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Moral Thesis Unravelled

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It is astonishing to see how Sanskrit scholarship and intellectual reasoning can be used, supposedly for the good of ISKCON, to advocate things which contradict the explicit words of ISKCON's founder-acarya and the injunctions of Vedic sastra. Recently a paper by the title "Vaisnava Moral Theology and the Homosexual Issue" (hereafter Moral Thesis) appeared on a public internet news forum frequented by ISKCON devotees and followers. The title itself reveals that the thesis has opened more than a debate over sexual preferences-ISKCON now faces a deliberate challenge to the implicit faith it places in its founder-acarya and Vaisnava scriptures. A weakening of that faith will act like a broadside to the ship so carefully constructed and guided by His Divine Grace. Along with marginalization of guru-mukha-padma-vakya cittete kariya aikya comes normalization of adhama (irreligious behavior).

Quite frankly, we didn't find any Vaisnava theology within the paper nor anything of value for the Vaisnava community. In a previous work entitled "Chaste Harlots" I have comprehensively responded to the "Homosexual Issue" brought forward in the Moral Thesis, thus I will not do so again here. In our present paper, we will attempt to analyze and unravel, if you will, the rather protracted Moral Thesis considering the paper's assumptions and their implications for ISKCON. The Moral Thesis is designed to make its readers think that superseding the explicit instructions of guru, sadhu and sastra is possible by moral reasoning according to fashionable social mores.

The Krishna consciousness movement should not be overly influenced by popular opinion lest it abandons its foundational tenets. We know that scholars, anti-cultists, governments and others are putting pressure on ISKCON to conform to their ideas. In fact some members of the academic community cry that unless ISKCON gives up its literal interpretation of the scriptures the organization will become irrelevant to scholars. This is totally untrue. Just the opposite is true. If ISKCON compromises its pure position to cater to modern whimsical trends the institution will become rubbish. The tendency to compromise in the place of preaching should not be indulged.

The Moral Thesis employs suspicious scholarship---at times quoting His Divine Grace when convenient and at other times totally ignoring his statements. Although the Moral Thesis presents several scriptural stories and references, its shocking conclusions place the devotee-reader, in the most unenviable position of having to accept several premises.

PREMISE #1: Sastric Ambiguity

The Moral Thesis:

"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.' Although homosexuality is said to have existed since the dawn of creation, the Bhagavatam does not explicitly describe nor proscribe it."

Firstly, by saying "said to have existed" the Moral Thesis makes it sound as if the Bhagavatam's statement may not be accurate. The Srimad Bhagavatam is accepted as the topmost trusted scripture and its statements are held above all others by Vaisnava acaryas such as Sridhara Svami, Ramanujacarya and Vallabhacarya. Srila Vyasadeva also confirms this: *srimad-bhagavate maha-muni-krte kim va parair isvarah*. "This beautiful Bhagavatam, compiled by the great sage Vyasadeva [in his maturity], is sufficient in itself for God realization. What is the need of any other scripture?" Srila Jiva Gosvami explains in his Sandarbha that even if there are some paradoxical statements between scriptures, Bhagavata Purana is to be taken as the final decision. Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu too accepted Srimad Bhagavatam as the spotless Vedic authority.

Secondly, how can the Moral Thesis say that the Bhagavatam does not explicitly describe homosexuality when we have a graphic case of it in the very verse under discussion (3.20.26)?

Lord Brahma, approaching the Lord, addressed Him thus: My Lord, please protect me from these sinful demons, who were created by me under Your order. They are infuriated by an appetite for sex and have come to attack me.

The Sanskrit indicates that the men created by Brahma (tah imah) were approaching (upakramanti) him (mam [Brahma]) for sex (yabhitum). Three texts prior in verse 23 the Bhagavatam also discloses that they (te) approached (abhipedire) Brahma for copulation (maithunaya). The topic of these verses is clearly a case of persons of one sex (male) approaching another person of the same sex (male) for sex-there is no ambiguity here. In fact, considering the attempted homosexual encounter Srila Prabhupada could not have translated the verses more literally.

Thirdly, it is untrue that Srimad Bhagavatam does not explicitly proscribe homosexuality. The word proscribe is defined: "To condemn or to prohibit." In general the Srimad Bhagavatam condemns and prohibits sinful activity of all kinds. The persons involved in the attempted sinful act are termed "demons" (adevan) in verse 23 indicating the ungodly or those who oppose the demigods and Lord Visnu. Verse 26 refers to those persons as "sinful demons" (papah). How could the behavior of persons characterized as "demons" and "sinful demons" not be proscribed by the scripture in which such descriptions appear? Demonic behavior is most assuredly condemned in the Srimad Bhagavatam and other Vedic literature exemplified by the hordes of demons killed by the Lord Himself. In particular, the Bhagavatam is described as the very source of religious principles for the age of Kali.

*krsne sva-dhamopagate / dharma-jnanadibhih saha
kalau nasta-drsam esa / puranarko 'dhunoditah*

"This Bhagavata Purana is as brilliant as the sun, and it has arisen just after the departure of Lord Krsna to His own abode, accompanied by religion, knowledge, etc. Persons who have lost their vision due to the dense darkness of ignorance in the age of Kali shall get light from this Purana."

One of the expressed purposes of the Lord's descent upon this material world is to annihilate the miscreants who do not care for Krsna consciousness. In the Bhagavad-gita the Supreme Lord eternally prohibits such demons by threatening to personally annihilate them (vinasaya ca duskrtam). If one argues that the Lord only personally appears to annihilate big demons and not the ordinary small sinful persons-it can be seen that the Lord also denounces such small sinful persons in the Bhagavad-gita:

"He who discards scriptural injunctions and acts according to his own whims attains neither perfection, nor happiness, nor the supreme destination." (16.23)

Furthermore the Lord condemns such persons by casting (ksipami) them (dvisatah kruran) "into the ocean of material existence, into various demoniac species of life."

