



Śrīla Prabhupāda's Authority in his Books and Other Contexts

A pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa cannot commit mistakes

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Maṅgalācaraṇa

*om ajñāna-timirāndhasya jñānāñjana-salākayā
cakṣur unmlītaṃ yena tasmai śrī-gurave namaḥ*

“I offer my respectful obeisances unto my spiritual master, who with the torchlight of knowledge has opened my eyes, which were blinded by the darkness of ignorance.”

*śrī-caitanya-mano'bhīṣṭaṃ sthāpitaṃ yena bhū-tale
svayaṃ rūpaḥ kadā mahyaṃ dadāti sva-padāntikam*

“When will Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī Prabhupāda, who has established within this material world the mission to fulfill the desire of Lord Caitanya, give me shelter under his lotus feet?”

*vande 'haṃ śrī-guroḥ śrī-yuta-pada-kamalaṃ śrī-gurūn vaiṣṇavāṃś ca
śrī-rūpaṃ sāgrajātaṃ saha-gaṇa-raghunāthānvitaṃ taṃ sa-jīvam
sādvaitaṃ sāvadhūtaṃ parijana-sahitaṃ kṛṣṇa-caitanya-devaṃ
śrī-rādhā-kṛṣṇa-pādān saha-gaṇa-lalitā-śrī-viśākhānvitāṃś ca*

“I offer my respectful obeisances unto the lotus feet of my spiritual master and of all the other preceptors on the path of devotional service. I offer my respectful obeisances unto all the Vaiṣṇavas and unto the Six Gosvāmīs, including Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī, Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī, Jīva Gosvāmī and their associates. I offer my respectful obeisances unto Śrī Advaita Ācārya Prabhu, Śrī Nityānanda Prabhu, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu, and all His devotees, headed by Śrīvāsa Ṭhākura. I then offer my respectful obeisances unto the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī and all the *gopīs*, headed by Lalitā and Viśākhā.”

*he kṛṣṇa karuṇā-sindho dīna-bandho jagat-pate
gopeśa gopikā-kānta rādhā-kānta namo 'stu te*

“O my dear Kṛṣṇa, ocean of mercy, You are the friend of the distressed and the source of creation. You are the master of the cowherd men and the lover of the *gopīs*, especially Rādhārāṇī. I offer my respectful obeisances unto You.”

*tapta-kāñcana-gaurāṅgi rādhe vṛndāvaneśvari
vṛṣabhānu-sute devi praṇamāmi hari-priye*

“I offer my respects to Rādhārāṅgī, whose bodily complexion is like molten gold and who is the Queen of Vṛndāvana. You are the daughter of King Vṛṣabhānu, and You are very dear to Lord Kṛṣṇa.”

*jaya nṛsimha śrī nṛsimha jaya jaya nṛsimha
prahlādeśa jaya padma mukha padma bhṛṅga*

“Glories to Lord Nṛsimha, Śrī Nṛsimha, All Glories to Lord Nṛsimha. The Lord of Prahlāda, like a honeybee, is always engaged in beholding the lotus-like face of the Goddess of Fortune.”

*om śrīm hrīm klīm kṛṣṇāya govindāya gopījana-vallabhāya, parāya
paramapuruṣāya paramātmāne | parakarma mantra yantra tantra auṣadha
astra śāstrāṅi saṁhara saṁhara | mṛtyor mocaya mocaya | om namo
bhagavate mahā sudarśanāya dīptre jvālā parītāya sarvadikṣobhana karāya
hum phaṭ brahmaṇe paramajyotiṣe sahasrāra hum phaṭ ||*

“O Lord Kṛṣṇa, the one who is the controller of all the senses, the one who is the Supreme Soul, the one who is the beloved of the Gopīs, the Paramātmā, protect me from all the evil acts of others, evil mantra, and weapons. O Lord, who holds the Mahā Sudarśana and lights all the directions, I surrender myself before You.”

*śruti-smṛti-purāṇādi-pañcarātra-vidhiṁ vinā
aikāntikī harer bhaktir utpātāyaiva kalpate*

“Devotional service of the Lord that ignores the authorized Vedic literatures like the Upaniṣads, Purāṇas and Nārada Pañcarātra is simply an unnecessary disturbance in society.”

*tad-vāg-visargo janatāgha-viplavo
yasmin prati-ślokaṁ abaddhavaty api
nāmāny anantasya yaśo 'ñkitāni yat
śṛṅvanti gāyanti grṇanti sādavaḥ*

“On the other hand, that literature which is full of descriptions of the transcendental glories of the name, fame, forms, pastimes, etc.,

of the unlimited Supreme Lord is a different creation, full of transcendental words directed toward bringing about a revolution in the impious lives of this world's misdirected civilization. Such transcendental literatures, even though imperfectly composed, are heard, sung and accepted by purified men who are thoroughly honest.”

*vāñchā-kalpa-tarubhyaś ca kṛpā-sinḍhubhya eva ca
patitānām pāvanebhyo vaiṣṇavebhyo namo namaḥ*

“I offer my respectful obeisances unto all the Vaiṣṇava devotees of the Lord. They are just like desire trees who can fulfill the desires of everyone, and they are full of compassion for the fallen conditioned souls.”

*śrī-kṛṣṇa-caitanya prabhu-nityānanda
śrī-advaita gadādhara śrīvāsādi-gaura-bhakta-vṛnda*

“I offer my obeisances to Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, Prabhu Nityānanda, Śrī Advaita, Gadādhara, Śrīvāsa and all others in the line of devotion.”

*hare kṛṣṇa hare kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa kṛṣṇa hare hare
hare rāma hare rāma rāma rāma hare hare*

Purpose

This paper is a critique of Kaunteya (JPS) Prabhu's book *Tough Questions, Difficult Answers* (TQDA), presented in five main sections according to the classic Vedic schema of *viṣaya* (topic), *saṁśaya* (doubt), *pūrvapakṣa* (the opposing view), *siddhānta* (the correct view), and *saṅgati* (application).

By at least February 2023, Kaunteya's book began circulating among ISKCON's members. And soon after, many congregational members and ISKCON India leaders expressed concern about it. In order to address their concerns more fully, the Chairman of the ICC (Indian Continental Committee) requested the IISB (ISKCON India Scholars Board) to review Kaunteya's book and report its conclusions.

As per Kaunteya, a central thesis for his book is, "*that Srila Prabhupada might have absorbed some of the outlooks predominant in his cultural environment, his historical period*" (TQDA 257), with the further implication that Śrīla Prabhupāda's words are sometimes to be considered untrue, in error, or incorrigibly offensive to modern sensibilities. This paper thoroughly rejects Kaunteya's thesis. Without further describing our response in this section, we think it will be most illustrative for readers to keep in mind a few of the key passages from Kaunteya's book that apparently express his vision for ISKCON's future; the logic that he presents in his book is a path that will lead us there.

Your servants from,

The ISKCON India Scholars Board

Key Passages

Absolving Śrīla Prabhupāda of his offenses?

Tough Questions, Difficult Answers (TQDA), page 627:

If you still feel embittered (due to something he [Śrīla Prabhupāda] said about race, gender, sexual orientation or whatever), and still think that what he said was unfair, unnecessary, or mistaken, you should consider just forgiving him. . . . Generally, the natural or "recommended sentiment" would be one of deep gratitude, appreciating the many priceless gifts and blessings he brought to us. But if you are still seriously affected by some of his "controversial statements," I wish you can find some closure,

some resolution or at least some mitigation of your emotional pain; and you can try to just forgive him for causing whatever pain you are experiencing. Even if the sentences that hurt you could be rationally justified, you might still feel wounded. Please, find the strength in your heart to excuse and absolve him for whatever pain his words caused you.

Erasing words from Śrīla Prabhupāda's lotus mouth?

TQDA page 635:

While Srila Prabhupada's historical earthly presence (1896-1977) might be meteorical - the proverbial blink in cosmic time - we accept him, over and above his circumstantial physical embodiment, as an eternal being, a permanent spiritual person possessing a perpetual *sat-cit-ananda* identity in the divine realm of Goloka Vrindavana, happily and everlastingly living with Krishna and His associates. There he won't appear as the Bengali holy man we are accustomed to. In that dimension beyond material time and space, his form, his voice, and his role shall be different; but he will be the same self, and those who dedicated their lives to his service and mission will live perpetually with him; his controversial statements about race, sex and sexual orientation finally erased from memory and long forgotten.

An ISKCON where Śrīla Prabhupāda is in the center in name only?

On page 617, Kaunteya compares and contrasts ISKCON with modern-day Protestant Christian institutions descended from Martin Luther (1483 – 1546):

Although all branches and sub-branches descending from the Reformation possess an historical connection with Martin Luther, in most cases it's a remote relationship. Therefore, although Luther could be taken as their ancestral originator, his disreputable assertions do not really affect contemporary Protestant institutions. In ISKCON, the status of the Founder-Acarya's statements is drastically different. Srila Prabhupada's role and presence is immensely more current and influential in ISKCON than Martin Luther's position is in today's Protestantism. Protestants don't offer daily worship to their founder; but we do. Protestants don't see their founder as their "preeminent siksa-guru"; but we do. Protestants don't consider their founder a "saktyavesa-avatara"; but we do. Protestants don't primarily study their founder's books, lectures, and letters; but we do. When Protestants argue a point, they don't refer primarily to the words of their founder; but we do. Protestants don't place a murti of their founder in all their churches or his picture on all their altars; but we do. I could go on, but you get the idea: Srila Prabhupada "controversial statements" can affect ISKCON much more than Luther's words can hurt his Protestant descendants. Of course, it must be said that Srila Prabhupada never said something comparable to calling the Jews 'the devil's people' or urging to set their synagogues on fire, or likening girls to weeds. Nonetheless, even affirmations that are very mild in comparison to what Luther said can severely agitate the modern minds. . . . Moving forward requires taking an impassionate, hard look at Srila Prabhupada's contentious statements for what they are and for how they are perceived, and then decide what to do with them. Do we truly agree with them and wish to defend them? Or do we disagree with them and therefore we dissociate from them?

Executive Summary

The Doubt:

- 1) Kaunteya Prabhu (JPS) says in his book *Tough Questions, Difficult Answers* (TQDA) that a guru’s authority is limited to whatever he says that can be backed by references from *śāstra*: “When gurus talk of things not specifically mentioned in the *śāstras* we may take those views as personal assessments, honest (but potentially mistaken) attempts at clarifying facts and events. Unless backed up by *śāstric* references, we cannot grant to those opinions the same authority of scriptural truths. Non-scriptural views can be taken as subjective.” (TQDA 45)
 - a) The reason Kaunteya holds this view is that it appears to him that some of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s views are based on non-scriptural sources. Kaunteya says, “One of the central theses of this book is that Srila Prabhupada might have absorbed some of the outlooks predominant in his cultural environment, his historical period.” (TQDA 257)
- 2) But contrary to Kaunteya’s opinion, the majority of ISKCON’s members believe that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words are perfect even when there is no known or explicit reference from *śāstra* to back them up. In other words, being a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa, Śrīla Prabhupāda cannot have any “non-scriptural views,” or views that are incompatible with *śāstra* or not sanctioned by it. That is what most of ISKCON’s members presently believe.

The Response:

- 3) The intuition that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words are perfect, without defect, even when not explicitly backed by *śāstra* is definitely the correct understanding. When a devotee is perfect in Kṛṣṇa consciousness, like Śrīla Prabhupāda, he not only perfectly sees Kṛṣṇa, but also perfectly sees Kṛṣṇa’s material energies as well. A pure devotee has none of the four defects of conditioned souls.
 - a) Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī says: *bhrama, pramāda, vipralipsā, karaṇāpāṭava, ārṣa-vijñā-vākye nāhi doṣa ei saba*, “Mistakes, illusions, cheating and defective perception do not occur in the sayings of the authoritative sages.”¹
- 4) A major fault in Kaunteya’s logic is that he mistakes the *parokṣa-jñāna* (knowledge from another person’s sense perception and inference) that Śrīla

¹ Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādī-līlā 2.86.

Prabhupāda sometimes quoted to also be the source of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s own understanding, at least in part. But Śrīla Prabhupāda’s own understanding is based only on *śāstra*; he quoted non-*śāstric* sources only to convince others who do not accept the authority of *śāstra*. Kaunteya’s misunderstanding is a case of mistaking correlation for causation.

- a) Correlation is not causation: Scorpions sometimes lay their eggs in rice, and when the eggs hatch, it appears that rice was the cause of the scorpions. In the same way, just because Śrīla Prabhupāda employed evidence whose source is considered defective (former university professors, folk-wisdom, etc.), it doesn’t mean that such evidence conditioned Śrīla Prabhupāda’s view on any topic..
 - b) Śrīla Prabhupāda: *“Our authority is sastra. We give analogy for the general mass of people who have no faith in sastra. Analogy is not proof; sastra is proof. Foolish people cannot understand or accept, so we use analogy. The conclusion is not drawn from the analogy but from the sastra. We don't use a combination of logic and authority, we use authority. Logic we use to convince someone who doesn't accept the authority. The basic principle is authority.”*²
- 5) Another fault in Kaunteya’s logic is it presumes *śāstra* is the exclusive source for obtaining Vedic knowledge, when in fact it is not. There are secondary, tertiary, and quaternary sources that are all based on *śāstra* and considered to be as good as *śāstra* when *śāstra* itself is not available. They are respectively known as *smṛti* (that which is remembered from the Vedas), *sadācāra* (exemplary behavior), and *ātma-tuṣṭi* (self-satisfaction or preference of greatly elevated souls or *sādhus*). For knowledge regarding many topics, whether spiritual or material, an *ācārya*’s words, exemplary behavior, or personal preferences may be the only sources available.³
- a) As regards to *smṛti*, Śrīla Prabhupāda defines it as follows: *“The smṛti, the scriptures following the principles of Vedic knowledge, are considered the evidence of Vedic principles. There are twenty different types of scripture for following religious principles, and among them the scriptures of Manu and Yājñavalkya are considered to be all-pervading authorities.”*⁴ Although here Śrīla Prabhupāda describes the word *smṛti* narrowly in

² Letter to Satsvarūpa dated 21 October 1975. See the section “Reviewing the theory that pure devotees sometimes make mistakes” for the extended quote and further discussion.

³ Further evidence and discussion are given in the sections “The authority of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements in his own books” and “The authority of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements when not backed by *śāstra*.”

⁴ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 7.11.7 purport.

referring to the *dharma-sāstras*, he also uses it broadly to apply to more recent literature like *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*: “Just like this *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*: this is a book written by Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, a great devotee of Lord Caitanya. It is called *smṛti*. Why? Everything written here is corroborating the Vedic literature.”⁵ Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, which also give evidence of Vedic principles, are therefore classified as *smṛti*.

- b) *Aprasiddha-sāstra-vākyas* (words from *sāstras* or *sāstras* themselves that are no longer available) are found in the writings of all the respected *ācāryas* of the Vedic tradition, including Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja and Madhva.
- 6) Regarding Kaunteya’s above claim that some of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s views are mistaken on topics “not specifically mentioned in the *sāstras*,” this paper addresses these two questions:⁶
- a) What is the authority of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words in his own books?, and
b) What is the authority of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words generally?

Some Further Findings from the Review:

- 7) Key statements in Kaunteya’s book allege that Śrīla Prabhupāda himself is subject to one or more of the four defects of a conditioned soul.
- 8) If one believes that Śrīla Prabhupāda can be affected by *bhrama*, *pramāda*, *etc.*, then one necessarily must accept that Śrīla Prabhupāda is a conditioned soul and not a pure devotee.
- 9) As per *sāstra*, none of the four defects of a conditioned soul are present in a pure devotee.
- 10) A pure devotee’s words are always true, and Śrīla Prabhupāda is a pure devotee.
- 11) Thus, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words in his own books are not to be changed for reasons other than correcting persistent typographical or transcription errors.
- a) Otherwise, why stop only at Śrīla Prabhupāda? Should we also change the original Bengali in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* or the original Sanskrit in Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura’s commentaries to make them more agreeable to modern tastes as well?
- 12) The belief that one can “fact check” Śrīla Prabhupāda to discern which of his statements are supported by *sāstra* and which are not assumes that one’s knowledge of *sāstra* is equal to or better than Śrīla Prabhupāda’s.

