howardjresnick.com/articles/essay_moral_theology_%26_homosexuality.pdf>.

³ ———, "Gay monogamy preferred to promiscuity," 19 Dec. 2004, Jagannath's Chakra, 8 Feb. 2014 <http://chakra.org/discussions/GenDec19_04.html>.

⁴ Although analysis of cause and effect is central to Vedic siddhanta (see Bhagavad-gita, Ch 13), it is rooted in an understanding quite different to agnostic consequentialism. See also Gita 16.5.

⁵ On page 6 of his paper on homosexuality, Maharaja writes, "At 18.25, Krishna states that work undertaken without considering the resultant himsa, or harm to the innocent, is work in the mode of darkness." This is all he says about this verse in his paper.

⁶ Definition of AbhAsa from the Monier-Williams Sanskrit Dictionary.

आभास

(H2) आ-भास [p= 145,2] [L=25252] m. splendour , light R. Veda1ntas. 195

[L=25253] colour , appearance R. Sus3r. Bhag.

[L=25254] semblance , phantom , phantasm of the imagination

[L=25255] mere appearance , fallacious appearance Veda1ntas. S3a1n3khS3r.

[L=25256] reflection

[L=25257] intention , purpose

[L=25258] (in log.) fallacy , semblance of a reason , sophism , an erroneous though plausible argument (regarded by logicians as of various kind)

(H2B) आ-भास [L=25259] mfn. ifc. looking like , having the mere appearance of a thing Gaut. Sa1h. &c

⁷ Since many of us live in societies in which most people believe that sex acts are moral as long as they are consensual, the example is not far-fetched.

⁸ Srila Prabhupada, *Sri Chaitanya-caritamṛta*, Madhya 20.352 purport.

⁹ The four defects are a tendency to commit mistakes, a tendency to become illusioned, imperfect senses, and the propensity to cheat.

¹⁰ Prior, recognized, saintly, spiritual authorities.

¹¹ ———, *Sri Chaitanya-caritamṛta*, Antya 7.134 purport.

¹² “Vaisnava Moral Theology and Homosexuality” (18):

Do Vaishnava Vedic scriptures give specific, explicit unambiguous rules for dealing with homosexuality, or if not, must we reason our way to a conclusion?

Srila Prabhupada taught that we must understand the spiritual science through guru, sadhu, and shastra, “one’s teacher, other saintly persons, and revealed scriptures.” Srila Prabhupada also taught unceasingly that his own ultimate qualification, and indeed the qualification of any bona fide guru, is to always faithfully repeat the teachings of Krishna as they are found in revealed scriptures. Thus we must search the most important Vaishnava scriptures presented by Srila Prabhupada, the Bhagavad-gita and the Srimad- bhagavatam, for specific, explicit, unambiguous scriptural statements about homosexuality.

The result? There are none. Remarkably, neither the Gita nor the Bhagavatam gives a single explicit reference to mutually consensual homosexuality.

¹³ *Manu-smṛiti* 11.68: Homosexual sex with a man is an offense for which loss of caste is prescribed.

¹⁴ Srila Prabhupada. “The revealed scriptures, like Manu-samhitā and similar others, are considered the standard books to be followed by human society” (Bhagavad-gita As It Is, 3.21 purport).

¹⁵ “The words vaisnavera sastra refer to Srimad Bhagavatam, which is the principle commentary on the Badarayana-sutras, or Brahma-sutras. It is stated: srimad-bhagavatam puranam amalam yad vaisnavanam priyam - “Srimad Bhagavatam is the spotless Purana and is most dear to the Vaisnavas.” These words also refer to the six Vaisnava Puranas, headed by the Visnu Purana and the Padma Purana; the Vaisnava smrtis, such as that of Harita, from among the twenty Dharma-sastras, headed by that of Manu; the srutis, such as Gopala-tapani and Nrsimha-tapani; the histories, such as the Mahabharata and the original Ramayana; the Satvata Pancaratras headed by the Narada, Hayasirsa, and Prahlada; and the literatures written by exalted pure devotees.”

¹⁶ Hridayananda Goswami, “Gay monogamy preferred to promiscuity,” 19 Dec. 2004, *Chakra.org*, 27 Feb. 2014 <http://chakra.org/discussions/GenDec19_04.html>.