Aside from this, we find in the episode under discussion, sinful demons directly attacking Brahma, or Vidhi the father of all religious principles. What could be more condemned or proscribed?

PREMISE #2: Poor Sanskrit Scholarship or Homophobia

The Moral Thesis:

"The story does not describe mutually consensual homosexuality, since Brahma fled the lusty demons."

By use of the term "mutually consensual homosexuality", the Moral Thesis wishes to make a distinction between the demoniac homosexual attackers of Brahma and modern gay partners. The nature of the Brahma-attacking demons' sexual attraction was confirmed above, now we will address the terms mutually consensual. The Moral Thesis contends that the demons attacking Brahma were wicked primarily because they attempted to force their lusty desires upon another unwilling person-whereas typical gay behavior taking place between willing adults cannot be considered to be in the same category. Such guesswork is reminiscent of some dead so-called scholars who accused Bhaktivedanta publications of inconsummate Sanskrit scholarship arising from an overzealous preacher. How lamentable it is that "Vaisnavas" are joining the group of mundane scholars who oppose the pure devotee's writings because, unbeknownst to them, the subject matter is transcendental to their understanding.

*atah sri-krsna-namadi / na bhaved grahyam indriyaih
sevonmukhe hi jihvadau / svayam eva sphuraty adah*

"No one can understand the transcendental nature of the name, form, quality and pastimes of Sri Krsna through his materially contaminated senses. Only when one becomes spiritually saturated by transcendental service to the Lord are the transcendental name, form, quality and pastimes of the Lord revealed to him." (Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu 1.2.234)

Although it is true that the demoniac attack against Brahma represents homosexuality in a most extreme manner, still homosexual behavior of any type is held as immoral by the Bhagavatam. In his purport to Srimad Bhagavatam 3.20.26 as quoted above, Srila Prabhupada viewed both forced and consensual homosexuality as falling into the same category of sinful activity or illicit sex. The Moral Thesis finds this assessment faulty and thus insinuates that ordinary gays of today have been contemptuously lumped into the same category as those of the demoniac attackers. Thus the implication points to either poor Sanskrit scholarship or homophobia. Let us consider Srila Prabhupada's Sanskrit scholarship first.

Moral Thesis:

"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."

"The story does not give any rule, injunction, or prohibition regarding homosexuality. Indeed the very word homosexuality does not appear in the Bhagavatam."

"Since we do not find a specific, explicit, unambiguous set of rules for dealing with homosexuality, we must engage in spiritual reasoning about it."

A good friend of mine wondered out loud whether to credit such ludicrous statements to poor research, inanity, intelligence stolen by illusion (mayayapahrta-jnana) and/or an attempt to beguile. The very word zoo-philia also does not appear in the Bhagavatam---does that mean sex with animals is acceptable? The Moral Thesis attempts to justify its claim that "the Bhagavatam does not explicitly describe nor proscribe" homosexuality by suggesting that only the homosexual attack is forbidden and not homosexual behavior if it is mutually consensual among adults.

This proposal is fundamentally wrong since there is indeed a perfectly specific, explicit, unambiguous set of rules for dealing with homosexuality as we will demonstrate. In attempting to eliminate a scriptural prohibition, the Moral Thesis employs absurd literalism to support its claim that "neither the Gita nor the Bhagavatam gives a single explicit reference to mutually consensual homosexuality."

Lord Krishna states that He is sex life which does not violate religious principles (dharmaviruddho bhutesu kamo 'smi). [Bhagavad-gita 7.11] What constitutes religious principles with regard to sex indulgence is clearly enunciated throughout the Srimad Bhagavatam.

Particularly in the Third Canto the incident of Diti's impregnation instructs that even when duly married and desiring offspring, sexual union is considered illicit when bereft of purificatory regulations.

"In the Seventh Canto, Sri Narada Muni also prescribes principles of the eternal religious system which he "heard from the mouth of Narayana" beginning with brahmacaryam. There brahmacaryam is defined as continence or abstaining from misuse of one's semen (not indulging in sex with women other than one's own wife and not having sex with one's own wife when sex is forbidden, like during the period of menstruation). The sage further explains that, the grhastha "is given permission by the spiritual master to indulge in sex during the period favorable for procreation (*guru-vrttir vikalpena grhasthasyartu-gaminah*)." (7.12.11)

Another directive is given in the Eleventh Canto to Vasudeva as follows:

"Religious sex life is also permitted, but only in marriage for begetting children, and not for sensuous exploitation of the body. Unfortunately, however, the less intelligent materialists cannot understand that their duties in life should be performed purely on the spiritual platform." (*vyavayah prajaya na ratya imam visuddham na viduh sva-dharmam*) (11.5.13)

The most explicit information found in the Srimad Bhagavatam, however, is spoken by the supreme authority, Lord Krishna as follows:

"A householder may approach his wife for sex only at the time prescribed for begetting children. (*grhasthasyapy rtau gantuh*)." (11.18.43)

Since the scriptural injunction for grhasthas excludes any sexual activity not specifically intended for procreation, it naturally forbids all sex for any other purpose. By forbidding all rather than most, some or numerous the order is unambiguous and explicit. Thus the prohibition necessarily includes each and every diverse form of illicit sex such as homosexuality, incest, auto-eroticism, pedophilia, zoo-philia, necrophilia, etc. When sex indulgence is allowed only under specific conditions, it automatically prohibits any sex indulgence which does not meet those specific conditions. The sastra's way of identifying prohibited behavior is the most comprehensive and intelligent because it not only makes sense in the immediate time period but it also allows for any situation that could arise in the future. In Kali-yuga the perverted sinful activities of men and women take on newer and more bizarre shapes and thus the sastras sensibly provide prohibitions for each and every form of illicit sexual behavior which does not conform to the precise allowable application given in the sastra.