⁵ Lecture, CC Madhya 22.5, 7 Jan. 1967, New York.

⁶ See the “Introduction” and “Viṣaya” sections of the paper for further discussion.

Maintaining this belief will necessarily lead to *adhikāra-ullaṅghana* (exceeding one's own authority) and *maryādā-vyatikrama* (impertinently surpassing a superior personality), if not also the offenses of *guruṣu nara-matiḥ* (viewing the spiritual master as an ordinary man) and *vaiṣṇave jāti-buddhiḥ* (calculating a Vaiṣṇava in terms of mundane birth, culture, etc.).

- 13) Kaunteya makes reader reactions the sole basis for changing some of Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements.
 - a) Making reader reactions the sole basis of any such decision is a form of consequentialist reasoning instead of theological fidelity. In the paper, this is called the pragmatic argument.
 - b) The truth of any such statement from Śrīla Prabhupāda is irrelevant to any decision taken as to whether it should be changed or removed.
 - c) Statements from Śrīla Prabhupāda that Kaunteya employs the pragmatic argument against also tend to be supported by *śāstra*.
 - d) Confirmation bias: Kaunteya sometimes misrepresents some of Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements as not being grounded in *śāstra*.
- 14) A pure devotee is never to be subjected to criticism, therefore:
 - a) No ISKCON member should criticize Śrīla Prabhupāda's statements, publicly or privately.
 - b) Likewise, no ISKCON member should distance himself from them.
 - c) No ISKCON member should agree with or support others' criticism of Śrīla Prabhupāda.
- 15) In facing doubts and criticisms against Śrīla Prabhupāda, one should:
 - a) Make a good-faith attempt to correct others' misunderstandings, or
 - b) If they remain obstinate, one should challenge them as far as possible, or go away.
- 16) It is the tradition among *ācāryas* to write commentaries to further explain what they say, rather than trying to modify their *ācāryas'* own words.
 - a) So, following in the footsteps of the *ācāryas*, those who feel that Śrīla Prabhupāda's works continue to be misunderstood should write their own commentaries on Śrīla Prabhupāda's books instead of trying to modify them.
 - b) A suggested purport to one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's controversial statements on homosexuality is given at the end of this paper and offered as a model and alternative to Kaunteya's policy recommendations. For the model and further discussion, see the section "An authentic exegesis of one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's remarks contradicted by modern science."

Introduction

Although the book *Tough Questions, Difficult Answers* by Kaunteya Prabhu (JPS) covers many topics, this paper focuses on Kaunteya’s assertion that, regarding issues Vedic *śāstras* do not explicitly mention, the guru’s words should not be taken as infallible. He says they should instead be considered subjective opinions whose truth or falsity is best determined empirically by subject-matter experts.

Kaunteya says,

Srila Prabhupada saying that animals "do not support homosex" appears to corroborate the principle that his words should be taken as completely authoritative when based on sastra, but not necessarily in areas not directly illuminated by scriptural revelation. Srila Prabhupada views on non-sastric topics (or in fields for which he didn't not possess a specialized expertise) could presumably have been affected by his cultural background and by the data, possibly inaccurate or incomplete, available to him.⁷

But Kaunteya’s perspective on Śrīlā Prabhupāda’s views for which he knows of no supporting reference in *śāstra* is an old idea that atheists have expressed many times in opposition to Vedic literature.

For example, Kaunteya’s objection to Śrīlā Prabhupāda’s statement that animals “do not support homosex” is similar both in form and content to this objection raised by Lord Macauley to Vedic literature generally:

The question now before us is simply whether, when it is in our power to teach this language [English], we shall teach languages in which, by universal confession, there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own, whether, when we can teach European science, we shall teach systems which, by universal confession, wherever they differ from those of Europe differ for the worse, and whether, when we can patronize sound philosophy and true history, we shall countenance, at the public expense, medical doctrines which would disgrace an English farrier, astronomy which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school, history abounding with kings thirty feet high and reigns thirty thousand years long, and geography made of seas of treacle and seas of butter.⁸

Kaunteya seems to find Śrīlā Prabhupāda’s views on Hitler, women, homosexuals, etc., to be as embarrassing as Macauley found thirty-foot-high kings with reigns thirty-thousand years long, and seas of sugarcane juice and butter. Both cases object to a spiritual authority’s stated views that clash with

⁷ TQDA 294.

⁸ Bureau of Education, India. “Minute by the Hon’ble T. B. Macaulay, dated the 2nd February 1835.” *Selections from Educational Records, Part I 1781 - 1839*. (Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, 1920) page 109. Accessed on 25 April 2023: http://ignca.gov.in/Asi_data/39650.pdf#page=130

modern science. And in both cases, the spiritual authority is supposed to be infallible—Vedic literature, and a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa. Of course, Lord Macauley did not consider Vedic literature to be infallible; for him, irrefutable proof of its fallibility was its difference with European science. Likewise, Kaunteya deems as fallible Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements that are neither supported by *śāstra* nor by modern science.

But there is a fundamental problem with Kaunteya’s idea: how would you know when any statement expressed by a pure devotee is not based on *śāstra*, especially when your own knowledge of *śāstra* is in any way lacking? Moreover, even if one’s knowledge of *śāstra* were equivalent to or greater than Śrīla Prabhupāda’s, not all knowledge originating in *śāstra* may be found in the *śāstra* which is extant at some particular time in history. Throughout time, various *śāstras* are manifest and unmanifest, and the knowledge in them is sometimes accessible only through great sages and devotees. It is also sometimes called *aitīhyam* (traditional wisdom).⁹

The *śāstras* themselves also deal with the circumstance where questions arise on topics that neither the *śrutis* nor *smṛtis* directly address. For example, can a *sannyāsī* perform the marriage ceremony when there are no other *brāhmaṇas* available to perform the rites?¹⁰ There are no *śāstras* that specifically say what should be done in such an instance. But the *śāstras* do explain how such questions are to be disposed of—a fact any sincere seeker has to accommodate. A summary exposition of the Vedic system of *pramāṇas* for acquiring knowledge of dharma is therefore provided as a topic in this paper.¹¹

An even more fundamental problem is Kaunteya’s two-tier conception of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purity—i.e., Kaunteya sees some part of Prabhupāda being fallible and liable to error, and some other part, infallible—but that is incompatible with *śāstric* definitions that ascribe infallibility to the words and cognitions of a pure devotee. On one hand, Kaunteya seems to consider God’s omniscience to be a necessary condition for being infallible. Kaunteya says, “So, ‘ācārya is not God, omniscient’; he may therefore receive some imprecise information but not

⁹ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.19.17: *śrutiḥ pratyakṣam aitīhyam anumānaṁ catuṣṭayam, pramāṇeṣv anavasthānād vikalpāt sa virajyate*, “From the four types of evidence—Vedic knowledge, direct experience, traditional wisdom and logical induction—one can understand the temporary, insubstantial situation of the material world and thus become detached from the duality of this world.”

¹⁰ See *Bhagavad-gītā As It Is*, 18.5 purport.

¹¹ See sections “The authority of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements in his own books” and “The authority of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements when not backed by *śāstra*.”

recognize it as mistaken.”¹² But if that is true, then, on the other hand, Kaunteya’s idea that a pure devotee can be mistaken contradicts statements in *śāstra* that say that a pure devotee is free from the four defects of a conditioned soul.

For example, in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādi-līlā 2.86*, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī says:

bhrama, pramāda, vipralipsā, karaṇāpāṭava
ārṣa-vijñā-vākye nāhi doṣa ei saba

“Mistakes, illusions, cheating and defective perception do not occur
in the sayings of the authoritative sages.”

These terms have technical definitions, which are given at length in this paper. *Bhrama* means to see an object as being some other object, like considering a man to be a pillar. Kaunteya is claiming that a pure devotee can have this kind of faulty cognition. But the *śāstra* says that this is never found in a pure devotee. As far as *śāstra* is concerned, despite a pure devotee not being omniscient, whatever cognitions he has are free from mistakes. Even a mere drop of pure water is still pure. This paper also therefore provides an exposition on the purity and cognitions of a pure devotee.¹³

There is also a brief section on pragmatic arguments made to justify editing, deleting or publicly distancing one’s self or the ISKCON institution from some of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements. A major characteristic of all these arguments is that they do not rely on any kind of truth test Kaunteya has already proposed. Truth is not the criteria for judging their value. Instead, Kaunteya’s pragmatic arguments are concerned with the consequences he thinks are likely to arise from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements as they are. Although a more in-depth investigation of the consequentialist philosophical foundations of these arguments may shed some further light on Kaunteya’s epistemology, such an investigation is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, some discussion is included because of Kaunteya’s heavy reliance on consequentialist reasoning.

The last section of the book (Saṅgati) discusses the practical outcomes, application of the insights derived from the previous sections. In it, the insights

¹² TQDA 42.

¹³ See sections “A pure devotee is free from the four defects of conditioned souls,” “Reviewing the theory that pure devotees sometimes make mistakes,” and “A ‘theology of embodiment’”.

are translated into practical action. Theologically, the status of a pure devotee’s words and body being free from defect necessarily means that no attempt should be made to distance one’s self or the ISKCON institution from any of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements; at least this has always been the orthopraxis recognized and exemplified by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *ācāryas* from the very beginning. The *maryādā* (etiquette) established by *ācāryas* forbids criticism of the *ācārya*, whether directly or indirectly. Alternative, practical recommendations are also given on how to effectively preach against criticisms of Śrīla Prabhupāda, when encountered.¹⁴

Before proceeding with the rest of this paper, we would like to point out that the challenge to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s authority immanent in Kaunteya’s book is not limited to his book. Many of the ideas he has presented have been extant in ISKCON for decades now, and their influence has spread without significant challenge. It is our sincere hope that this presentation will be found useful by individuals and leaders of ISKCON at all levels in maintaining fidelity to and faith in ISKCON’s Founder-Ācārya, His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedānta Swami Prabhupāda.¹⁵

Om Tat Sat

Your servants from the ISKCON India Scholars Board

¹⁴ See the “Saṅgati” section of this paper for discussion on practical alternatives to dealing with criticism of Śrīla Prabhupāda.

¹⁵ We also recommend reading Hari Vilāsa (ACBSP) Prabhu’s recent book *Defending Prabhupada’s Words* (Tulsi Books: Mumbai, 2023). His book nicely defends Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words with his own words and *śāstra*, and it also addresses some of the same problems this paper deals with.

Viṣaya (the topic to be discussed)

The recent book titled *Tough Questions, Difficult Answers* (TQDA) by Kaunteya Prabhu (JPS) raises several doubts about our fundamental beliefs with respect to Śrīla Prabhupāda. Up to the present, these fundamental beliefs have always been taken for granted by ISKCON’s members, for Śrīla Prabhupāda personally instilled such faith into his disciples’ hearts. One of these universally shared beliefs is about the authority of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words, which devotees take to be perfect, without any defect, and as good as *śāstra* itself. But Kaunteya proposes that unless a guru’s words are backed by *śāstric* references, “we cannot grant to those opinions the same authority of scriptural truths”:

Śrīla Prabhupāda explains that there are three parameters for judging the veracity and reliability of an assertion: "One should accept a thing as genuine by studying the words of saintly people, the spiritual master and the *śāstra*. The actual center is the *śāstra*, the revealed scripture." (Cc, Madhya-lila, 20.352, purport) When gurus talk of things not specifically mentioned in the *śāstras* we may take those views as personal assessments, honest (but potentially mistaken) attempts at clarifying facts and events. Unless backed up by *śāstric* references, we cannot grant to those opinions the same authority of scriptural truths. Non-scriptural views can be taken as subjective.¹⁶

Since the beginning of ISKCON, devotees accept that even the words of Śrīla Prabhupāda with no apparent backing from the *śāstras* are nonetheless as good as *śāstra*. But as the above statement shows, Kaunteya’s book opposes this.

Although other papers on other aspects of his book are anticipated, the fundamental questions to be addressed here are:

- 1) What is the authority of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words in his own books?, and
- 2) What is the authority of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words generally?

The answers to these questions will form the basis of this paper’s critique of Kaunteya’s book.

The outline of this paper’s topics follows the traditional order of *viṣaya* (topic), *saṁśaya* (doubt), *pūrvapakṣa* (the opposing view), *siddhānta* (the correct view), and *saṅgati* (application).

¹⁶ Kaunteya (JPS), *Tough Questions, Tough Answers* (TQDA), page 44

Samśaya (doubt)

In a section titled “Perfect Doesn’t Mean Infallible,” *Tough Questions, Difficult Answers* rejects the idea that, as a pure devotee, Śrīla Prabhupāda was never unaffected by his own physical and psychological circumstances.

Kaunteya writes,

In the years he walked the Earth - 1896- 1977 - he felt the heat of the summer, the cold of winter, the afflictions of illness and the discomforts of old age. Someone might imagine and theorize that, no, he wasn't touched by physical and psychological circumstances, by what happened to his body and mind; but Srila Prabhupada never said that.¹⁷

And to substantiate this claim, he gives several examples of Śrīla Prabhupāda describing his own physical troubles and mental distress.

He often mentioned about his physical troubles, in letters such as this one: "I was sick for four or five days; now I am a little better but the disease is prolonging in a different way. I cannot sleep at night more than 2 hours and during the day sometimes I am feeling some dizziness." (Letter to Kirtanananda, 22 Aug 1971) or in expressions like this: "I was very sick after heart stroke . . . The heart was so weak." (Conversation, Los Angeles, 8 June 1976) Or this: "I was suffering so much from dental pain." (Morning Walk, Bombay, 23 Dec 1975)¹⁸

As far as mental distress, he wrote, for example: "Regarding the closing of the temples . . . It is disastrous . . . I am very disappointed that you have done this." (Letter Hansadutta, 29 Sept 1974) Or he said: "If somebody dozes [during the lecture], it gives me too much pain . . . It disturbs me, too much disturbs me." (Lecture on SB 6.3.18-19, Gorakhpur, 12 Feb 1971) Or: "You have written that you will soon be leaving Hamburg and this news 36 has caused me some distress." (Letter to Sivananda, 17 Dec 1968)¹⁹

So, Kaunteya’s discussion raises this doubt: If a pure devotee does not experience physical or mental distress, then why does Śrīla Prabhupāda mention these at all? Do his own statements about himself not demonstrate that some part of a pure devotee still has an embodied existence, just like ordinary people? And if the answer to this is “yes,” as Kaunteya suggests, then why not also accept that the embodied part of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s existence is also susceptible to the four defects of a conditioned soul?

¹⁷ TQDA 34.

¹⁸ TQDA 35.

¹⁹ TQDA 35.

Kaunteya anticipates this objection. He says that despite the soul being liberated and his body being spiritualized, a body is still a body, and as such it is still limited:

A material body is synonymous with limitation; but this doesn't necessarily have to significantly curtail or impact the spiritual stature or effectiveness of great souls. . . . a devotee’s body is not connected with material activities, and as such, a devotee is always liberated (*brahma-bhūyāya kalpate*), as confirmed in *Bhagavad-gītā* (14.26). At the same time, although spiritual or spiritualized, the body of the pure devotee doesn't become omnipresent, omniscient, or omnipotent; it still partakes of the limitations of time and space; of partial perception; of being *atma* and not Paramatma.²⁰

Otherwise, how else can apparent mistakes seen in the body be accounted for?

To explain this, Kaunteya gives many examples of Śrīla Prabhupāda saying something that contradicts scientific or historical consensus on several different topics.

For example, Śrīla Prabhupāda says that among animals there is no homosexuality, but Kaunteya finds contradictory scientific consensus:

Śrīla Prabhupada said: "The world is degrading to the lowest status, even less than animal. The animal also do not support homosex. They have never sex life between male to male." (Conversation with the GBC, Los Angeles, 25 May 1972) It turns out that animals do engage in homosexual behavior: "Various forms of this are found in every major geographic region and every major animal group . . . documented in over 450 species of animals."²¹

Kaunteya then quotes Wikipedia to show that the results of scientific research on homosexuality have been instrumental in striking down traditional sodomy laws.²²

[From Wikipedia] For instance, homosexuality in animals was cited by the American Psychiatric Association and other groups in their amici curiae brief to the United States Supreme Court in *Lawrence v. Texas*, which ultimately struck down the sodomy laws of 14 states.²³

²⁰ TQDA 37.