¹⁷ Achintya Chaitanya Das, “The Draupadi Incident,” 26 Sep. 2013, *Krishna East and West*, 2 Mar. 2014 <http://www.krishnaeastandwest.com/uploads/2/3/7/1/23713168/the_draupad_incident_public_version.pdf>.

¹⁸ ———, “The Real Dharmaraja,” 26 Sep. 2013, *Krishna East and West*, 2 Mar. 2014 <http://www.krishnaeastandwest.com/uploads/2/3/7/1/23713168/the_real_dharmaraja_public_version.pdf>.

¹⁹ Bhakta Charles (name and name of wife changed). “Facebook Chat Session” 27 Jan. 2014.

²⁰ Sandeep Shreekumar, “An Analysis of Consequentialism and Deontology in the Normative Ethics of the Bhagavadgītā”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* (2012) 40:277 – 315.

²¹ Joseph Dowd, “Maximizing Dharma: Krishna’s Consequentialism in the Mahabharata,” vol. 3, no. 1, Spring 2011, *Praxis*, 16 Mar 2014 <<http://praxisjp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Praxis3.1dowd.pdf>>.

²² Sitansu S. Chakravarti, “Consequentialism and the Gita” 2002, *Infinity Foundation*, 16 Mar. 2014 <http://www.infinityfoundation.com/mandala/i_es/i_es_chakr_consequence_frameset.htm>.

²³ See *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1994

²⁴ *The Public Interest*, No. 155, Spring 2004 (22 – 24), accessed at *National Affairs*, 16 Mar. 2014 <http://www.nationalaffairs.com/doclib/20080710_20041552theunravelingofchristianityinamericaciffordorwin.pdf>.

²⁵ Srila Prabhupada, “Letter to Lalitananda” 26 May 1975.

²⁶ CDC, “HIV among Gay, Bisexual, and Other Men Who Have Sex With Men: Fact Sheet,” 26 Sep. 2013, *U.S. Center for Disease Control*, 2 Mar. 2014 <<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/gender/msm/facts/index.html>>.

²⁷ Don H. Hockenbury, Sandra E. Hockenbury, *Psychology*, 4th ed. (New York: Worth Publishers, 2006) 220.

²⁸ Jock Abra, *Should Psychology Be a Science?: Pros and Cons* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998) 56. *Questia*. Web. 2 Mar. 2014.

²⁹ CC Antya 7.131 – 137.

³⁰ Hridayananda Maharaja should be asked how he reconciles this verse with his consequentialism.

³¹ Qtd. in CC Madhya 25.27.

³² Hridayananda Goswami, "Disrobing of Draupadi in the Mahabharata," 29 May 2013, Ask Acharyadeva, 18 Mar. 2014 <<http://askacharyadeva.wordpress.com/2013/05/29/disrobing-of-draupadi-in-the-mahabharata/>>.

³³ Kisari Mohan Ganguli, The Mahabharata, Book 3: Vana Parva: Arjunabhigamana Parva: Section 30, 20 Mar. 2014 <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/m03/m03030.htm>>.

³⁴ As already noted, this is how Hridayananda Maharaja defines consequentialism in his paper "Vaisnava Moral Theology and Homosexuality" (2005).

³⁵ Arguments in favor of abortion are almost always consequentialist arguments.

³⁶ Hridayananda Goswami, "Hridayananda dasa Goswami's letter to the GBC," 11 Apr. 2009, Dandavats, 15 Mar. 2014 <<http://www.dandavats.com/?p=7166>>.

³⁷ In 2007 I wrote a rebuttal to Hridayananda Maharaja's 2005 paper. My rebuttal is titled "A Response to Hridayananda Das Goswami's 'Vaisnava Moral Theology and Homosexuality'", and it is currently published at the Dandavats website (<http://www.dandavats.com/?p=2734>). That paper focuses more on some of the points raised in this paper, such as the virtual absence of a representative sample of Srila Prabhupada's stated opinions and alternative, non-consequentialist approaches to dealing with the same problem. However, it does not address Maharaja's concept of dharma reimagined as a type of consequentialism whereas this paper primarily does.

³⁸ Srila Prabhupada, "Letter to Bali Mardan," 25 Aug. 1970.