If a man tells a barber to shave his head clean, it is understood the man means that all the hairs on his head should be cut. The barber need not ask whether the man wants this or that specific hair to be shaved. Nor can the man be rightly accused of being ambiguous or inexplicit in his instruction. He has accurately included each and every hair in the instruction for the barber to cut. A typical barber would not become bewildered by this instruction. The instruction is explicit because it refers to each individual hair and it is unambiguous because there is no doubt about which hairs are included. Not only would the task of specifically attempting to name each and every hair to be cut impractical, it is also redundant and unnecessary. Thus the Srimad Bhagavatam and the Bhagavad-gita display the kind of wisdom and foresight that one would expect from the most important Vaisnava scriptures.

Looking at this in another way, let's imagine an attorney arguing in court to defend his client:

"Your Honor, my client was given a citation for breaking the traffic law Number 1634 of the Municipal Traffic Section, which states that: (quote) "no motor vehicle weighing over 2 tons may be driven on this road." (end quote) Your Honor, please note that my client was driving a sixty foot long, green Mac truck that weighed 4 tons. I have searched the entire traffic law book and I can swear that in that entire body of laws there is not a single explicit reference prohibiting a 60 foot long, green, Mac truck weighing 4 tons to drive on that road."

From a purely and absurdly technical angle of vision, the attorney is stating a fact: indeed there is no "single explicit reference" prohibiting a "60 foot, green Mac truck weighing 4 tons" in the traffic law book. However, a sober judge will explain to the foolish attorney that the single law prohibiting any motor vehicle weighing more than 2 tons includes all varieties of motor vehicles never minding whether the vehicle's brand is Mac, Scania, International, Volvo, brandless or any other brand-and whether the vehicles are colored green, blue, pink, grey, polka-dotted or whatever-and whether the vehicles weigh 2 tons, 4 tons, 8 tons or any other weight beyond 2 tons-or whether the vehicles are 60 feet long, 20 feet long, or 120 feet long. The law applies equally to them all. There is no need, nor any possibility, for the traffic law book to enumerate all the trillions of potential characteristic-combinations of motor vehicles which could violate the law. In short, it is understood by sane persons that this prohibition refers to all types of motor vehicles weighing more than 2 tons.

So, getting back to the claim that: "neither the Gita nor the Bhagavatam gives a single explicit reference to mutually consensual homosexuality,"-it must be soberly pointed out that indeed mutually consensual homosexuality is included in the multitudes of types of prohibited illicit sex indulgence because it falls outside of Srimad Bhagavatam's accepted criterion for religious sex. These accepted criteria include:

1. within a sacred marriage between a man and a woman,
2. the purpose must be for procreation and,
3. the scriptural regulations must be observed, etc.

Since mutually consensual homosexuality unmistakably meets none of these decisive factors, it must be considered prohibited or illicit. Consensuality is by no means a saving grace for homosexuality according to Vaisnava scripture.

It is also unfair to charge Srila Prabhupada of being homophobic when his very life's example of saving the conditioned souls, (including gays) proves otherwise. It is observed that many former homosexuals experienced transcendental transformations by engaging in devotional service to Krishna under the direction of Srila Prabhupada. The qualification of those persons was their willingness to give up sinful habits and abide by the guidance given by His Divine Grace. Lacking such faith, some of today's homosexually-oriented candidates for Krishna consciousness represented by the Moral Thesis, claim unfair discrimination. No, it is not homophobia at work but rather careful adherence to the verdict of the scriptures and the unswerving dedication of the society's founder-acarya. Members of ISKCON take the purports of His Divine Grace to be as good as scripture, without which there would be no understanding of scripture in the West today. The Moral Thesis, on the other hand, seems to view them as expendable. Fortunately, we have His Divine Grace to clarify exactly what is meant by Bhagavatam stories so we don't need to speculate and come to perverse conclusions.

Some human acts are deemed wrong by God and scripture and it is the faithful, honest and pure persons who accept and abide by those injunctions. For example, stealing is deemed wrong by God and scripture. Similarly, whether we like it or not, homosexual behavior is also one of the human acts which is deemed wrong by God and revealed scriptures throughout the world, thus it should be given up by all sane persons. One may argue that there are exceptions to the rule and sometimes stealing could be condoned. That exception is very rare and it is certainly not a principle which should be broadly encouraged. But one may object: "There is a vast spectrum of stealing from armed robbery to shoplifting and surely they differ in their severity." Although there is a relative hierarchy in stealing diamonds (hira-cora) or cucumbers (khira-cora) both are criminal acts and are punishable. Similarly, according to scriptures (sastra caksus) the aggressive homosexual attack and the commonplace consensual homosexual relationships found today are both immoral and condemned.

Devotional service encompasses the highest reason because it has been decided by superior authorities. When the founder-acarya has given his verdict on an issue, it is offensive to bring that same issue up to the open forum for debate. A lower court cannot overrule a higher court's decision. Whether one does not understand the instruction or one does not accept the instruction or one thinks the instruction is OK but needs a little work-the policy of trying to outsmart the founder-acarya is not wise.