²¹ TQDA 292.

²² Kaunteya frequently quotes Wikipedia throughout his book. For such a serious subject that he attempts to deal with, however, the sources should be as free from the taint of bias as reasonably possible, and Wikipedia is notorious for its biases. In a May 14, 2020, blog post, Wikipedia cofounder Larry Sanger criticized Wikipedia as heavily biased. He says, "their notion of what is credible does, in fact, bias them against conservatism, traditional religiosity, and minority perspectives on science and medicine—to say nothing of many other topics on which Wikipedia has biases." Accessed on 29 Apr 2023: <https://larrysanger.org/2020/05/wikipedia-is-badly-biased/>

Bias aside, Wikipedia also lacks scholarly rigor.

²³ "Homosexual behavior in animals," *Wikipedia*, 28 Apr 2023, qtd in TQDA 294.

And Kaunteya’s next statement raises a doubt as to whether Śrīla Prabhupāda also might have changed his mind about homosexuality if such information had also been available to him. “We will never know if information about homosexual behavior among animals would have influenced Srila Prabhupada's attitude about homosexuality among humans.”²⁴ Implicit in his statement is a rejection of the notion that a pure devotee is never influenced by material sources of knowledge. Otherwise, why not say definitively that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s opinion would never have been influenced by non-śāstric, flawed sources of knowledge?²⁵

But to Kaunteya, the greater significance of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s opinion on homosexuality being contradicted by scientific consensus is that he feels it further supports his theory that only when the guru speaks on topics for which there is perceptible, direct support from *śāstra* should the guru’s words be accepted as infallible, not otherwise:

Srila Prabhupada saying that animals "do not support homosex" appears to corroborate the principle that his words should be taken as completely authoritative when based on sastra, but not necessarily in areas not directly illuminated by scriptural revelation.²⁶

In this way, Kaunteya raises serious doubts about Śrīla Prabhupāda’s broad authority on topics without explicit references from *śāstra*.

Consequently, Kaunteya says that on topics *śāstra* does not cover, whatever Śrīla Prabhupāda says should not have the same authority as scriptural truths.

Our idea of Śrīla Prabhupāda's perfection shouldn't turn mythological. He was perfect because he was presenting, with pure motivation, the perfect words of the supremely perfect person, Śrī Kṛṣṇa; and because he was following those perfect teachings in his life. "I am an imperfect person. I cannot give you any knowledge. I cannot manufacture any knowledge. If I do that, then I shall deceive you. I can simply present before you the original knowledge. I can explain it in an understandable way, but not deviating from the original text." (Lecture on Bg 2.12, New York, 9 March 1966) So, when Śrīla Prabhupāda is presenting the "original text" we should take his words as perfect; when he is retelling something he heard from, say, his Christian professors at the Scottish Church College, we need to be cautious, and seek verification.²⁷

²⁴ TQDA 294.

²⁵ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 3.2.10: “Under no circumstances can the words of persons bewildered by the illusory energy of the Lord deviate the intelligence of those who are completely surrendered souls.”

²⁶ TQDA 294.

²⁷ TQDA 45.

The statement “something he heard from, say, his Christian professors at the Scottish Church College” is a reference to statements such as Śrīla Prabhupāda’s oft-repeated remark (in lectures and conversations) that men have a 64-ounce brain, whereas women have a 34-ounce brain.

Prabhupāda: "This form of the Personality of Godhead is worshiped by the intelligent class of men," *su-medhasaḥ*. *Su* means very good, and *medhasaḥ* means brain, brain substance. One who has got very good brain substance, they will understand this *saṅkīrtana* movement nicely. Just like in our India, especially in Bengal, sometimes they say a dull-brained man, "Oh, you have got cow dung within your brain. You have no brain substance." Actually a man becomes intelligent by the greater amount of brain substance. It is a psychological fact. It is called cerebrum... Doctor knows. What is called?

Doctor: Cerebrum. Cerebrum cortex.

Prabhupāda: Yes. So psychology... I was student of psychology in my college life. Dr. Urquhart said, I remember still, that the brain substance of man has been found up to 64 ounce, while brain substance of woman has been found, highest, 34 ounce. Therefore woman class [laughs] is not so intelligent as man. There is no question of competition. It is actual, scientific fact.²⁸

The fact that Śrīla Prabhupāda says this not one but many times apparently causes Kaunteya to believe that this has influenced Śrīla Prabhupāda’s outlook on women generally, even when self-evidently speaking as a spiritual authority.

But if any part of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, for example, is not “divinely inspired,” or if it is faulty on account of Śrīla Prabhupāda himself, then none of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books would have any spiritual merit. This is confirmed explicitly in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books—i.e., *śāstra*:

Kṛṣṇa has maintained spiritual individuality all along; if He is accepted as an ordinary conditioned soul in individual consciousness, then His *Bhagavad-gītā* has no value as authoritative scripture. A common man with all the four defects of human frailty is unable to teach that which is worth hearing.²⁹

So, if Śrīla Prabhupāda himself is subject to these four defects, then why should any of his books be considered authoritative?

Moreover, if any of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s followers possess these four defects, then how can they possibly selectively accept, edit, “verify,” or simply reject some of their guru’s instructions? To say the least, that attempt would seem to be foolhardy and arrogant.

²⁸ Lecture, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.2.6, 3 Aug. 1968, Montreal.

²⁹ *Bhagavad-gītā* 2.12 purport.

Pūrvapakṣa (the position of the opposing side)

Kaunteya Prabhu says,

The issue is that the brain comparison statement wasn't just casually mentioned once or twice and then overlooked. No, it was repeated in multiple places and circumstances, from informal exchanges to TV interviews, from lectures in ISKCON temples to a speech at a university. And his disciples, apparently, didn't provide him with more reliable information. This wrong idea might have played a part in shaping Śrīla Prabhupāda's outlook on gender.³⁰

Kaunteya clearly believes that the influence of “wrong ideas” on Śrīla Prabhupāda’s own beliefs extends even to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books—the very books Śrīla Prabhupāda said would be “the lawbooks for the next ten-thousand years.”

For ISKCON devotees [it] is natural to feel flustered and unsettled hearing such things. For decades we have been worshipping these books as the highest sacred expression of spiritual knowledge. We have been indoctrinated to consider them the apex of transcendent, divinely inspired literature. It can be disconcerting and discombobulating to realize that they contain passages that can repel and infuriate readers. We should ask ourselves: are those sentences truly essential to the philosophy, to the overall message of the Gita or the Bhāgavatam? Is it necessary to compare women to children or saying that women are not trustworthy? If such sentences can generate seriously counterproductive consequences, should they be kept in the "law books for the next ten-thousand years"?³¹

Are Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books truly “the highest expression of spiritual knowledge,” “the apex of transcendent, divinely inspired literature”? If they are, then everything that Śrīla Prabhupāda said in them must also be free from defect and representative of Kṛṣṇa’s point of view. But questioning whether some of his statements in them “are truly essential to the philosophy, to the overall message of the Gita or the Bhagavatam,” Kaunteya raises doubts as to whether Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books are without defect and trustworthy at all.

Moreover, Kaunteya’s stated doubts question the very fitness of Śrīla Prabhupāda to be a spiritual guide. Virtually no one in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s physical presence ever thought that devotees had been “indoctrinated” to believe his books were transcendental. And where has Śrīla Prabhupāda ever taught us to “ask ourselves which of his sentences” in his own books or outside of them were “truly essential to the philosophy”? Rather, our gurus uniformly

³⁰ TQDA 399.

³¹ TQDA 53.

teach: *guru-mukha-padma-vākya cittete kariyā aikya*, “Make the teaching emanating from the lotus mouth of your spiritual master one with your heart,” and *ār nā karihā mane āsā*, “do not desire anything else.” If anything, not only Śrīla Prabhupāda but his own predecessor-*ācāryas* like Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura have recommended a fully opposite policy. Kaunteya Prabhu’s doubts actually extend to the entire *paramparā*, not merely to Śrīla Prabhupāda. Hence, it is only fair to ask whose purpose Kaunteya actually serves by encouraging such doubts.

In other places he raises the same kinds of doubts. Kaunteya cites verbatim an excerpt from a purport in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* commentary (1.11.36) published before coming to America. Then he criticizes the excerpt and suggests that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s view of Africans was a result of his own lack of personal experience with Africans, and due to unfair and racist stereotypes common in his time.

A possible inference or supposition: in the early 1960's, before extensive experience with Blacks (Srila Prabhupada had never been outside of India), based on whatever limited exposure to Blacks he might have had (photos in books? Characterizations in movies? Comments by his Scottish professors?).³²

However, Kaunteya also notes that, on the advice of Satsvarūpa Mahārāja, who said he told Śrīla Prabhupāda that “people in modern America would never accept these statements,”³³ Śrīla Prabhupāda agreed to remove them, and they were removed. But Kaunteya then observes that along with other statements, this statement has nevertheless been discovered by people outside of ISKCON and quoted in articles with titles like, “Racism and Caste Bigotry in the Hare Kṛṣṇa Movement,” or “Prabhupāda Racism, Sexism, Homophobia, and Violent Theocracy.”

On dealing with such statements, Kaunteya finally says,

We can choose to stick our heads in the sand, pretending the problem doesn't exist, or we can deal with the issue, which might involve recognizing that, on a cultural, psychological, acquired level - external to the soul and pertaining to his embodied circumstances - Śrīla Prabhupāda did seem to display a degree of racial bias.³⁴

Kaunteya thus appears to agree with Prabhupāda’s critics. Although he goes to considerable length to defend Śrīla Prabhupāda from the accusation of being a

³² TQDA 84.

³³ TQDA 87.

³⁴ TQDA 87.

racist, he never says that none of his statements were racist. He only defends “some” of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements, not all.

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements on homosexuality are also similarly cast as doubtful.

Some aspects of Śrīla Prabhupāda's ideas and attitudes might be more difficult to reconcile with *śāstric* guidelines or empirical observations. They appear the result of having received inaccurate information on certain specific themes, such as the relation between homosexuality and impotence. . . ³⁵

Here, Kaunteya’s use of “they appear” avoids directly asserting that Śrīla Prabhupāda received “inaccurate information.” Instead of being more direct, he presents his own certainty in the form of a doubt. And Kaunteya does not even consider that Prabhupāda’s views might be explicit in *śāstras* Kaunteya doesn’t know anything about.

Half-hen defence of Śrīla Prabhupāda

In the same way, Kaunteya raises further doubt regarding some of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements about women. For example, Kaunteya first quotes:

“Natural position is that the wife is under or subordinate to the husband. At least that is the Vedic conception . . . Even the queens of Kṛṣṇa . . . they are not ordinary woman; very exalted . . . every queen possessed a big, palatial building, and all the palaces were made of first-class marble . . . very, very opulent. But still, they were placing themselves in the position of maidservant. They were also king's daughter, not ordinary being. So that is the Vedic conception . . . according to the Vedic system, there is no equal right of the man and woman. The woman is always subordinate.”³⁶

Then he says “some” (never all) of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements—though they appear to be sexist—are not actually sexist but merely misunderstood or misrepresented:

For many contemporary people, this quote would represent the undisputable and irrefutable proof that Srila Prabhupada was, indeed, an inveterate and incurable sexist. For many the chapter could probably just finish here: "Where is the need to say more? The question in the title of this section - Sexism in Srila Prabhupada's Teaching? - can be conclusively answered in the affirmative. Yes, there is plenty of sexism in his teachings. Case closed." For the sake of saving time, I might be tempted to go along with that conclusion: yes, by contemporary standards and definitions, some of Srila Prabhupada's views certainly qualify as sexist. Yes, some of his statements, especially if taken out of context or according to particularly literal

³⁵ TQDA 284.

³⁶ Lecture on SB 3.26.8, Bombay, 20 Dec 1974, qtd. In TQDA 356.

dictionary definitions, are not only sexist [sic] but inaccurate and objectionable in other ways.³⁷

In response to this, Kaunteya then lays out a “half-hen” defence of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s so-called sexist statements, in which he disputes some of the charges of sexism but agrees with others:

The rest of this section, though, will be dedicated to demonstrate: 1. aspects of his so-called sexism might be fully justified and ultimately beneficial for human society; 2. some of his so-called sexist remarks had been misrepresented or aggravated by taking them in isolation from a broader understanding; 3. there are many instances in which he modified, qualified and mollified his so-called sexist statements; his message should therefore be considered as a whole, not in a fragmented form; 4. Srila Prabhupada was speaking of women - and of human beings in general - on different anthropological levels, and some assertions apply to one level but not to another; 5. his style, as we have seen, was at times impetuous; he often resorted to colloquial generalizations and even hyperboles; taking those expressions literally would be intellectually disingenuous; 6. some of what he said was the result of having received inaccurate information.³⁸

For the most part, each of the first five defences given by Kaunteya attributes the perception of sexism in Śrīla Prabhupāda to errors on the part of the critic. There is either some mistake in his perception, or the critic has decided to deliberately misrepresent Śrīla Prabhupāda. The sixth defence, however, is presented as if it were a defence, but is not a defence at all—it attributes faults to Śrīla Prabhupāda himself. Hence, Kaunteya’s defence of Śrīla Prabhupāda is termed as a half-hen defence, because while it seeks to exonerate him from most of the charges against him, it also validates others.

According to *ardha-kukkuṭī-nyāya* (logic of the half-hen), by rejecting a part, the whole is rejected. According to the same logic, by rejecting some of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements as sexist, the fundamental claims of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s critics are validated. So, if Kaunteya’s half-hen defence is not a defence at all, then what is it intended for?

Its apparent purpose has been to give the book the appearance of being an apologetic work, a defence of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s controversial statements, when its actual purpose is something quite different. Here is why one can conclude this:

³⁷ TQDA 357.

³⁸ TQDA 357.

There are two ways of persuading people: one is by logic and the other by rhetoric. Both are often used together, but their means nonetheless differ. Rhetoric is distinguished from logic in that it seeks to persuade people in non-rational ways, which may include appeals to emotions, emphasizing certain points or words, deemphasizing others, purposefully resorting to vague or unclear language, using poetic methods like alliteration (repetition of certain sounds in parts of words) to evoke a brighter mood in order to make an otherwise dreadful idea sound palatable, and so forth. Kaunteya’s book employs all these methods and others, in abundance, all throughout.³⁹ So, Kaunteya’s half-hen defence of Śrīla Prabhupāda, though logically useless, is quite useful as a strategy of persuasion. By appearing to be a defence of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s controversial statements, its usefulness lies in distracting the reader from the objectionable nature of the core idea that the book promotes.

The core idea in Kaunteya’s book

What is the core idea in Kaunteya’s book? He himself says that some of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s views are not spiritual in origin but instead come from non-spiritual, defective, material sources.

One of the central theses of this book is that Srila Prabhupada might have absorbed some of the outlooks predominant in his cultural environment, his historical period. Exploring such attitudes is therefore essential to our analysis.⁴⁰

Since this is at its core, Kaunteya must necessarily act on it. Therefore it is seen throughout his book that Kaunteya himself criticizes Śrīla Prabhupāda.

For example, he recommends that ISKCON and its members distance themselves from some of their Founder-Ācārya’s statements:

³⁹ Regarding alliteration, here is an example from Kaunteya’s book (TQDA 416):

*“Objectively speaking, portions of what Srila Prabhupada said cannot be supported; but we love him also because of his **occasional outsized outbursts of objectionable, outrageous outspokenness.**”*

The bolded portion is an example of alliteration; the letter “o” is repeated. It evokes a mood of playfulness, which has the effect of distracting the reader from the actual nature of the statement. Without the alliteration, this says that Śrīla Prabhupāda sometimes is prone to making outrageous, hyperbolic statements that are objectionable. The basic idea expressed is at the very least unflattering and derogatory. Readers should note how opposite Kaunteya’s statement about Śrīla Prabhupāda is to the statements of Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura and other *ācāryas* about the guru. It directly ignores the advice of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.17.27) to never think less of one’s *ācārya* (*nāvamanyeta karhicit*).