PREMISE #4: Infidelity to Acaryas

The Moral Thesis:

"The godless demons who chased Brahma for sex were apparently attracted to the specific part of his body that manifests female beauty. Both in the Bhagavatam text itself,

and in the commentaries of the great Acaryas, we find unanimous evidence that these demons were actually lusting after women."

"In conclusion, there is no doubt that the godless demons created by Brahma all felt extreme lust toward women. A question arises as to whether they approached Brahma in a straightforward homosexual way, or whether they were attracted to a female aspect of Brahma's cosmic body, since Brahma gave up to them a body in the form of a beautiful female. Keep in mind that the Bhagavatam itself states at 3.20.53 that Brahma gave them a "part", amsha, of his body, and Sridhara Swami states that this part was in fact an aspect of Brahma's mental state, specifically the state of lust. Thus according to the Bhagavatam and Sridhara Swami, the demons lustfully rushed at Brahma who then seems to have given them what they wanted: a beautiful female. Therefore it is clear that the demons had a strong heterosexual appetite, as well as an ambiguous attraction to a lusty female aspect of Lord Brahma."

"In their commentaries on this incident, three great commentators --- Sridhara Swami, Vira Raghavacarya, and Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakur, all describe these demons as stri-lampata, "lusting after women." Thus when the Bhagavatam first mentions this incident and describes the demons as atilolupan, "excessively lusty," Sridhara Swami states that this lust was for women."

The insinuation here by the Moral Thesis is that because the Bhaktivedanta Translations and Purports describe the demons' attack on Brahma for sex as homosexual they have deviated from the acaryas' (such as Sridhara Swami, Vira Raghavacarya, and Visvanatha Cakravarti Thakur), standard conclusion concerning this episode of Srimad Bhagavatam.

This claim cannot stand. Srila Prabhupada taught that the homosexual appetite within men is produced of excessive lust after women (atilolupan stri-lampata) just as the commentators have explained. He is totally in agreement with the acarya commentators on this point. Thus the Moral Thesis' attempt to discredit Srila Prabhupada's fidelity to the acaryas of the Srimad Bhagavatam fails.

What makes the Bhaktivedanta Purports so outstanding is that they focus the light of the Bhagavata and the previous acaryas into a powerful and compassionate beam of hope and mercy for the fallen conditioned souls of Kali-yuga. His Divine Grace further extended that mercy with practical advice to his followers of homosexual inclination that they should sincerely perform devotional service to Krishna and they, like others, would transcend the material impurities of their birth and activities. Those who carefully follow the principles of bhakti-yoga achieve spiritual advancement proving that His Divine Grace's advice continues to work. The purport under scrutiny is especially brilliant because it crystallizes exactly what is happening in the episode and what is to be learned by such an incident.

A renowned modern Sanskrit scholar expresses the opinion that Srila Prabhupada's purports to the Srimad-Bhagavatam reveal his loyalty to the Vaisnava tradition of scriptural commentary:

"I have gathered some insights into Srila Prabhupada's hermeneutic methodology. He always de-emphasized his own abilities, preferring to be judged on the more objective grounds of his bona fide allegiance to the teachings of the Vaisnava tradition he represented. He did not credit his preaching success to any special abilities of his own. As he once said, 'I don't claim that I am a pure devotee or perfect, but my only qualification is that I am trying to follow the instruction of the perfect.' "

To publicly establish spiritual authority, then, a teacher, rather than making an open spectacle of his intimate ecstasies, should simply speak philosophically on the basis of what previous authorities have said in scripture and on reputable commentaries of scripture. Srila Prabhupada wanted his own authority to be accepted according to how faithfully he lived up to that standard.

Srila Prabhupada was firmly convinced of the relevance of Srimad-Bhagavatam. In his view, the Bhagavatam's teachings were timeless, the perennial science of God consciousness. His own responsibility was simply to translate them without distortion. If the instructions of his authoritative predecessors were properly served, the whole world would surely benefit. He based his own presentation largely on the commentaries of previous authorities."

(Back to Godhead Magazine; Volume 36, Number 04, 2002; "Serving the Words of His Predecessors," By Gopiparanadhana Dasa Bhaktivedanta Book Trust (BBT) Sanskrit editor and translator for more than 25 years. His works include Srimad Bhagavatam and Sri Brhad-Bhagavatamrta)

The Moral Thesis:

"It is not clear from the original Bhagavatam story that the demons were true homosexuals. By close study of this story, we find that in fact the demons who approached Brahma were at most bi-sexual, and that even this bi-sexuality is quite ambiguous."

Whether the demoniac men approaching Brahma were "true" homosexuals meaning persons exclusively attracted to males without sexual attraction for females is not of primary concern. The Moral Thesis tries to divert attention from the primary action of the verse to a technical discussion of bisexuality which carries little relevance to the event. A judge is not particularly interested in whether a rapist is heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual. The criminal act itself is to be judged-not latent tendencies.

PREMISE #5: Human Reasoning Paramount

Moral Thesis:

"Sometimes devotees state that 'no illicit sex' means 'no sex outside of marriage.' Indeed that is the standard that many respected grhasthas are able to follow."

"ISKCON teaches the ideal in regards to avoiding illicit sexuality within marriage but in reality accommodates illicit sex within marriage."