⁴⁰ TQDA 257. Also, this is another case of using vague language to disguise some idea that, if plainly stated, would be generally considered objectionable. Kaunteya’s phrase “might have absorbed” is identical in meaning to “absorbed,” but he pads the phrase with words that convey uncertainty to make his idea sound less objectionable. But he is nonetheless certain that Śrīla Prabhupāda absorbed some (wrong) ideas from material sources.

In some cases (and I emphasize: "in some cases"; not in all cases) we could and should simply say: "Those were ideas Śrīla Prabhupāda acquired in his earthly embodied experience from problematic sources or were expressions of his unconventional use of terminology; we do not identify with such statements; they don't constitute official positions of ISKCON." And then we should move on, remaining loyal to his spiritual, universal scriptural teachings, but cautious about what he spoke that didn't come directly from Vedic or mystical revelation.⁴¹

Kaunteya Prabhu is no longer expressing a doubt. He is expressing a certainty that some of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements are not divinely inspired—he says they are mistaken.⁴²

Kaunteya’s above logic actually belongs to Śaṅkarācārya, who similarly taught that the Absolute Truth exists in two tiers: one contaminated by mundane modes (*saguṇa*) and one uncontaminated by those modes (*nirguṇa*); the only conclusion that can be drawn from this is offensive: “We worship the ‘essential’ Kṛṣṇa—but not His earthly form.” Likewise, Kaunteya now suggests that Śrīla Prabhupāda, in addition to having a spiritual personality, has a mundane personality that must be rejected.

For example, he says:

His psychic body, external and extraneous to the soul, might have imbibed certain cultural conditionings and might have assimilated certain aesthetic leanings tainted by racial prejudice - but he transcended them by not allowing such acquired instincts to affect the policies of his missionary work.⁴³

This means that Kaunteya discourages ISKCON devotees from seeing Śrīla Prabhupāda as the external manifestation of the Supersoul; instead, he encourages them to critically judge (as he does) the very same *ācārya* they

⁴¹ TQDA 359.

⁴² A fundamental topic that needs to be further addressed beyond this paper is about perceived differences between Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements and Śrīla Prabhupāda’s teachings. Our differences with Kaunteya’s book revolve around whether (as well as when and how) Śrīla Prabhupāda intended us to take his words as didactic. In this regard, a fundamental idea advocated by Kaunteya and some others is that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements are not always in line with his teachings (or in line with the *śāstras*), and this idea motivates their recommendations to modify some of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements or (ever so politely) declare them invalid and distance ourselves from them. However, because *śabda-pramāṇa* is considered the only kind of evidence that is free from the four defects of a conditioned soul, and is therefore the only evidence considered direct, this paper takes the position that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s teachings are derived from his statements, which themselves are in line with and never against the *śāstras* because of his own status as also being free from these four defects. Any misunderstanding of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s teachings is therefore considered a result of misunderstanding one or more of his statements. This point of view motivates this paper’s preference for the term “statements” over “teachings” wherever either could be used, since his teachings are always based on his statements and always in line with the *śāstras*.

⁴³ TQDA 196.

already accepted as their teacher—and that is precisely what *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 11.17.27 prohibits.

However, Kaunteya degrades even Śaṅkara’s logic because he tries to move it several stages below pure spiritual life. Whereas scholars recognize that Smarta Hinduism mixes Advaita philosophy with devotional practices,⁴⁴ the prescriptions in Kaunteya’s book seem to prefer ISKCON to mix bhakti practices with post-Enlightenment ideals (such as Neo-Marxism, Feminism, and Queer Theory)—as if there were any such thing as “*vikarma-yoga*.” Shrewd demagogues and politicians know that the best chance at promoting something is to somehow paint it as pseudo-egalitarian populism—discover what the people want and then give it to them, *vox populi*.

Kaunteya finally argues that even if Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements are true, he still feels they should be removed because of their “poisonous, radioactive effect on our outreach”:

Even if, for argument's sake, we could substantiate that ‘women are generally not very intelligent and therefore not trustworthy,’ do we really need to say it at the beginning of our most important book? That sentence - and similar ones - has a poisonous, radioactive effect on our outreach. Even if the sentence is true - according to unconventional definitions - does it have to be publicly broadcasted?⁴⁵

It is beyond the scope of this paper to question why Kaunteya here feels Prabhupāda’s books are “ours” to emend, nor whether “we” truly have any capacity to “update” them, even if our gurus did confer us that right.

But all the above presents a small sample of the doubts Kaunteya Prabhu raises against Śrīla Prabhupāda’s various statements. He raises them in order to discredit the belief that Śrīla Prabhupāda cannot commit any mistake. Once discredited, this can be replaced with the belief that Śrīla Prabhupāda makes mistakes, just like other conditioned souls do.

Siddhānta (correct understanding)

Two questions were presented initially:

- 1) What is the authority of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words in his own books?, and
- 2) What is the authority of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words generally?

⁴⁴ “Hinduism” by Alf Hiltebeitel, pg. 357, in *The Religious Traditions of Asia: Religion, History, Culture*. (Routledge, 2013).

⁴⁵ TQDA 621.

Additionally, a pragmatic objection to some of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements was raised. Hence,

- 3) If many happen to find some of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements to be objectionable—regardless of their truth or authority—are we allowed to modify them, remove them, or publicly distance ourselves from them in order to make the rest of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s teachings acceptable to the greatest number of people?⁴⁶

As explicated below, the answers to these questions are:

- 1) Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books are classified as *smṛti*. Śrīla Prabhupāda says, “*Smṛti means if you are learned scholar in the Vedic injunction, if you have heard from the bona fide source, and if you are convinced, then if you write something, that is smṛti. You cannot write nonsense. You have to write something which corroborates with the Vedic injunction. That is called smṛti.*”⁴⁷ In his books, wherever Śrīla Prabhupāda’s didactic statements do not explicitly refer to any known *śāstra*, they are still presumed to be based on *śāstra*. Otherwise, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books could not be considered *smṛti*.
- 2) Outside of his books, his statements—including those for which no explicit or implicit reference from *śāstra* is discernible—are nonetheless considered as good as *śāstra*, since they are the words of a pure devotee. Śrīla Prabhupāda says, “*The statements of Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda are as good as scriptures because he is a liberated person.*”⁴⁸ Śrīla Prabhupāda himself is also to be regarded as such a liberated person. And the words of liberated, pure devotees about even worldly facts and events contradicted by mundane general consensus or expert opinion are still to be considered free from the four defects of a conditioned soul—*īśvarāṅgāṁ vacaḥ satyaṁ*: “*The statements of the Lord’s empowered servants are always true.*”⁴⁹ The mundane sources that Śrīla Prabhupāda sometimes quotes are by nature *doṣapūrṇa*, full of fault, or change over time, but Śrīla Prabhupāda’s views never depended on such sources.

⁴⁶ The formulation of this last question, if fair, suggests Kaunteya Prabhu’s mode of moral reasoning has some close resemblance with Benthamite Utilitarianism (“the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people”) or with other forms of Consequentialism.

⁴⁷ Lecture, *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā* 22.5, 7 Jan. 1967, New York.

⁴⁸ Letter to Janardana, 26 Apr. 1968.

⁴⁹ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 10.33.31.

- 3) Except for correcting typos, transcription errors, or other kinds of mistakes due to actors other than Śrīla Prabhupāda, correcting him is forbidden on account of his status as a pure devotee. His followers do not and cannot have such *adhikāra* to correct him. His books themselves are as good as *śāstra*, and modifying or removing statements in them would be like changing or deleting the original Bengali in Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī’s *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*. That is patently unthinkable. The same respect is also to be given to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, because they are also as good as other *śāstras* (*smṛti*).

These conclusions are further explained in the following subsections.

A pure devotee is free from the four defects of conditioned souls.

The words of pure devotees are always true and are not subject to faults:

īśvarāṇām vacaḥ satyaṁ

“The statements of the Lord’s empowered servants are always true.”⁵⁰

sac-chāstrī-kurvanti śāstrāṇi

“Great pure devotees make scriptures authoritative.”⁵¹

*tatra vaiduṣe ca vipratipatti-bhramādi-nṛ-doṣa-rāhityāt,
śabdasyāpi tan-mūlatvāc ca*

“About the perceptions of the wise there is no disagreement, because these perceptions are devoid of the human weaknesses, such as faulty judgment. Moreover, the perceptions of the wise are the basis of even verbal testimony [*śabda-pramāṇa*].”⁵²

“The statements of Ṭhākura Bhaktivinoda are as good as scriptures because he is a liberated person. Generally the spiritual master comes from the group of such eternal associates of the Lord . . .”⁵³

⁵⁰ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 10.33.31.

⁵¹ *Nārada-bhakti-sūtra* 69.

⁵² Jīva Gosvāmī, *Tattva-sandarbhā, Sarva-saṁvādinī* commentary on *anuccheda* 9.

⁵³ Letter to Janardana, 26 Apr 1968.

*bhrama, pramāda, vipralipsā, karaṇāpāṭava
ārṣa-vijñā-vākye nāhi doṣa ei saba*

“Mistakes, illusions, cheating and defective perception do not occur in the sayings of the authoritative sages.”⁵⁴

This last statement is a *pramāṇa* by which Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa-kavirāja demonstrates that Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.3.28 proves that Lord Kṛṣṇa is the source of all incarnations, and not Lord Nārāyaṇa. Since the author (Śrīla Vyāsadeva) is free of the defects of an ordinary *jīva*, there can be no defect in his statements. Hence, they constitute direct evidence that cannot be contradicted.

Śrīla Prabhupāda himself further confirms that the four defects of a conditioned soul are not found in the sayings of the authoritative sages—and that even *śāstra* cannot help those who neglect this fact:

Had Kṛṣṇa been a plenary expansion of Nārāyaṇa, the original verse would have been differently composed; indeed, its order would have been reversed. But there cannot be mistakes, illusion, cheating or imperfect perception in the words of liberated sages. Therefore there is no mistake in this statement that Lord Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. The Sanskrit statements of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* are all transcendental sounds. Śrīla Vyāsadeva revealed these statements after perfect realization, and therefore they are perfect, for liberated sages like Vyāsadeva never commit errors in their rhetorical arrangements. Unless one accepts this fact, there is no use in trying to obtain help from the revealed scriptures.⁵⁵

Apparent mistakes in the words of the authoritative sages are never wrong—even if they happen to resemble the faults in ordinary souls.

Śrīla Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa, in his commentary on *Tattva-sandarbhā*, text 9, says:

*bhramaḥ pramādo vipralipsā karaṇāpāṭavaṁ ceti jīve catvāro
doṣāḥ | teṣv atasmimś tad-buddhir bhramaḥ | yena sthāṇau
puruṣa-buddhiḥ | anavadhānatānya-cittatā-lakṣaṇaḥ pramādaḥ |
yenāntike gīyamānaṁ gānaṁ na gṛhyate | vañcanecchā vipralipsā
| yayā śiṣye sva-jñāto’py artho na prakāśyate | indriya-māndyaṁ
karaṇāpāṭavam | yena datta-manasāpi yathāvat vastu na
paricīyate | ete pramāṭṛ-jīva-doṣāḥ pramāṇeṣu sañcaranti | teṣu*

⁵⁴ Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādī-līlā 2.86.

⁵⁵ Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādī-līlā, 2.86 purport.

bhramādi-trayaṃ pratyakṣe, tan-mūlake anumāne ca; vipralipsā tu śabde iti bodhyam

Bhrama, *pramāda*, *vipralipsā* and *karaṇāpāṭava*: These are four faults found in an ordinary *jīva*. Among them *bhrama* means acceptance of an object to be different from what it is, e.g., mistaking a pillar to be a person. *Pramāda* means inattentiveness or having one’s mind in another object by which one is not able to catch some song that is being sung just nearby. *Vipralipsā* means the desire to cheat others, e.g., knowingly not revealing a particular knowledge to one’s student. *Karaṇāpāṭava* means weakness of the senses by which even after giving full attention of mind, one cannot properly understand something. These are the four faults (observed in the *pramāṇas*, namely *pratyakṣa-anumāna* and *śabda*) of ordinary *jīvas*, that do not produce “*pramā*” or valid knowledge. Among them, the three faults “*bhrama-pramāda-karaṇāpāṭavam*” occur in relation to *pratyakṣa-pramāṇa* as well as *anumāna-pramāṇa*, which is rooted in *pratyakṣa-pramāṇa*. However, the fault “*vipralipsā*” occurs only in relation to *śabda-pramāṇa*.⁵⁶

Regarding *bhrama*, “acceptance of an object to be different from what it is,” Śāṅkarācārya calls this *pratibhāsa*—one of three ways he says Brahman is perceived. The other two given by Śāṅkarācārya are *vyavahāra* (worldly convention) and *paramārtha* (pure transcendence); like *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa*, these last two also resemble Kaunteya’s two-tiered theory about Śrīla Prabhupāda’s authority.

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura in his *Anubhāṣya* to *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādī-līlā* 2.86 also provides a similar technical definition of the four defects of the conditioned soul.

*eka-kathā anya-prakāre upalabdhi karā vā śravaṇa karā vā balā.
vipralipsā—vañcanecchā. karaṇāpāṭava—indriyer apaṭutā;
yathā—cakṣur dūra-darśana-rāhitya, kṣudra-vastu-darśana-*

⁵⁶ Śrīla Baladeva Vidyābhūṣana, commentary to *Tattva-sandarbhā*, anuccheda 9. Trans. ISKCON India Scholars Board. Accessed 10 April 2023 at: https://grettil.sub.uni-goettingen.de/grettil/corpustei/transformations/html/sa_jiva-gosvami-satsamdarbhā.htm

rāhitya, kāmlādi-roge varṇa (rūpa)-jñāner viparyaya, (karṇer) sudūra-sthita śabda-śravaṇe akṣamatā.

“To receive false information or to hear or speak incorrect information [*bhrama* and *pramāda*]. *Vipralipsā* means the desire to cheat others. *Karaṇāpāṭava* means incapability of senses—e.g. not being able to see things situated at a distance, not being able to see things that are very small in size, not being able to identify colour or form of some object as it happens in diseases like jaundice and so on, not being able to hear from a distance.”⁵⁷

None of these faults are present in the words or activities of pure devotees, because such devotees are directed by the Lord Himself.

Liberated souls or eternal associates of the Supreme Lord do not contain the limitations of conditioned souls either in receiving or sharing any knowledge. This does not mean, however, that they inherently have all the perfections of God. Instead, it means that as far as any knowledge is concerned—be it material or spiritual—they cannot make any mistakes either in receiving it or sharing it with anyone. This is the proper understanding of liberated souls being free from the four defects of conditioned souls.

The authority of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements in his own books

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements represent and exemplify those of his predecessors, and this has always been the case in each generation, which means that our *ācāryas* all ultimately represent Kṛṣṇa—all bona fide Vaiṣṇavas accept Śrīla Prabhupāda’s authority in this way (*uktas tathā bhāvyata eva sadbhiḥ*). Thus Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura (in his *Narottamāṣṭaka*, text 7) also said that the words of Śrīla Narottama dāsa Ṭhākura have the same authority as the *śrutis*.

prāmāṇyam evaṁ śrutivad yadiyam

“His words are as authoritative as the *Śruti*.”