The Moral Thesis here puts forward the idea that ISKCON and its founder-acarya authorize two acceptable standards of sexual indulgence (a higher and a lower) within the grhastha asrama. Although acknowledging that the higher standard is the ideal, the Moral Thesis argues that the lower is also authorized by default despite its accommodating illicit sex. Supposedly, authorization of a lower standard emanates from statements made by Srila Prabhupada himself, such as those below:

"Illicit sex is sex outside of marriage." (Science of Self-Realization, Chapter 2)

"Students are required to follow strictly the regulative principles of Vedic life: 1) No illicit sex-life (i.e. outside of marriage)" (From a letter to a life member; April 5, 1972)

It is disturbing and unethical the way that the Moral Thesis disregards certain statements of Srila Prabhupada entirely and yet uses other statements out of context. It seems that it is not His Divine Grace's words which the Moral Thesis holds as absolute but rather its own agenda. While Srila Prabhupada's statement that "illicit sex is sex outside of marriage" is certainly true, it does not constitute an "easier version of the rule" as the Moral Thesis demands. It cannot be supported that Srila Prabhupada taught such an "easier" version of regulative principles because illicit sex is not limited only to sex outside of marriage. His Divine Grace made numerous statements on the subject as did Srimad Bhagavatam (see the four verses quoted in the Premise #3 section above). When asked for a brief definition of what illicit sex constituted, His Divine Grace sometimes opted to give a simple, abbreviated description of the term rather than the more detailed explanation which he reserved for the proper time and circumstance.

Consider a botany professor who tells some children that coconuts come from seeds in the ground. The statement is not incorrect but certainly lacks completeness. The simplified explanation cannot be taken as realistic guidance on how to grow coconuts. The same professor lectures his university graduate students on the details of growing coconuts such as the type of seed, soil, sowing techniques, weeding, temperatures, quantities of water, sunlight, fertilizers, diseases, plant predators, plant characteristics-its flowers, fruits, etc. The professor reveals more about the science of botanically growing coconuts according to time and circumstances and the capacity of the students. Not only is the statement to the children incomplete, but an inexperienced person trying to grow coconuts simply based on that meagre information would easily become baffled presuming that putting any seed, in any type of ground, at any time, in any location would produce coconuts. Further information would be required to successfully grow coconuts from the start.

In the same way, when comprehensive explanations were required, Srila Prabhupada spared no pains in providing minute details about the standard for sex within Vaisnava marriage. On the other hand, when a reporter from the London Times interviewing Srila Prabhupada asked about it, His Divine Grace replied with the abbreviated "illicit sex is sex outside of marriage." (Science of Self-Realization, Chapter 2).

Moral Thesis:

"Why do we thus condone a sexual act which is, in the strictest sense, sinful? Surely because it is the lesser of two evils, the greater evil being sex outside of marriage."

If the discussion revolves around the standard for the grhastha asrama or the standard for Vaisnavas within marriage, or the standard for married initiated students within the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, the truth is that there is but one acceptable standard. The acceptable standard is the complete explanation given in Srimad Bhagavatam (see the Eleventh Canto quoted above) and confirmed by His Divine Grace as follows.

"It is sometimes misunderstood that a grhastha, a householder, is permitted to indulge in sex at any time. This is a wrong conception of grhastha life. The grhastha is allowed to indulge in sex life during the period favorable for procreation and in accordance with the spiritual master's order. If the spiritual master's orders allow a grhastha to engage in sex life at a particular time, then the grhastha may do so; otherwise, if the spiritual master orders against it, the grhastha should abstain. The grhastha must obtain permission from the spiritual master to observe the ritualistic ceremony of garbhadhana-samskara. Then he may approach his wife to beget children, otherwise not." (Srimad Bhagavatam 7.12.11 Purport)

This line of reasoning should be clear to all honest persons. Why then does the Moral Thesis propose that an "easier rule" was established for Vaisnava grhasthas? Wishful thinking does not constitute religious principles nor can illicit sex within marriage be rightly called the grhastha asrama. Srila Prabhupada set equal standards for all of his followers where the grhastha asrama is characterized as a spiritual order in which husband and wife make spiritual advancement. Householders who do not follow the regulative principles enunciated in these verses of Srimad Bhagavatam do not belong to the grhastha asrama but are termed grhamedhis (materialistic householders). The "easier rule" fallacy is definitely not a rule for Vaisnavas because it was not given by sastra, previous acaryas nor by Srila Prabhupada.

The Moral Thesis fabricates an "easier rule" on the basis of its own concocted "lesser of the two evils" reasoning. Such a proposition is as foolish as the atheistic slogan yata mata tata patha-"all ways lead to the Truth." We cannot manufacture our own way of understanding devotional service for it is not that everything one manufactures or concocts will lead to understanding God.

Moral Thesis:

"The question then arises: is the policy of choosing the lesser of evils valid only for heterosexuals, or is it also a necessary strategy for homosexuals?"

Now by disclosing this "easier rule-lesser of evils" theory, the Moral Thesis makes it easy to see the basis of the "gay monogamy" proposition. In a vain attempt to support this objective, the Moral Thesis employs pieced-together bits of mundane interpretations of scriptural stories.

PREMISE #6: Story Interpretations

The telling of stories to fulfill one's own mental purpose is counterproductive to bhakti-nevertheless, the Moral Thesis indulges in such acts.

Story #1

Moral Thesis:

"In both these stories of Asvatthama and Rukmi we find justice tempered by mercy, resulting in an act of merciful justice which does not obey the strictest letter of the law."