This assertion of the pure devotee’s authority is also supported even in the wider Vedic tradition—specifically in the *dharma-śāstras*; for example, Āpastamba in his famous *dharma-sūtra* (2 - 3) says,

⁵⁷ Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura, *Anubhāṣya* commentary on *Śrī-Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, *Ādi-līlā* 2.86. Trans. ISKCON India Scholars Board. Accessed 10 April 2023 at: <https://archive.org/details/CCBSSTAdi01>

dharmajñā-samayaḥ pramāṇam, vedaś ca

“The orders and practice of those who know dharma are *pramāṇa*, and for them the Vedas alone are *pramāṇa*.”⁵⁸

Closely associated with the above *sūtra* from Āpastamba is *Manu-saṁhitā* 2.6, which further describes the *pramāṇas* that come from the *dharmajñā* (knower of dharma).⁵⁹ In addition to the Vedas, which Manu says are the root of knowledge of dharma (*vedo 'khilo dharma-mūlam*), the *smṛtis*—works composed by those who are virtuous and learned in the Vedas—are also a source of knowledge of dharma:

*vedo 'khilo dharma-mūlam
smṛti-śīle ca tad-vidām
ācāraś-caiva sādḥūnām
ātmanas-tuṣṭir eva ca*

“The entire Veda [*śruti*] is the root-source of Dharma; also the Conscientious Recollection of righteous persons versed in the Veda [*smṛti*], the Practice of Good (and learned) Men [*sadācāra*], and their self-satisfaction [*ātma-tuṣṭi*].”^{60 61}

Of special interest is *smṛti*, which is translated as “the conscientious recollection of righteous persons versed in the Veda.” Medhātithi in his *Manubhāṣya* commentary on this *śloka* describes how, when one has the qualifications mentioned here, and he produces a work about dharma, and it is also accepted by all learned and wise men, that work is to be accepted as *smṛti*, an authorized source of knowledge of dharma.

As per Medhātithi’s commentary:

What thus the words ‘*Smṛtiśīle ca tadvidām*’ mean is that ‘when a person is found to be recognised and spoken of by all wise and learned persons as endowed with the

⁵⁸ Śrī Haradatta Miśra, *Āpastamba-dharma-sūtra* (Sanskrit, Hindi), (Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office: Varanasi, 1969) Accessed on 14 April 2023: [The Internet Archive](#)

⁵⁹ Also closely associated with *Āpastamba-dharma-sūtra* 2 - 3 is *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* 1.1.7, which is quoted by Śrīla Prabhupāda in his purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 7.11.7, which will soon be discussed in this section.

⁶⁰ *Manusmṛti with commentary of Medhātithi*, trans. Gaṅgānātha Jhā. Accessed on 14 April 2023 at the [Wisdom Library](#).

⁶¹ This *śloka* also gives the relative strength of the *pramāṇas* listed from strongest to weakest. Their relative strength is necessary to consider when doing *samanvaya*—resolving apparent conflicts between different types of statements in the *śāstras* or from *ācāryas*. But for each, in the absence of any *pramāṇa* higher than itself, its authority is to be considered to have the same authority as *śruti*. *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* 1.1.7 also gives the same *pramāṇas* in the same order and adds a fifth *pramāṇa*.

said qualifications, and they also accept a certain work as really by that person,—the word of such a person (and of the work composed by him), even though proceeding from a human source, should be recognised as an authoritative source of the knowledge of Dharma. So that even at the present day if there were a person possessed of the said qualifications, and he were to compose a work by reason of just those qualifications, then for later generations they would be accepted to be just as authoritative as the words of Manu and others. People of the present generation—who would be contemporaries of the said writer—would not derive their knowledge of *Dharma* from the words of such a writer, because the sources of information available to him would be all available to them also. Hence it is that until a teacher of the present day clearly indicates the source from which he has derived a certain information, learned people do not accept his word as reliable. When however he has pointed out his source and his work has been accepted as authoritative, then at some future time if the case of his work be found to be analogous to that of the *Smṛti* rules regarding *Aṣṭakā* and other acts (whose basis in the Veda we of the present day cannot find), it would be only right to infer its authoritative character from the fact of its being accepted by the wise and the learned (which fact could not be explained except on the basis of its being duly authoritative).⁶²

Medhātithi also says that, in the course of time, the words of such a qualified writer of *smṛti* could come to be regarded with as much authority as the words of Manu himself. This anticipates future writers, like Śrīla Prabhupāda, who without question have these same qualifications given in this *śloka*—and much more.

In this regard, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s own explanation of what is *smṛti* is much like Medhātithi’s. He says,

Smṛti means if you are learned scholar in the Vedic injunction, if you have heard from the bona fide source, and if you are convinced, then if you write something, that is *smṛti*.

You cannot write nonsense. You have to write something which corroborates with the Vedic injunction. That is called *smṛti*. You cannot manufacture anything. You should always remember that “I am a teeny brain here, so I have to receive knowledge from superior sources.” Then whatever knowledge you have received, if you can expand that in your..., by your, I mean to say, capacity, that is called *smṛti*.

So there are two different kinds of Vedic literature. One section is called *śruti*, originally coming. Just like this *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*: this is a book written by Kṛṣṇa dāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī, a great devotee of Lord Caitanya. It is called *smṛti*. Why? Everything written here is corroborating the Vedic literature. There is nothing suggestion, "I am a philosopher. I am a speculator. I think this will be like this." Here

⁶² Medhātithi’s commentary to *Manu-saṁhitā* 2.6: Source: *Manusmṛti with commentary of Medhātithi*, trans. Gaṅgānātha Jhā. Accessed on 14 April 2023 at the [Wisdom Library](http://www.wisdomlib.org).

you'll see in every step he is quoting from Vedas. Caitanya Mahāprabhu is quoting. This is the topics between Sanātana Gosvāmī... This is the Vedic way.⁶³

So, any work representing Vedic literature and composed by a perfectly pure and learned person is acceptable as *smṛti*. And in fact, Śrīla Prabhupāda's books have become widely recognized by wise and learned men as authoritative—hence, his books are *smṛti*. Considering all this, it looks increasingly clear that Kaunteya's actual objection is that he simply does not believe Śrīla Prabhupāda has all these high qualifications.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (7.11.7) explains that the Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the basis of the authority of both the *śrutis* and *smṛtis*:

*dharma-mūlaṁ hi bhagavān
sarva-vedamayo hariḥ
smṛtaṁ ca tad-vidāṁ rājan
yena cātmā prasīdati*

“The Supreme Being, the Personality of Godhead, is the essence of all Vedic knowledge, the root of all religious principles, and the memory of great authorities. O King Yudhiṣṭhira, this principle of religion is to be understood as evidence. On the basis of this religious principle, everything is satisfied, including one's mind, soul and even one's body.”

Hence, the *smṛti-śāstras* are also authoritative sources for knowledge of dharma. Their importance is suggested by the fact that *dharma-śāstras* constitute the most voluminous genre in Indian literature. As per Klaus Klostermaier in his well-regarded book, *A Survey of Hinduism* (1994):

Dharmasastra as a literary genre is undoubtedly the largest in the whole of Indian literature. This is due to both the importance of the subjects dealt with under it and the inherent difficulty of applying its principles to concrete instances. According to Indian tradition dharma is hidden and had to be revealed by competent persons. Because dharma was supposed to be the overarching rule of life, everything came under its purview and great care had to be taken to find expressions of dharma in particular circumstances. The universal nature of dharma also explains the absence of the division between a "religious" and "secular" sphere, so fundamental to the modern West.⁶⁴

⁶³ Lecture, CC Madhya 22.5, 7 Jan. 1967, New York.

⁶⁴ Klaus Klostermaier, *A Survey of Hinduism*. SUNY Press: 1994: 52. Ch. 21 makes many valuable observations.

A special characteristic of dharma is that knowledge of it can only be given by the Supreme Lord. It is essential to note that dharma cannot be discovered by *pratyakṣa* or *anumāna*. It must be received from the Lord. Śrīla Prabhupāda therefore begins his purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 7.11.7 by explaining this:

As stated by Yamarāja, *dharmam tu sākṣād bhagavat-praṇītam* [SB 6.3.19]. Yamarāja, the representative of the Lord who takes care of the living beings after their death, gives his verdict as to how and when the living being will change his body. He is the authority, and he says that the religious principles consist of the codes and laws given by God. No one can manufacture religion, and therefore manufactured religious systems are rejected by the followers of the Vedic principles.

In this regard, a doubt may arise as to the authority of *smṛti*. If only the Lord can give knowledge of dharma, then how can a human being, who is not the Lord, give such knowledge by composing *smṛti*? The answer is that it is given by those who “know the Vedas.” Just as a physician can explain medical science to ordinary people, who, on their own, can neither understand nor benefit from standard medical books, so those who actually know the Vedic literature write *smṛtis* in order to make Vedic knowledge understandable to ordinary people. This high qualification is of course very rare, Śrīla Prabhupāda was just such a person. He explained the essence of Vedic literature to people who would never have been able to understand any of it without his help.

Moreover, it is also a fact that the Vedas and other Vedic literature are sometimes present and at other times disappear. Therefore, even if the original part of the Veda on which a *smṛti* is based is no longer available, then that *smṛti*—and even the utterances of those qualified to write *smṛti*—will be the only way that one can obtain that knowledge.⁶⁵

For example, Śrīla Prabhupāda describes the saffron-colored clothing worn by renunciates and keeping shaved heads, yet he does not quote any *śāstra* to back up his statements:

“According to the Vedic system, a *sannyāsī*, a person in the renounced order of life, is dressed in saffron-colored garments.”⁶⁶

“There is not much difference in the robes of Mayavadis and Vaisnavas, but they generally use a deeper color and we use lighter saffron.”⁶⁷

e.g., *ibid.* 340-341

⁶⁵ *Pramāṇas* from *śāstra* for this will be given in the [next section](#), “The authority of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements when not backed by *śāstra*.”

⁶⁶ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 3.15.31 purport.

⁶⁷ Letter to Jadurani, 28th June, 1973.

So this dress... In Vedic culture, there are different dresses for different persons. So this saffron-colored dress means that he is admitted without any introduction anywhere, because he's understood to be a man of transcendental knowledge.”⁶⁸

“Vaisnava must have sikha.”⁶⁹

“So you have returned, but now you must be very careful not to become rubbish. If you are keeping long hairs, they must be removed. All of my disciples must be clean shaved. Even anyone who stays with us must be clean shaved. They can visit, but anyone who wants to remain with us must be clean shaved.”⁷⁰

But an absence of quoted *śāstra* does not mean his statements are not based on it.

*ye śaṅ-ṇavati-tattvajñā
yatra kutrāśrame ratāḥ
jaṭī muṇḍī śikhī vāpi
mucyate nātra saṁśayaḥ*

“The knowers of these ninety-six tattvas will attain liberation in whatever order of life they may be in, and whatever appearance they may have i.e. Whether they have matted hair or are of shaven head or have (only) their tuft of hair on heads. There is no doubt about this.”⁷¹

*kāśyājīnayoḥ anyatara-vāsāḥ jaṭī śikhī vā mekhalī daṇḍī sutrājina-
dhārī brahmacārī śucir akṣāra-lavaṇāśī yathokteṣu varṣeṣu
dharmāṇy anutiṣṭhatīti vijāyate*

“A Brahmācārī, wearing either a reddish dyed garment or a deer skin, wearing his hair matted or tufted, wearing a girdle, a staff, wearing deerskin in the pattern of sacred thread, abstaining from use of garland, sandalwood paste, betel nuts, oil massage and so on, abstaining from sexual intercourse, abstaining from pungent food and salt, fulfils his duties as a Veda-student during the years that are ordained in sacred lore.”⁷²

⁶⁸ Radio Interview 12th March 1968, San Francisco.

⁶⁹ Letter to Govinda dāsī, November 20th, 1971,

⁷⁰ Letter to Upendra dasa, 30th August, 1974.

⁷¹ *Varāha Upaniṣad* (Chapter 1, verse 17); https://sanskritdocuments.org/doc_upanishhat/varaha.html

⁷² *Vaikhānasa-grhya-sūtram* (*aṣṭama khanda*, text 16); <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.382894>

So, if it ever happens that these *śāstras* are no longer available, or even just the quoted portions of it go missing, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements in his books or elsewhere may become the only source of knowing what the *śāstras* say. This is visible in some writings by Madhvācārya, for example. Hence, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books and commentaries are as good as *śāstra*, and they are considered *smṛti*.

The authority of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements when not backed by *śāstra*

In his book, Kaunteya says that statements by the guru not specifically mentioned in the *śāstra* cannot be granted the same authority as statements in *śāstra*. He says,

When gurus talk of things not specifically mentioned in the śāstras we may take those views as personal assessments, honest (but potentially mistaken) attempts at clarifying facts and events. Unless backed up by śāstric references, we cannot grant to those opinions the same authority of scriptural truths. Nonscriptural views can be taken as subjective.⁷³

This assertion is wrong for several reasons. According to many *pramāṇas* already given, the statements of pure devotees are always true (*īśvarāṇām vacaḥ satyam*), and therefore such statements from pure devotees also are considered a basis for *śabda-pramāṇa*. Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements are always true, even in the case of citing a worldly source as his authority and even when he seems to merely be expressing an opinion, citing neither any worldly source nor *śāstra*.

The *dharma-śāstras* especially declare that on matters not mentioned in any extent *śāstras*, genuine *śiṣṭas* (cultured *brāhmaṇas*) are fit to declare what is dharma.

As per *Manu-saṁhitā* 12.108:

*anāmnāteṣu dharmeṣu
kathaṁ syād iti ced bhavet
yaṁ śiṣṭā brāhmaṇā brūyuh
sa dharmāḥ syād aśaṅkitaḥ*

“If the question should arise—'How should it be in regard to those points upon which the laws have not been declared?'—[the answer

⁷³ TQDA 44.

is]—what the cultured Brāhmaṇas declare, that shall be the undoubted law.”⁷⁴

Whatever “liberated souls in ancient times” said and did is also considered *pramāṇa*, as per *Bhagavad-gītā*, 4.15:

*evaṁ jñātvā kṛtaṁ karma
pūrvair api mumukṣubhiḥ
kuru karmaiva tasmāt tvaṁ
pūrvaiḥ pūrva-taraṁ kṛtam*

“All the liberated souls in ancient times acted with this understanding of My transcendental nature. Therefore you should perform your duty, following in their footsteps.”

The *Vāsiṣṭha dharma-sūtra* (4 - 5)⁷⁵ also declares similarly:

śruti-smṛti-vihito dharmah

“The sacred law has been settled by the revealed texts and by the tradition of the sages.” (4)

tadalābhe śiṣṭācāraḥ pramāṇam

“On failure of rules given in these two sources the practice of the Śiṣṭas [*sadācāra*] has authority.” (5)⁷⁶

Śrī Caitanya Mahaprabhu Himself confirms that *sadācāra* is the cause for establishing dharma.

⁷⁴ Trans. Gaṅgānātha Jhā. Accessed on 13 April 2023: [Wisdom Library](#).

⁷⁵ Georg Bühler (1882), *Vasistha Dharmasutra*, 24 Mar 2023: [Wisdom Library](#).

⁷⁶ Here by the phrase *tadalābhe śiṣṭācāraḥ pramāṇam* should not be understood as any non-habitual action of liberated personalities i.e. Śrīla Prabhupāda doing *ācamana* with his left hand or eating the *bhoga* of the Lord. The word “*sadācāra*” has been glossed as “*śiṣṭānām ācāraḥ*” or practices of cultured *brāhmaṇas*. Thus, there must be repetition both in instructions (in the form of a *vidhi-niṣedha*, prescription and prohibition) as well as in personal behavior to call it *sadācāra*, for *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.33.31) warns us that sometimes the behavior of the Lord’s empowered servants may not be according to their words. And therefore logically, when consistent with their own statements, their behavior should be accepted as *sadācāra*.

dharma-sthāpana-hetu sādhusa vyavahāra

“A devotee’s behavior establishes the true purpose of religious principles.”⁷⁷

And of course,

mahājano yena gataḥ sa panthāḥ

“One should accept whatever progressive path the *mahājanas* advocate.”⁷⁸

So, both the *smṛti* (recollection of a *mahājana*) and *sadācāra* (exemplary behavior of a *mahājana*) are authoritative *pramāṇas*.⁷⁹

The relationship between *śāstra* on the one hand and the words of the guru and other *sādhus* on the other hand is like this: If you want to know who your father is, then you must hear from your mother. Otherwise, knowing is not possible. But if your mother passes away and your brother has heard from her before she departed and you have not, then you must hear from your brother. That knowledge is just as good as having heard directly from your mother. In the same way, the words of the gurus and *sādhus* are also as good as *śāstra*.

Pragmatic reasons for modifying or removing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements

Kaunteya’s theory that a pure devotee may hold mistaken views—whether they are based on so-called misinformation or cultural biases—is an impossibility. As per evidence from guru, *sādhu* and *śāstra*, a pure devotee of Kṛṣṇa cannot commit any mistake. Therefore the only basis left for critiquing Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements is pragmatic. If objections are to be raised at all, they will have to be based on how others react to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements, or how critics anticipate others will react to them. So, Kaunteya prabhu adopts that approach.