The Moral Thesis proposes that the punishments Krishna meted out to Asvatthama and Rukmi compromised justice and mercy and did "not obey the strictest letter of the law." The Moral Thesis has not accurately understood these pastimes. In reality, Krishna never compromises justice in favor of mercy. Rather His mercy is always perfectly just and His justice is always perfectly merciful and both follow the supreme letter of the law. This marks the difference between the ordinary flawed living entities trying to play God by redesigning human morality and the Lord Himself. The Lord and His devotee Arjuna did not compromise the letter of the law in punishing Asvatthama. More accurately, they knew all the laws and thus came to the perfect conclusion that Asvatthama should not be slain but humiliated. It may appear like a compromise to those who are not conversant with all the appropriate laws or to those who choose to ignore the appropriate laws. According to Srimad Bhagavatam, the punishment chosen for Asvatthama was perfect according to dharma.

"Cutting the hair from his head, depriving him of his wealth and driving him from his residence are the prescribed punishments for the relative of a brahmana. There is no injunction for killing the body." (1.7.58)

Srila Prabhupada nicely comments on the outcome:

Contradictory orders of different persons are impossible to carry out. Therefore a compromise was selected by Arjuna by his sharp intelligence, and he separated the jewel from the head of Asvatthama. This was as good as cutting off his head, and yet his life was saved for all practical purposes. Here Asvatthama is indicated as twice-born. Certainly he was twice-born, but he fell down from his position, and therefore he was properly punished. Thus being insulted, the humiliated Asvatthama was simultaneously killed and not killed by the intelligence of Lord Krsna and Arjuna.

Story #2

Moral Thesis:

"A strong male seeks to act in a strong way claiming such an act to be just. A respected lady [Kunti] then insists on a somewhat different course, and the male adjusts his behavior."

The Moral Thesis asserts that when calling demigods for sons Pandu compromised dharma to appease his wife Kunti. In reality this story provides no compromise of dharma in the least. Pandu's acquiescence to his wife's opinion was fully based on dharma. Kunti devi also happened to be a very great devotee of the Lord and a learned scholar in Vedic knowledge in addition to her being Pandu's beloved wife. There was no fault on Pandu's part in listening to his dharma patni, nor was there any fault on Kunti's part for speaking what she had heard from saints and sastra. The final decision was made mutually in accord with all dharmic principles and did not depend on mundane human feminine appeals.

Story #3

Moral Thesis:

"The family's moral duty, was not at all clear to the them and they could not agree on what to do since any possible moral act seemed to violate another moral duty of equal importance. The key point here is that practical circumstances presented a seemingly insoluble moral conflict to a good, brahminical, Vedic family."

The Moral Thesis wishes to use the Eka-cakra brahmana family's dilemma in deciding which family member should be sacrificed to the demon Baka to prove that no matter how hard one tries to be moral or pious, one will inevitably fail due to "conflicting moral duties." Such a gloomy view is not entirely untrue however it certainly does not touch the actual lesson to be learned from the story. In reality, the brahmana and his family represent all conditioned souls in this material world facing the perplexities of worldly existence. Ordinary dharma or varnasrama provides some relief from the confusion, however it is not capable of solving the problems entirely. To actually resolve life's dilemma everyone requires the guidance of a bona fide spiritual master whose transcendental instructions burn away the dense fog of confusion and anxiety. Fortunately for the brahmana family of Eka-cakra, the Lord sent His dear representative Vaisnavi in the form of Srimati Kuntidevi to compassionately, transcendently and efficiently solve the family's problems. So the moral dilemma was solved permanently and safely by the divine grace of Srimati Kuntidevi and her son Bhimasena. Sanjaya declared that:

Wherever there is Krsna, the master of all mystics, and wherever there is Arjuna, the supreme archer, there will also certainly be opulence, victory, extraordinary power, and morality. That is my opinion.

*yatra yogesvarah krsno / yatra partho dhanur-dharah
tatra srir vijayo bhutir / dhruva nitir matir mama*

The pure devotee knows how to act in all circumstances satisfying both morality and bhakti.

Story #4

Moral Thesis:

"Narada urges upon Mrgari the lesser of evils."

The Moral Thesis wishes to show how Narada chose the lesser of moral evils when he advised Mrgari the hunter to fully kill animals rather than to half-kill them. Again the Moral Thesis has put aside the true significance of the scriptural story (this time from the Puranas) to instead emphasize a minor element-and that also incorrectly. A great saintly person like Narada Muni does not travel around the material and spiritual worlds to split hairs over the relative papa of killing and half-killing animals. Narada Muni's real intent was to encourage the hunter to stop hunting altogether and depend totally on the Lord for his maintenance. That is why he spoke the significant words to the hunter, "You stop this hunting business and I will give you your livelihood."

Narada's preaching strategy was successful with Mrgari as it was when he disclosed to Kamsa that Krsna and Balarama were sons of Vasudeva. In that pastime, Narada knew that as a result of his disclosure Kamsa would arrange to kill the boys---but Krsna would defeat Kamsa. In the same way, Narada knew that although Mrgari the hunter was sinful, he was nonetheless simple-hearted and would give up killing animals completely.

Story #5

Moral Thesis:

"In a sense, Bhishma declares here that even if the universe should collapse, he will not give up his vow. 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."

The Moral Thesis considers Bhishma's vow of celibacy insensitive to its consequences. This seemingly sanctimonious interpretation attempts to bring down one of Vedic culture's most sacred and beneficial vows to the mundane level. Bhishma never intended that consequences didn't matter, rather he meant that the act of dharma (keeping his sacred vow) inevitably produces the best consequences. Of that he is sure, and he is a mahajana. Bhishma should not be considered an ordinary impetuous youth prone to making rash vows without due deliberation. At the time of making his vow, Bhishma was already perfectly educated in all branches of Vedic knowledge by great rishis. If Bhishma's vow was truly whimsical, irresponsible and harmful as implied by the Moral Thesis, why would Yamaraja, the great demigod and universal authority on morality, include Bhishma's name as one of the twelve wisest authorities (mahajanas) in existence?