⁷⁷ *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā*, 17.185.

⁷⁸ *Mahābhārata, Vana-parva*, qtd. In *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā* 17.186

⁷⁹ It may be asked whether all behavior of a *mahājana* is *pramāṇa* (a source of knowledge of dharma). Not always. In *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 10.33.31 the word *kvacit* means “sometimes” and modifies the scope of the actions of the Lord’s empowered servants. The context of the statement makes it clear that the actions of such people are not to be imitated, like Lord Śiva’s drinking an ocean of poison or Lord Kṛṣṇa’s dancing with many women in the dead of night during His *rāsa-līlā*. Also see footnote 76 with regard to distinguishing between *sadācāra* and actions of pure devotees that are not meant to be imitated.

The essence of any such pragmatic objection is that even if a statement upsetting some people is true, it is still upsetting them. Kaunteya says, for example, “*Even if the sentence is true . . . does it have to be publicly broadcasted?*”⁸⁰ Consequently, the idea goes, readers will not give Śrīla Prabhupāda the hearing they might have given him had he spoken differently or chosen to not speak about a certain topic. *But it is crucial to note that in all such arguments, the truth of whatever Śrīla Prabhupāda said is irrelevant in deciding how his statement should be dealt with.*

Here we will look at two such arguments:

- 1) Śrīla Prabhupāda himself assented to revising his own works when disciples expressed concern about how they would be received; and
- 2) The objectors are influential or numerous.

Śrīla Prabhupāda changed his own content

A reason sometimes given for changing or removing content from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books is that Śrīla Prabhupāda himself sometimes assented to such changes when requested by disciples. This happened sometimes when one or more of his editors felt that something Śrīla Prabhupāda said (despite being true) would be rejected.

For example, Kaunteya cites Prabhupāda’s reference to “negro” persons:

When, after starting ISKCON, Srila Prabhupada wished to publish a new edition of the First Canto *Bhagavatam*, his disciple Satsvarupa Dasa Goswami worried about the above statement from the original volumes printed in India and expressed his concern in a letter to Srila Prabhupada. In his book *Memories of Srila Prabhupada*, he recalls: “In my letter I had pointed out how people in modern American society would never accept these statements.” (MSP 3-4, April 1968) Srila Prabhupada agreed to have the reference to Negroes removed from further printings.⁸¹

The important question here is: “If it were acceptable to make such edits for this reason back then, why should it not be acceptable to make such edits now for the same reason?”

This should no longer be allowed because Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books were written by a pure devotee. As such, there is no mistake in them. Śrīla Prabhupāda’s

⁸⁰ TQDA 621.

⁸¹ TQDA 87.

decision to withdraw his statement from publication was also his decision and therefore also free from fault.⁸²

But if his editors in his absence make such decisions, they become suspect because, unlike with Śrīla Prabhupāda, there is no presumption that they are also pure devotees above the four defects of conditioned souls. How could any of them guarantee (to themselves or to readers) that their decision to remove or modify something is Śrīla Prabhupāda’s desire?

Just as no devotee would dare to change the original text of Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja’s *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, editors should give the same regard to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *smṛtis*—his books, which are as good as *śāstra*.

The authorized alternative—and our traditional orthopraxis—is to either write commentaries to Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, or just write one’s own books once one is duly empowered to write *smṛti* as discussed above. Of course, that is much more difficult than directly or indirectly criticizing one’s *founder-ācārya*.

Popular or Elite Protest

Kaunteya has recommended that ISKCON’s leaders change or remove certain statements in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, or publicly distance themselves from them. Otherwise, as per Kaunteya, important people will consider ISKCON’s members to be odd, ill-motivated, and untruthful:

A brahminical movement should be guided by the principle of honesty. We should be truthful. We should recognize when an affirmation is not factual. Trying to rationalize that everything Śrīla Prabhupāda ever said is correct, ultimately represents a disservice to him and a distortion of our mission. It makes his followers look like hypocritical spin doctors or mindless, bigoted zealots. If we can't admit to facts, how can we expect the public to trust us? How could they take us seriously?⁸³

But such criticisms are not new. For example, the former Soviet Union (and other Eastern European countries under Communist rule) also considered Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books to be objectionable. And in fact, they found his books objectionable for some of the same reasons Kaunteya now puts forward. Yet it never occurred to anyone in ISKCON at that time to change his books in order to appease the leaders of those societies. This shows that even if the people objecting are important, or if they are many—or even if their retaliation is excessive (some devotees were brutally tortured under the Soviet system)—

⁸² His decision to withdraw his statement does not also mean it was no longer true. It was still true—*ārśa-vijñā-vākye nāhi doṣa ei saba (Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta Ādī-līlā 2.86)*.

⁸³ TQDA 320.

their objections never warranted any change or removal of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements. In this regard, it appears that the outsider critics Kaunteya extensively cites have not really made any new kind of objection. Even in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s time, politicians, feminists, deprogrammers, etc., were raising some of the same objections. So, why should these objections be entertained now?

Outsider objections as a proxy for truth?

The reason Kaunteya continues to raise objections made by outsiders (and some insiders) to some of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements—however altruistic his reasons for raising them appear—has little to do with pacifying people who might easily be offended by them. And if we take Kaunteya’s stated reason for sharing their objections at face-value, we may believe that truth is also his fundamental concern. Above, Kaunteya said that “A brahminical movement should be guided by the principle of honesty. We should be truthful.”⁸⁴ Yet it is ironic that one so outspokenly dedicated to truth also argues that the truth of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements is irrelevant to any decision about changing them. And it is even more peculiar that Kaunteya frequently employs such pragmatic arguments throughout his book. This gives reason to inquire further into the nature of this disjuncture.

Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements backed by śāstra also found objectionable

The problem faced by those who want to make peace with politicians, scientists and other experts in worldly topics is that their opinions clash with Vedic scriptures. This is especially true for the topics Kaunteya focuses on in his book—race, homosexuality, and women’s nature and corresponding duties. Indeed, an earlier version of his book was more provocatively titled, *Racism, Sexism and Homophobia in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Teachings*.

Kaunteya presumes that on these topics, the “clash” is mainly due to mistaken notions allegedly held by Śrīla Prabhupāda and communicated to naive disciples who uncritically accepted them—not on account of śāstra. Hence he says that only when Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements are supported by śāstra should they be considered objective and faultless, not otherwise.

Kaunteya says:

⁸⁴ TQDA 320.

“Unless backed up by s̄āstric references, we cannot grant to those opinions the same authority of scriptural truths. Non-scriptural views can be taken as subjective.”⁸⁵

But this is not the case, because Kaunteya’s book also counters Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements that are backed by *s̄āstras* Śrīla Prabhupāda himself quotes.

One such example is in his section titled “No Responsible Posts for Women?” (beginning on page 424). He says (bolding added):

[Śrīla Prabhupāda:] “Once, in England, Srila Prabhupada said: “The law of primogeniture [the right to succession belonging to the firstborn child] . . . The eldest child . . . in your country, even the eldest child is a girl, she also occupies the throne. Just like present Queen Elizabeth. Formerly there was Queen Victoria; before that, another Elizabeth. But in India woman has no such right. The woman is never given any responsible post.” (Lecture on SB 5.6.2, Vrindavana, 24 Nov 1976)

[Kaunteya:] Let’s pause and consider; at the time Srila Prabhupada was speaking, in 1973, Indira Gandhi was the prime minister of India. She had already been prime minister for more than seven years (she served in that role from January 1966 to March 1977 and again from January 1980 until her assassination in October 1984). The statement that “in India . . . The woman is never given any responsible post” can therefore remain puzzling. One might argue that Srila Prabhupada was talking about monarchical succession, while Indira Gandhi had been operating within a democratic system; yet her appointment as prime minister in 1966 - and before that as President of the Indian National Congress in 1959 and Minister of Information and Broadcasting in 1964 - seem to indicate that political leadership by a woman was culturally acceptable (and politically viable) in twentieth century India. **I recommend taking the expression “woman is never given any responsible post” as a generalization and not as a literal fact.**

By “generalization” Kaunteya appears to be referring to the principle of *āmraṇa-nyāya* (the “logic of the mango-forest”), which says that just because a forest is predominated by mango trees, it does not mean that other trees are not also present. It is still called a mango forest.⁸⁶ Following from this interpretation, the rest of the section cites both direct and indirect statements from Śrīla Prabhupāda that suggest Śrīla Prabhupāda supports women as leaders but who will most likely always remain as a minority. By this, Kaunteya is trying to demonstrate that Śrīla Prabhupāda is not at all opposed to women in positions of “responsible posts” in society, and that he merely considers it

⁸⁵ TQDA 45.

⁸⁶ This paper also applies the same logic in a model purport to one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s controversial statements on homosexuality. See the last section of this paper, “An authentic exegesis of one of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s remarks contradicted by modern science,” for further discussion.

uncommon. That is the meaning Kaunteya apparently ascribes to “woman is never given any responsible post.”

But Kaunteya’s interpretation is possible only by omitting the *śāstra* that Śrīla Prabhupāda himself quoted to support his own statement. The two *śāstras* Prabhupāda cites (one from *Cāṇakya-nīti-śāstra* and the other from *Manu-saṁhitā*), are both *niṣedhas*—prohibitions. Therefore, Prabhupāda’s statement should also be taken as a *niṣedha*—“The woman is never [to be] given any responsible post.”

Prabhupāda: Hm. So the history is, that same family, there was dispute who would occupy the throne. Dhṛtarāṣṭra and... Actually he was the eldest son of the king, and next was Pāṇḍu. So every country the law of primogeniture, what is called? The eldest child... In your country, even the eldest child is a girl, she also occupies the throne. Just like present Queen Elizabeth. Formerly there was Queen Victoria; before that, another Elizabeth. But in India woman has no such right. The woman is never given any responsible post. **That is the opinion of the greatest politician in the history of the world, Cāṇakya Paṇḍita. According to his opinion, *viśvāso naiva kartavyaḥ strīṣu rāja-kuleṣu ca.*⁸⁷ He has given his explicit opinion that "You cannot trust with any responsible post or any responsibility with a woman and politician."** Those who are diplomat, politician, you cannot trust them.

So the general regulation is that woman should remain under the protection of husband, er, father, husband and children. Just like these Pāṇḍus, their mother, Kuntī, she was very, very qualified lady. But still, after the death of her husband, she always remained with the sons. The sons are going to the forest; the mother is also going. Also the wife is also going, Draupadī.

Śrīla Prabhupāda himself clarifies in English what Cāṇakya says, “You cannot trust with any responsible post or any responsibility with a woman and a politician.” And then, referring to *Manu-saṁhitā* 9.3 (“woman should remain under the protection of father, husband, and children”) he gives the examples of Kuntī and Draupadī as an illustration of this prohibition.

What is the actual *abhiprāya* (purport) of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statement? He was telling the Englishmen and women that, according to Vedic civilization, woman is not to be given any responsible post, because she cannot be trusted with it; since a woman is not fit for independence, she must always be dependent on a father, husband or grown sons.

⁸⁷ There is a similar *śloka* in the *Garuḍa Purāṇa* (1.109.14): *nadīnām ca nakhīnām ca śṛṅgiṇām śāstra-pāṇinām / viśvāso naiva gantavyaḥ strīṣu rāja-kuleṣu ca*, “As with rivers, animals with claws, animals with horns, and men carrying weapons, trust is not to be reposed in women and members of a royal family.” 21 May 2023 <<https://gretel.sub.uni-goettingen.de>>.

Kaunteya prabhu considerably expanded the context of Prabhupāda’s words in a manner that might better accommodate his own stated socio-political recommendation—which, as we shall see, is antithetical. Śrīla Prabhupāda’s quote was not discussing twentieth-century sociological gender trends in government leadership around the world. Prabhupāda was presenting what is *dharma* and *adharmā* for women as per *śāstra*; if the people of England want to benefit their women and the rest of their society, they should follow the example of Queen Kunti and adopt Vedic culture. Once the *śāstra* that Kaunteya omitted is returned, the actual intent (*abhiprāya*) of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statement is revealed too clearly for Kaunteya’s argument to stand.

So, Kaunteya’s mention of Indira Gandhi is an example of confirmation bias—the tendency to interpret and seek out information in a way that confirms one’s existing beliefs or hypotheses, while disregarding or downplaying contradictory evidence. Although Kaunteya cites Indira Gandhi as an example of a woman occupying the topmost executive leadership position in India in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s time, it is relevant to Kaunteya’s point that Śrīla Prabhupāda also criticizes her appointment as artificial and against the *śāstras*.

After describing the material energy, *bhūmir āpo analo vāyuḥ*, earth, water, air, fire, this material... This is also female, *prakṛti*. Female means... We have got..., in India we have got little experience: the female is always controlled. Female is never given the position of controller. Nowadays it is going on. Just like Indira Gandhi, she has given the position of controller. This is artificial. In the history of India, greater India, Mahābhārata, you will never find that a woman has been given the position of controller. No. It is not possible. We have to take things from the *śāstra*. In the *Bhagavad-gītā* also, woman's position has been equated with *śūdra*. *Striyaḥ śūdrās tathā vaiśyas te 'pi yānti parām gatim*.⁸⁸

Yet Kaunteya failed to present any such countervailing statements. Indeed, this statement alone should have been sufficient to have alerted him that his thesis for this section is unsupportable.

Lightning strikes thrice: continued omissions of *śāstra*

Also, in the section “No Responsible Posts for Women,” statements indicating the support of *śāstra* are omitted from the next two excerpts quoted by Kaunteya.

⁸⁸ Lecture, *Bhagavad-gītā* 1.21 – 22, 18 July 1973, London.

With regard to the second excerpt, Kaunteya says “Śrīla Prabhupada did indicate that a woman could certainly assume a ‘responsible post’,” and then gives the excerpt as proof:

Harikesa: In America they have women senators now. Prabhupada: Huh? Harikesa: Women senators, women are in charge of companies sometimes. Indian man: No, in India there are two women. They are high commissioners of India to the foreign countries. [Indian ambassadors to other Commonwealth nations are known as "high commissioners."] Prabhupada: No, that is possible. That it requires education. (Morning Walk, Vrindavana, 10 Dec 1975)⁸⁹

But as more of the excerpt is shown, it turns out that Śrīla Prabhupāda is not making an unqualified endorsement of women in responsible posts. That is, just because she can does not mean she should.⁹⁰ But most important is that Prabhupāda’s deference to *śāstra* was obscured by Kaunteya’s decision to delete Prabhupāda’s words that would have destroyed Kaunteya’s argument.

Indian man: She was telling me when... She... I said that "Prabhupāda sometimes says these things that we feel all ashamed, you know, because..."

Devotee (2): The medicine is not always palatable for these people.

Prabhupāda: But in speaking spiritual understanding we cannot make any compromise. What to speak of in Mauritius; in Chicago I told. There was great agitation in papers.

Harikeśa: In the TV, on television.

Indian man: Same thing?

Devotee (2): In France also.

Prabhupāda: They were very upset. And when I was coming, I think, in Chicago, in the aeroplane, one of the host girl, she was seeing... [makes some gesture] [laughter] I asked her to supply one 7-Up. And, "I have no key." She was so angry. But all the captains and others, they gathered around me. [laughter]

Harikeśa: I think that was the same stewardess who came in the back and asked us, "Why the Swāmījī doesn't like women?"

Prabhupāda: No, no, I don't say that I don't like women, but I cannot say that equal rights. How can I say? First of all show that you equal rights—your husband becomes sometimes pregnant and then you become pregnant, alternately.

Akṣayānanda: Yeah, that doesn't mean you don't like them.

⁸⁹ TQDA 426.

⁹⁰ In *Bhagavad-gītā* 18.47, Lord Kṛṣṇa says: *śreyān sva-dharmo viguṇaḥ para-dharmāt sv-anuṣṭhitāt, svabhāva-niyataṁ karma kurvan nāpnoti kilbiṣam*, "It is better to engage in one's own occupation, even though one may perform it imperfectly, than to accept another's occupation and perform it perfectly. Duties prescribed according to one's nature are never affected by sinful reactions."

Prabhupāda: No, it is truth. I am speaking the truth, that "If you have equal right, then let your husband become pregnant. Make some arrangement."

Harikeśa: Viśākhā was preaching to her. She said that "Actually, we are less intelligent." [laughter] That started a big scandal...

Prabhupāda: Yes. And that is Kṛṣṇa consciousness. [break] They are in equal right, then... Nowadays, of course, they are thinking like that, that man should remain independent, and they'll have homosex, and the woman also independent, and they will make some... This is most immoral things.

Indian man: If only people think that they have equal right...

Prabhupāda: Where is equal right? Even in Russia there is no equal rights. They have created some of them are managers and some of them are workers. Why? If equal rights, then everyone should be manager.

Harikeśa: Well, in America they have women senators now.

Prabhupāda: Huh?

Harikeśa: Women senators. Women are in charge of companies sometimes.

Indian man: No, in India there are two women, they are high commissioners of India to the foreign countries.

Prabhupāda: No, that is possible. That requires education. That is another... By nature the woman's body is different from man's.

Caitya-guru: Womans are subordinate.

Prabhupāda: Not subordinate actually. The occupations are different. It does not mean... That is another mistake. Just like the leg is walking and the head is directing, so although the occupation is different, both of them are important. We require the head and leg also. If simply head is there, if there is no leg, then who will walk? This is the understanding. Not equal. Everyone must have his separate duties to serve the whole. That is the arrangement. This is real understanding.

Just before the portion that Kaunteya cited, Śrīla Prabhupāda makes the following remark (bolding added):

Prabhupāda: Yes. And that is Kṛṣṇa consciousness. [break] They are in equal right, then... Nowadays, of course, they are thinking like that, that man should remain independent, and they'll have homosex, **and the woman also independent**, and they will make some... This is most immoral things.

The bolded text is an oblique but nevertheless unmistakable reference to *Manu-saṁhitā* 9.3 (*na strī svātantryam ārhati*). And with regard to Śrīla Prabhupāda's mention of his television interview in Chicago, where he was directly challenged on his position against granting equal rights to women, prior discussions about that also refer to this same *śloka*. It is the basis of Śrīla Prabhupāda's opposition to equal rights between men and women, and it is the basis of his opposition to

women in positions of leadership. And it is *śāstra*—perfect, authoritative, and injunctive.

And just after the portion Kaunteya quotes, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s addresses the comparative differences between men and women. He clarifies that men and women should follow their prescribed roles and duties, not that the leg is performing the duties of the head. Similarly, women should not aspire to perform men’s duties. In any case, the context of the excerpt given by Kaunteya suggests that it is definitely not an unequivocal endorsement of women in responsible leadership positions.

In the same section, here is the third excerpt given by Kaunteya:

[Kaunteya:] Srila Prabhupada also approved of women assuming responsible administrative posts within ISKCON:

Mrs. Wax: Could a woman be a temple president?

Prabhupada: Yes, why not? (Room Conversation, Chicago, 5 July 1975)

Within that conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Wax, just before and after the portion that Kaunteya quoted, Śrīla Prabhupāda also emphasized that women must never be independent from father, husband or sons:

Mrs. Wax: But she can never be first class unless she has a first-class husband.

Prabhupāda: No, she is first class by following faithfully husband. And if the husband is first class, then woman is first class.

Mrs. Wax: Could a woman be a temple president?

Prabhupāda: Yes, why not?

Mrs. Wax: Glad to hear it.

Prabhupāda: **But because women are less intelligent, they should remain dependent on first-class father, first-class husband and first-class son. Then she is first class. That is the injunction. Woman should remain dependent in childhood upon first-class father, in youthhood upon first-class husband and in old age upon first-class son. Woman is never independent. If she becomes independent, her life is not very good. She must agree to remain dependent on first-class father, first-class husband and first-class son—three stages.**

Again, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s reference to *Manu-samhitā* is omitted—constituting yet another instance of confirmation bias.

Moreover, just a few days after the conversation with Mr. and Mrs. Wax, in a room conversation just after the 9th July 1975 television interview, Śrīla Prabhupāda explicitly justified his controversial remarks on the basis of *śāstra*.

Prabhupāda: Very good. [pause] But I am not speaking of my experience. **When we speak, we speak from the śāstra. So this woman's in..., dependence is described in Manu-saṁhitā.** And there are many instances. Just like Kuntī. Kuntī was not ordinary woman. She was very learned, exalted woman.

We do not know whether Kaunteya’s decision to exclude Śrīla Prabhupāda’s own references to śāstra was an oversight or deliberate. We would like to be charitable and err on the side of attributing it to oversight. However, the frequency and regularity of these omissions gives rise to a valid and reasonable doubt—were these exclusions deliberate? Regardless, Kaunteya will have to account for them—either to correct his initial interpretation or to explain why he thinks the references are irrelevant. But for Kaunteya to let the serial omissions stand without correction and not bring his interpretation of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements in line with the śāstra that Śrīla Prabhupāda quotes would amount to a half-hen acceptance of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s authority.

Is philosophical pragmatism a solution?

Since a central thesis of Kaunteya’s book is that Śrīla Prabhupāda has “absorbed some of the outlooks predominant in his cultural environment, his historical period,”⁹¹ and that he “might have imbibed certain cultural conditionings and might have assimilated certain aesthetic leanings tainted by racial prejudice,”⁹² it is only right for us to inquire as to whether Kaunteya’s own critique of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements is tainted by his own mundane conditioning.

In this regard, Kaunteya seems to favor a pragmatic approach to dealing with some of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s śāstric statements. And he seems to consider that their effect on others is the primary criterion in deciding what should be changed or deleted. In this kind of argument, the actual truth of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements is irrelevant; all that matters is their effect on others. If Kaunteya himself is culturally conditioned, is there any aspect of Western thought and culture that could predispose him to thinking in such a radically pragmatic way?

It turns out that there is. In the West, there is an influential category of philosophies that come under the name of *Consequentialism*. Included in this group are Utilitarianism (Bentham), Consequentialism (Mill), Pragmatism (Pierce, James, Dewey), Instrumentalism (Dewey), and innumerable modern, lesser-known variants. Their common feature is the significant weight they give to consequences in evaluating the ethical and practical value of actions.

⁹¹ TQDA 257.

⁹² TQDA 196.

Even if one has not read a single word of any of these philosophies, their influence is nevertheless widespread. So, it is possible to acquire certain habits of thought peculiar to these philosophies merely by encountering them in everyday life. To some extent, expressions like “the ends justify the means,” “the greater good,” “cost-benefit analysis,” and “doing what’s best for everyone” have roots in one or another kind of consequentialism. So, even someone unaware of consequentialism may nonetheless act upon their precepts without being aware of their origin.

One kind of consequentialism that we present in some further detail is Pragmatism. We present it with the aim of explaining some part of Kaunteya Prabhu’s pragmatic argument for changing or deleting certain statements made by Śrīla Prabhupāda. Other kinds of consequentialist philosophies could have been picked and probably would have succeeded equally. Again, without claiming that Kaunteya is explicitly an advocate of Pragmatism, we offer it only as a possible explanation for some of Kaunteya’s radical proposals, in order to better explain why they are being contemplated at all.

In his book *Pragmatism: A New Name for some Old Ways of Thinking* (1907), the pioneering psychologist and philosopher William James cites Charles Sanders Pierce’s 1878 definition of the Pragmatic Principle:

To develop a thought’s meaning, we need only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance.⁹³

In other words, the meaning of a thought lies in its practical consequences. Our understanding of an object—whether it is a physical object, an idea, a concept, or any entity we can mentally engage with—is determined by the possible effects it can have on our actions and experiences.

To explain what Pierce means by saying that a thought’s “conduct is for us its sole significance,” James gives the following example: If a theistic explanation for the origin of the world and an atheistic explanation were to be judged, and each advocate succeeded in his presentation, then both positions would be

⁹³ William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York: Longmans Green & Co. 1907) 46. Full quote: “To develop a thought’s meaning, we need only determine what conduct it is fitted to produce: that conduct is for us its sole significance. And the tangible fact at the root of all our thought distinctions, however subtle, is that there is no one of them so fine as to consist in anything but a possible difference of practice. To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object, then, we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve—what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as that conception has positive significance at all.”

considered equivalent because their outcomes are the same. Since they both arrive at the same conclusion—the world as we see it today—both explanations have the same “cash value.”

As per James, “True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot. . . . Truth happens to an idea. It becomes true, is made true by events.”⁹⁴ Thus, the pragmatic theory of truth itself, as expected, is concerned solely with outcomes.

According to this theory, these two ideas are equivalent because their outcomes are the same:

- Something Śrīla Prabhupāda said should be removed from his books, because modern science has proven otherwise.
- Something Śrīla Prabhupāda said should be removed from his books, because it is upsetting too many people.

Even though the criteria for each statement is different (evaluating its correspondence with scientific consensus as opposed to evaluating the emotional response from many people), both ideas have the same consequence and therefore have the same “cash-value.” From the perspective of the pragmatic theory of truth, one idea is considered no different from the other idea.

So, if Kaunteya’s mode of thought is pragmatic, when he says,

“Even if, for argument’s sake, we could substantiate that “women are generally not very intelligent and therefore not trustworthy,” do we really need to say it at the beginning of our most important book? That sentence – and similar ones – has a poisonous, radioactive effect on our outreach.”⁹⁵

Kaunteya’s statement would be equivalent to saying that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statement is untrue or mistaken in some way—but without a need to say it.

However, Kaunteya indirectly suggests his factual position. Regarding Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statement (*Bhagavad-gītā* 1.40, purport), he offers us these thoughts through a fictional “average reader”:

“And, by the way, who the heck is this Cāṅkya Paṇḍita guy anyway and why should I listen to his nonsense?! Who wrote this commentary?! Why should I continue to read this rabidly sexist book?!”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ James 201.

⁹⁵ TQDA 621.

⁹⁶ TQDA 53.

Śrīla Prabhupāda accepted Cāṇakya as a Vedic authority, which is why he often quotes him in the first place. Kaunteya seems to have a problem with that, which in turn could only mean Kaunteya has a problem with Śrīla Prabhupāda’s judgment even on matters of Vedic authority, *śāstra*.

Kaunteya’s pragmatic way of channeling his apparent difficulty in accepting some of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s *śāstra*-based statements is to argue that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s own statements will turn away millions of people who would otherwise become devotees. And if these statements are going to offend so many people, then better to change or remove them. And this is the same conclusion that would have been reached by saying Śrīla Prabhupāda was mistaken, while yet avoiding the stigma of openly criticizing a pure devotee.

Overall, the idea that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements should be changed or removed from his books if they are perceived to be hurting people is dangerous. Such truths will ever be lost because they will never be taught or recorded again. In only one generation, that knowledge will just be lost. As Lord Kṛṣṇa says in *Bhagavad-gītā* (4.2):

*evaṁ paramparā-prāptam
imaṁ rājarṣayo viduḥ
sa kāleneha mahatā
yogo naṣṭaḥ parantapa*

“This supreme science was thus received through the chain of disciplic succession, and the saintly kings understood it in that way. But in course of time the succession was broken, and therefore the science as it is appears to be lost.”

We will be accused of having deleted truths received from Śrīla Prabhupāda in our *paramparā*, because we will factually be guilty of that crime.

Is it worse to offend our materialistic enemies than to offend our virtuous *ācāryas*?

But if we maintain Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements as they are, despite the criticism raised against them, because they are truth, people will one day or another realize that they are true, and they will be able to appreciate Śrīla Prabhupāda (and our integrity for actually representing him faithfully) much more and change their own lives and others’ lives to be based on the truth. This we see happening so many times, even now. Just ask the book distributors. How

many times it happens that a person takes Śrīla Prabhupāda’s book, reads it, and then leaves it. But later, when some incident happens in his life and he remembers what he read, he finally surrenders.

Reviewing the theory that pure devotees sometimes make mistakes

At the beginning of his book, Kaunteya initially argued that because *śāstra* is the central *pramāṇa*, when the guru says things not specifically mentioned in the *śāstras*, “we may take those views as . . . honest (but potentially mistaken) attempts at clarifying facts and events,” and which cannot be granted “the same authority of scriptural truths.”⁹⁷

It is on this basis that Kaunteya recommends that ISKCON “would still do well to distance itself from some of the things Srila Prabhupada said, attributing those statements to relative cultural influences, atypical use of words, and incorrect information he received”⁹⁸ and remain “cautious about what he spoke that didn't come directly from Vedic or mystical revelation.”⁹⁹

This policy, however, breaks down when what Śrīla Prabhupāda spoke came directly from “Vedic or mystical revelation.” Actually, everything that Śrīla Prabhupāda says has its basis in Vedic literature. “A devotee *Bhāgavata* is as good as the book *Bhāgavata* because the devotee *Bhāgavata* leads his life in terms of the book *Bhāgavata*. . .”¹⁰⁰ In both words and *sadācāra*, the devotee *Bhāgavata* represents Vedic literature. So even when it is not apparent that the devotee *Bhāgavata*’s words are based on *śāstra*, it is understood that they are. Thus Kaunteya’s policy breaks down in every case, but this is more apparent when Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements that Kaunteya considers objectionable are also self-evidently based on *śāstra*.

For example, Kaunteya attributes perceived sexism in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements to the following taxonomy of explanations (which may simply represent his personal doubts):

To conclude: some of the things Srila Prabhupada said certainly sound as sexist, as stereotyping women in a negative way. Some of the statements can be explained by their context; others can be considered descriptions of Vedic cultural standards suitable for people of other times. Other statements may not be readily justified in the literal form they were presented. These can be taken as hyperbolic pronouncements; as informal generalizations; as due to inaccurate information he

⁹⁷ TQDA 44. Kaunteya’s statement is quoted in full in the Viśaya section of this paper on page 1.

⁹⁸ TQDA 358.

⁹⁹ TQDA 359.

¹⁰⁰ SB 1.2.18 purport.

received; as expressions of Srila Prabhupada's daring, fiery and defiant style; or as unhappy choices of words.¹⁰¹

But too many of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s frequent statements about women that some criticize as sexist cannot be explained away by this list. For example, in the *Bhāgavatam* narration of Goddess Pārvatī cursing Mahārāja Citraketu, Śrīla Prabhupāda says the *Bhāgavatam* pastime demonstrates that “woman is always less intelligent than man”:

Here is a difference between male and female that exists even in the higher statuses of life—in fact, even between Lord Śiva and his wife. Lord Śiva could understand Citraketu very nicely, but Pārvatī could not. Thus even in the higher statuses of life there is a difference between the understanding of a male and that of a female. It may be clearly said that the understanding of a woman is always inferior to the understanding of a man. In the Western countries there is now agitation to the effect that man and woman should be considered equal, but from this verse it appears that woman is always less intelligent than man.¹⁰²

There is no hyperbole in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statement. It also cannot be understood differently by its context, since the *mukhya-vṛtti* (direct meaning) produces coherent meaning. Interpretation is required when the direct meaning is not coherent; interpretation is not to be attempted when a statement is already clear.

Kaunteya also does not attempt to interpret Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements according to their context *when he thinks* their instruction is clear. For example, in complaining about objections to creating female *dīkṣā-gurus*, he says (bolding emphasis added):

It's unfortunate that the International Society for Krishna Consciousness counts among its affiliates members who openly disregard the **direct and unambiguous** instructions of the Founder-Acarya, such as this one: “I want that all of my spiritual sons and daughters will inherit this title of Bhaktivedanta. . .”.¹⁰³

However, the fact that his book is fundamentally about correct and incorrect ways of reading Śrīla Prabhupāda and yet lacks even a semblance of a sufficiently rigorous introduction to the topic of how and when direct and indirect readings are to be applied shows his lack of concern for the very thing he writes about. The standard rules explicated and used by our *ācāryas* are to be respected in determining when direct or indirect readings are to be applied to a text. But

¹⁰¹ TQDA 602.

¹⁰² *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 6.17.34-35 purport.

¹⁰³ TQDA 530.