Several other factors must be considered in regard to Bhishma's vow:

1. Bhishma was well-aware that the fisherman's daughter Satyavati was divinely chosen to be the mother of the Kuru dynasty.

2. Despite his vow of celibacy Bhisma never shirked his responsibility to protect and guide the Kuru dynasty through valiant fighting and giving perfect counsel.
3. The sacred vow of naistiki brahmacarya is authorized by Vedic authorities and has been glorified in the lives of the Kumaras, Narada, Hanuman, Kapila, Sukadeva, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, etc. Bhisma's vow was no different.
4. We have not heard of any acarya intimating that Bhisma's vow of celibacy was inauspicious or would bring inauspicious results.
5. The vow was so glorious and auspicious that the Supreme Lord Sri Krishna Himself personally attended to Bhisma at the time of his passing from this world.

Story #6

Moral Thesis:

"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 Bhisma himself at the Battle of Kurukshetra."

The Moral Thesis considers Krishna's picking up the broken chariot wheel to protect Arjuna from Bhisma's attack a model of breeching dharma (morality) for the sake of helping people. In reality however, Lord Krishna does not become immoral by His activities but rather He becomes glorified by the seemingly immoral acts, as indicated earlier. His youthful dancing with the gopis, childish butter-stealing, fleeing the battlefield and breaking a promise demonstrate independence from mundane governance. These special activities must be considered the transcendental prerogative of the Supreme Personality of Godhead and should not be used as models upon which ordinary souls compromise morality to achieve social expediency.

If one actually wishes to critique the broken promise of Krishna, many additional factors must be taken into account:

1. Krishna's singular status as the omniscient, benevolent, all-merciful God.
2. Lord Krishna's chivalrous relationship with Bhisma known as vira rasa.
3. Lord Krishna's magnanimous willingness to sacrifice His own promise in order to keep the promise of His beloved devotee Bhisma. Bhisma vowed earlier that morning he would kill Arjuna unless Krishna broke His promise.
4. The intimate friendship of Arjuna with Krishna.
5. Krishna's preference to honor the declaration of Arjuna (kaunteya pratijanihi na me bhaktah pranasyati). Krishna prefers to be known as the protector of His devotees rather than the keeper of promises.
6. The fate of the world should Arjuna have been slain.
7. How morality is defined when it is employed by God, etc.

Story #7

Moral Thesis:

"Krishna tells Yudhisthira, '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.'"

The Moral Thesis highlights how Krishna advised Yudhisthira to cast aside dharma in order to defeat Drona. Many of the same considerations discussed in Story #6 apply here with the addition of several other factors.

1. The statement of Bhagavad-gita provides a higher stratum of dharma or morality which is accomplished when one has implicit faith in the directions of the Supreme Lord.

*sarva-dharman parityajya / mam ekam saranam vraja
aham tvam sarva-papebhyo / moksayisyami ma sucah*

"Abandon all varieties of religion and just surrender unto Me. I shall deliver you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear." (18.66)

An ordinary person cannot invoke such indemnity by his would-be desire to become a social reformer. For example, an ordinary soul should not recommend casting aside Vedic morality for the sake of supposedly appeasing the minds of those unable to follow standard religious principles.

2. Drona the brahmana had already breeched dharma by fighting in a ksatriya war.

3. Drona had lost his respectability by siding with the evil Duryodhana.

4. Drona himself had personally and explicitly outlined to Yudhisthira what means should be used for his own defeat.

5. Drupada had performed a Vedic sacrifice to kill Drona and a son (Dhrstadyumna) was born for fulfilling that purpose.

Story #8

Moral Thesis:

"One must keep in mind that the whole purpose of moral principles is to benefit people. At times, good people, externally, perform bad deeds. At times, bad people, externally, perform good deeds. In such cases one must look beyond appearances to see what actually produces good consequences."

The Moral Thesis uses a story from the Mahabharata to demonstrate how a family-minded hunter was sent to heaven and a superficially truthful brahmana was sent to hell. From this we are supposed to look beyond outward appearances and to be careful of false

self-righteousness. There is a similar story told by Srila Prabhupada about a brahmana who lived next to a prostitute. Each time the prostitute had a customer, the brahmana would add a stone to a pile that gradually became a wall, revealing to everyone her sinful activity. He became so absorbed in pointing out her sinfulness that at the time of death, he thought of the prostitute and fell down from his position. The prostitute, however, felt remorse for her sinful behavior and longed to become purified and thus she became elevated.

Karmic reactions are often mystifying and those engaged in karma-kandiya activity are subjected to the sometimes confusing results. For example, King Nrga was turned into a lizard for an apparently innocent faux pax. No doubt that we should be cautious about finding faults in others ignoring our own, yet this obvious fact does not justify disobeying the instructions of the founder-acarya in the guise of magnanimity.

Lord Krishna has also confirmed that the intricacies of action are complicated:

*karmano hy api boddhavyam / boddhavyam ca vikarmanah
akarmanas ca boddhavyam / gahana karmano gatih*

The intricacies of action are very hard to understand. Therefore one should know properly what action is, what forbidden action is, and what inaction is. (4.17)

However, Srila Prabhupada has made the whole process quite easy by his lucid instructions and the sincere follower accepts them without a challenging spirit. The Moral Thesis, on the other hand, obsessed with juggling words like "good" and "bad," hopes to find loopholes in the system of dharma, karma and bhakti. If guru, sastra and sadhu all agree on a particular topic, which is definitely true with the case under discussion, why should one waste time in such hermeneutical gymnastics. Indeed Lord Krishna instructs in His Uddhava-gita that mundane duality and the Absolute Truth go ill together.

*kim bhadram kim abhadram va / dvaitasyavastunah kiyat
vacoditam tad anrtam / manasa dhyatam eva ca*

Anything not conceived in relationship to Krsna should be understood to be illusion [maya]. None of the illusions uttered by words or conceived in the mind are factual. Because illusion is not factual, there is no distinction between what we think is good and what we think is bad. When we speak of the Absolute Truth, such speculations do not apply. (Srimad-Bhagavatam: 11.28.4)

Similarly, Lord Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu points out the mistake of speculating.

*'dvaite' bhadrabhadra-jnana, saba-'manodharma'
'ei bhala, ei manda',-ei saba 'bhrama'*

"In the material world, conceptions of good and bad are all mental speculations. Therefore, saying 'This is good' and 'This is bad' is all a mistake." (Caitanya-caritamrta: Antya 4.176)

It may also be aptly questioned why the Moral Thesis includes episodes from Mahabharata to support its own purposes while privately considering the book corrupt. To make matters worse, the Thesis chooses to quote from a Sanskrit edition of the work produced by scholars who reject as spurious, certain portions of the Mahabharata such as the attempted disrobing of Draupadi. The Moral Thesis's curving thread running through all these stories is that human reasoning surpasses dharma, scriptural injunctions, the words of the Supreme Lord and the spiritual master.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Moral Thesis:

"To encourage devotees who are struggling to regulate, reduce and eliminate sinful sexuality in any form is not to praise or encourage sinful activities. The truth is the opposite: we are praising and encouraging the reduction and gradual elimination of such activities."

"Lord Krishna Himself states at the end of the Gita, 18.66: Giving up all moral/religious principles and come to Me alone for shelter. I shall protect you from all sinful reactions. Do not fear!"

"Thus considering Vaishnava moral philosophy, as taught by Krishna Himself and by His pure devotees, ISKCON must encourage sincere devotees who at times, in good faith, and within reasonable limits, choose the lesser of evils in order to stabilize themselves on the spiritual path. This principle applies to human sexuality among mutually consenting adults."

Dharma is not achieved by adharma. Inventing a so-called religious principle based on an insane society's mores is like cleaning a wine-stained pot with Academician Wine. The process of trying to understand scriptures by use of logic and argument goes on unsuccessfully for millions of lifetimes-vedesu durlabham adurlabham atma-bhaktau. A simple devotee gives the guru a glass of water when it is asked for whereas the sophisticated philosopher conjectures that soy milk is better, so he brings that. A similar phenomenon befell Western society at large when in the beginning of the 20th century Sigmund Freud introduced an atheistic, decadent paradigm of pseudo science and rhetoric. Hopefully, the Vaisnava community will stand its ground against the "Moral Thesis" which ostensibly appears as a scholarly Vaisnava reassessment of preaching strategy.

Although completely blinded by ignorance, the lost souls of Kali-yuga have received the grace of Krishna in the form of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

*tarko 'pratisthah srutayo vibhinna / nasav rsir 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).

As with the punishing of Asvatthama Arjuna incorporated all relevant instructions and made the perfect conclusion without breaking any dharmic rules, so has Srila Prabhupada incorporated ISKCON. True devotees and members of ISKCON accept His Divine Grace as the person bhagavata and thus his words are the same as Srimad Bhagavatam. ISKCON has become somewhat celebrated for its high standards and Srila Prabhupada requested his followers to maintain those high standards.

ISKCON accepts its founder-acarya as a prominent mahajana and agrees to follow his conclusions without wrangling new interpretations to suit the current social trends-but the Moral Thesis dares to differ. Ignoring the founder-acarya's explicit directives on the subject, the Moral Thesis produces four papers of twenty pages and displays them eagerly. Yet, moral reasoning which contradicts scripture and guru and sadhu is useless. In Sri Isopanisad we learn that the culture of so-called knowledge is worse than the culture of nescient activities and Canakya Pandita compares misused education to a jewel on a serpent's hood. The danger is that sometimes a student gains a little bit of learning and thinks himself qualified to dispute the real teacher. The result of this is that the student becomes a mouse again (punar musiko bhava).

Running through the Moral Thesis we find an underlying theme that His Divine Grace's teachings are outdated. The Moral Thesis endorses sub-religious principles and gives assurances to persons accepting them that they will make spiritual advancement. However, non Vedic standards cannot be established whimsically. Abandoning the founder-acarya's guidance, unfortunately the Moral Thesis is guilty of not knowing what actually produces good consequences. In the Srimad Bhagavatam's Fifth Canto we learn of how Bharata Maharaja sought a righteous path in saving a drowning fawn but because he had no counsel of a spiritual master, became entangled in his affection and thus lost his status as an advanced devotee. Social reasoning may be popular with ordinary society but a devotee prefers to please the real acarya and Krsna. Those who wander off into the realm of mundane wrangling and speculation (mano dharma) forgetting the simplicity of accepting the words of the spiritual master as one's life and soul also lose their status as advanced devotees.

*ei kali-kale ara nahi kona dharma
vaisnava, vaisnava-sastra, ei kahe marma*

"In this Age of Kali there are no genuine religious principles other than those established by Vaisnava devotees and the Vaisnava scriptures. This is the sum and substance of everything." (CC Madhya 9.362)

Hare Krishna.