Kaunteya’s policy of when to apply direct versus indirect readings seems to be guided primarily by pragmatic concerns and not as much by authoritative rules.

According to rules of interpretation accepted by our *ācāryas*, the interpretation of a text according to its context (*prakaraṇa*), as a type of *lakṣana-vṛtti* (indirect meaning), is resorted to only when the *mukhya-vṛtti* (direct meaning, denotation) and the *lakṣana-vṛttis* of *liṅga* (connotation) and *vākyā* (grammatical inferences) also do not produce coherent meaning. Only then can one resort to context (*prakaraṇa*) to attempt to produce a coherent meaning.¹⁰⁴

Moreover, since Śrīla Prabhupāda uses the *Bhāgavatam* pastime of Mahārāja Citraketu being misunderstood by Pārvatī Devī as evidence in criticizing modern agitation for equality between men and women, his statement also cannot be relegated to a condition valid in some bygone age but no longer so today. None of the other labels in Kaunteya’s taxonomy can soften Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statement without producing an interpretation that would be more remarkable for its speciousness than its clarity. In short, neither this sentence nor its paragraph can be spun in a way that would satisfy the readership Kaunteya wants to placate.

This turns out to be true of most of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements that Kaunteya criticizes. To revisit the 64 ounces of male brain versus 34 ounces female brain statistic, in light of the above paragraph from his *Bhāgavatam* purport, it is apparent that Prabhupāda’s conclusion did not depend on the material science he had been quoting. Even though he cites it as an “actual, scientific fact,” as if he accepted it on that basis alone, the strength of Prabhupāda’s assertion (that women are less-intelligent) actually rests on the authority of *śabda*, because *śabda* alone is always absolutely flawless.

Śrīla Prabhupāda himself explains that the standard of evidence is *śabda-pramāṇa*—the *śāstra* ultimately—and that evidence from *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* is there to help us understand what the *śāstra* says. So, when Śrīla Prabhupāda uses evidences other than *śabda*, he is utilizing the policy of *śākhā-candra-nyāya*:

Our authority is sastra. We give analogy for the general mass of people who have no faith in sastra. Analogy is not proof; sastra is proof. Foolish people cannot understand or accept, so we use analogy. The conclusion is not drawn from the analogy but from the sastra. We don't use a combination of logic and authority, we use authority. Logic

¹⁰⁴ For an introduction to the topic, see Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī’s *Tattva-sandarbhā, Sarva-saṁvādinī* commentary, *anuccheda* 11 (para 54) (2019 ed., trans. Gopīparāṇadhana Prabhu) on page 307 - 308.

we use to convince someone who doesn't accept the authority. The basic principle is authority. Vedas say that cowdung is pure and we accept it. There is no logic, but when we practically use it we see that it is correct. The logic of using analogy is called in the sastra “sakha candra nyaya.” It is easier to focus on the moon through the branches of a tree. The moon is great distance away, and you say that it is just through the branches. So you can focus more easily on the moon because 2 points joined make a straight line. So focusing on the nearby object helps us to focus on the far-away object.¹⁰⁵

For one example, regardless of what the scientists now say about animals and homosexuality, *śāstra* is clear that homosexual sex is a punishable crime, which indicates that it is a degrading sinful activity that is meant to be avoided by anyone seeking auspiciousness.¹⁰⁶

But what about things about which the *sāstras* seem to say nothing at all? Without the support of *śāstra*, is even a pure devotee not susceptible to receiving wrong or erroneous information? In such cases, it would appear that only the characteristic of omniscience—being all-knowing, a characteristic only God possesses—can ensure that one will not commit mistakes even in matters about which the *śāstras* say nothing. It thus appears that a pure devotee, who is not omniscient, is therefore capable of being mistaken on some matters of perception and understanding.

Kaunteya apparently embraces this conclusion. He says:

So, "ācārya is not God, omniscient"; he may therefore receive some imprecise information but not recognize it as mistaken. That doesn't affect his spiritual status as pure representative of God. The ācārya's greatness is not diminished because of his having occasionally assimilated misinformation on certain material phenomena. These are marginal and infrequent occurrences, which don't affect the truthfulness or correctness of his teachings of the sastra.¹⁰⁷

The basic problem, however, is our own subjectivity. Due to our own insufficient self-realization or insufficient knowledge of the *śāstras*, it may appear that an *ācārya* might have some mistaken idea or has said something in error—especially when quoting non-*śāstric* sources as evidence. But “a person who is

¹⁰⁵ Letter to Satsvarupa dated 21 October 1975.

¹⁰⁶ References to homosexual sex being punishable are given in *Manu-saṁhitā* 8.369 – 370, *Yājñavalkya-smṛti* 2.293, *Kauṭilya Artha-śāstra* 4.12.20 – 23, 4.13.40 – 41.

¹⁰⁷ TQDA 43.

liberated acharya and guru cannot commit any mistake.”¹⁰⁸ It is therefore the verdict of *śāstra* that that the words of a pure devotee are always true.¹⁰⁹

The idea that an *ācārya* “occasionally assimilated misinformation on certain material phenomena” is a misperception. Sometimes scorpions lay their eggs in rice, and to ordinary vision it seems like scorpions come from rice. Similarly, just because Śrīla Prabhupāda sometimes quotes non-*śāstric* sources does not mean his view is based on them and not on *śāstra*.

For example:

Reporter: When I interviewed you perhaps five or six years ago, it was before there were reports of the astronauts landing on the moon, and I asked you at that time if you thought..., what you thought about it, and you said that, as I recall, that they would not be able to land or explore, because spirits or creatures that lived on the moon would not allow it. The reports of course said that indeed people did land and explore and return safely. I understand you have further thoughts about that [laughter] and you've even written a lot about it. I wonder if you could tell me, not at great length perhaps, but what your belief about those events is.

Prabhupāda: Yes. From the... That question I was discussing the other day. In the common sense, question, that all over the world, they accept Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, in this way Saturday last. So why these arrangement, Sunday first and Monday second? And nobody could reply it. But as a layman I can conclude that sun planet is first and the moon planet is next. So if you cannot go to the sun planet, which is ninety-three million miles away, how you can go to the moon planet within four days? Nobody could answer me. Can you answer?

Reporter: Well, I don't think it's worth the answer now, but I'm wondering what your response is.

Prabhupāda: But this is the arrangement all over the world. Sunday first, Monday second, then Tuesday. So sun, moon, Mars, Jupiter, in this way. Last Saturn. This is the arrangement of the planets. So if this is the arrangement of the planets, moon-day next to..., moon next to sun, and if you cannot go to the sun, how can you go to the moon?¹¹⁰

This illustrates the perfection of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s words, because there is no question that his view is based on *śāstra*. Yet he cites the order of days of the week as evidence that the Moon is further from the Earth than the Sun, which to some educated non-devotees seems irrelevant and quaint. But Śrīla

¹⁰⁸ Letter to Janardana dated 26 April 1968.

¹⁰⁹ *bhrama, pramāda, vipralipsā, karaṇāpāṭava ārṣa-vijñā-vākye nāhi doṣa ei saba*, “Mistakes, illusions, cheating and defective perception do not occur in the sayings of the authoritative sages.” *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Ādī-līlā*, 2.86 trans.

¹¹⁰ Room conversation with reporter, 4 June 1976, Los Angeles.

Prabhupāda is certainly aware that his own understanding is based on *śāstra*—not the conventional order of the days of the week.

Whether the connection with *śāstra* is apparent or not, the views of a person *Bhāgavata*—Śrīla Prabhupāda’s views—are always based on *śāstra*. Otherwise, given the *uttama-adhikārī* definition given in the *Bhāgavatam* (11.2.45), how could such a person see everything situated within the Lord and see the Lord within everything? There can be no mistakes in such a devotee’s actions or statements.

A “theology of embodiment”

Because of non-acceptance of the principle that a pure devotee cannot commit any mistake, Kaunteya feels that ISKCON needs a “theology of embodiment”:

What remains to be defined: was he infallible in the literal sense of never making a mistake or of never incorporating imperfect data in his outlook? It seems that we need a “theology of embodiment,” a coherent philosophical explanation of how liberated, empowered personalities such as Srila Prabhupada, are affected by their inhabiting prakritic (material) physical and psychic tabernacles. Such theology, I believe, would have to preserve the respect for such great souls as perfected beings, revering them as divine emissaries, while detailing how their dwelling in material bodies and minds may impose certain circumstantial limitations.¹¹¹

In other words, Kaunteya hopes to explain how a flawless person has flaws.

So, presented here is a “theology of embodiment” for a pure devotee:

As Śrīla Prabhupāda’s rejection of the American moon landings shows, when *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* conflicts with *śabda*, *śabda* is to be accepted over the other two. The cognitions from *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* must then be understood in a way compatible with *śabda*. Śrīla Prabhupāda said that since the *śāstra* describes the moon planet as being full of vegetation and people, the American astronauts could not have landed on the Moon—they must have landed somewhere else. Furthermore, there cannot be any of the four defects of a conditioned soul in the body of a pure devotee. But if that is true, then how do we account for the apparent manifestation of mistakes in them? One answer is that these “mistakes” are arranged directly by the Lord for the welfare of all, and they cannot be equated with the defects of a conditioned soul.

Just consider Parīkṣit Mahārāja’s perception that Śamīka Ṛṣi disrespected him by not receiving him properly and not giving him water. But the reality was that

¹¹¹ TQDA 36.

Śamīka Ṛṣi was in a meditative trance and did not even notice that Parīkṣit Mahārāja had entered his *āśrama*. So, on the part of Parīkṣit Mahārāja, is this an instance of *bhrama*? *Bhrama* is defined by Śrīla Baladeva Vidyābhūṣana as *teṣv atasmimś tad-buddhir bhramaḥ, yena sthāṇau puruṣa-buddhiḥ*, “acceptance of an object to be different from what it is—e.g., mistaking a pillar to be a person.”¹¹² Has Parīkṣit Mahārāja perceived within Śamīka Ṛṣi the intent of willful disrespect where no disrespect was actually shown? Is this not an instance of *bhrama* in the body of a pure devotee?

The answer to this is that it is not, for such devotees are always under the direct protection and control of the Lord. In this case, it was the arrangement of the Lord so that the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* could be spoken. Similarly, his grandfather Arjuna’s so-called display of ignorance at the onset of the Battle of Kurukṣetra was not ignorance but an arrangement by the Lord so that the *Bhagavad-gītā* could be spoken.

The Supreme Lord is so kind to His pure devotees that in proper time He calls such devotees up to Him and thus creates an auspicious circumstance for the devotee. Mahārāja Parīkṣit was a pure devotee of the Lord, and there was no reason for him to become extremely fatigued, hungry and thirsty because a devotee of the Lord never becomes perturbed by such bodily demands. But by the desire of the Lord, even such a devotee can become apparently fatigued and thirsty just to create a situation favorable for his renunciation of worldly activities.¹¹³

So, even if a devotee appears to be suffering from bodily or mental distress, that is only an appearance, not the reality.

That is also why, on account of being fully Kṛṣṇa conscious, great devotees like Parīkṣit and Arjuna are always considered to be free from any illusion or ignorance, even if they sometimes appear to be bewildered.

In this verse Arjuna is referred to as Guḍākeśa. *Guḍākā* means sleep, and one who conquers sleep is called *guḍākeśa*. Sleep also means ignorance. So Arjuna conquered both sleep and ignorance because of his friendship with Kṛṣṇa. As a great devotee of Kṛṣṇa, he could not forget Kṛṣṇa even for a moment, because that is the nature of a devotee. Either in waking or in sleep, a devotee of the Lord can never be free from thinking of Kṛṣṇa’s name, form, qualities and pastimes. Thus a devotee of Kṛṣṇa can conquer both sleep and ignorance simply by thinking of Kṛṣṇa constantly. This is called Kṛṣṇa consciousness, or *samādhi*.¹¹⁴

¹¹² See [definition](#) in section “A pure devotee is free from the four defects of conditioned souls.”

¹¹³ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.18.24 – 25, purport.

¹¹⁴ *Bhagavad-gītā* 1.24, purport.

Thus, when Śrīla Prabhupāda himself presents such behavior as his own flaw, those who see through eyes of knowledge understand that he is merely expressing his Vaiṣṇava humility. Likewise, Kuntī Mahārāṇi considers herself to be a less-intelligent woman, and even the greatest of all Kṛṣṇa’s devotees—the gopīs of Vraja-dhama—call themselves ordinary householders. Such perfect devotees should never be considered to have any defect.

And we also must assume that there is some higher purpose of the Lord involved:

Sometimes He creates an awkward situation, and the devotee becomes obliged to renounce all worldly affairs. The devotee can understand by the signal of the Lord, but others take it to be unfavorable and frustrating. Mahārāja Parīkṣit was to become the medium for the revelation of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* by Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa, as his grandfather Arjuna was the medium for the *Bhagavad-gītā*. Had Arjuna not been taken up with an illusion of family affection by the will of the Lord, the *Bhagavad-gītā* would not have been spoken by the Lord Himself for the good of all concerned. Similarly, had Mahārāja Parīkṣit not been fatigued, hungry and thirsty at this time, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* would not have been spoken by Śrīla Śukadeva Gosvāmī, the prime authority of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*.¹¹⁵

We may not know what is the exact purpose of the Lord for creating such appearances of hunger, thirst, fatigue, or illusion in the body of a pure devotee, but it is enough for us to know that it is directly according to the Lord’s will.

Such arrangements by the Lord are often far too subtle for ordinary persons to detect; an example is Indra’s killing Vṛtrāsura (who was actually not demon at all, but rather a pure devotee). On the face of it, one may understand—and even *śāstra* may portray—that because Indra killed a *brāhmaṇa* and Vaiṣṇava, he had to suffer the expected reactions for that sin and offence. However, Indra’s action was neither his sin nor his offence, because it was simply Kṛṣṇa’s desired arrangement. Thus the sages also approved of it, as they wanted to relieve Vṛtra of his “demon” incarnation (Jīva Gosvāmī’s *Krama-sandarbhā*, 2.1.11). Likewise, the actions of the Lord’s devotees are inscrutable even to learned scholars, what to speak of aspiring neophytes.

Such pure devotees are under the control of the Lord’s internal potency, his *daivī-prakṛti*:

¹¹⁵ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.18.24 – 25, purport.

*mahātmānas tu mām pārtha
daivīm prakṛtim āśritāḥ
bhajanty ananya-manaso
jñātvā bhūtādim avyayam*

Translation

O son of Pṛthā, those who are not deluded, the great souls, are under the protection of the divine nature. They are fully engaged in devotional service because they know Me as the Supreme Personality of Godhead, original and inexhaustible.

Purport

In this verse the description of the *mahātmā* is clearly given. The first sign of the *mahātmā* is that he is already situated in the divine nature. He is not under the control of material nature. And how is this effected? That is explained in the Seventh Chapter: one who surrenders unto the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, at once becomes freed from the control of material nature. That is the qualification. One can become free from the control of material nature as soon as he surrenders his soul to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.¹¹⁶

The so-called defects in the body of a pure devotee are not products of *māyā*, the illusory energy. They are instead under the control of the Lord’s *daivī-śakti*. Hence, there is no defect in the body of a pure devotee.

Just this much evidence should have been enough to settle doubts in the matter of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s so-called mistakes. There can be no defects in the body or words of a pure devotee. And Kaunteya’s own book quotes sufficient *pramāṇas* from *śāstra* to have reached the same conclusion. But he sets them all aside as he continues to allege that Śrīla Prabhupāda is a pure devotee and yet still somehow susceptible to the four defects of a conditioned soul. Without acknowledging that he cannot prove his assertion by standard means, Kaunteya appeals for some “theology” that might support it better than he has. But his is a self-contradictory position, like that of a hare’s horn, for his misunderstanding does not originate from bona fide gurus, *sādhus*, or *śāstras*.

¹¹⁶ *Bhagavad-gītā* 9.13, translation and purport.

Because Kaunteya and other interested parties have been making vigorous propaganda that the pure devotee is subject to the defects of a conditioned soul, it is necessary to provide further *pramāṇas* from many different sources in order to conclusively settle any further doubts.

Throughout the *Rāmāyaṇa*, we find Śrī Rāma and Śrī Lakṣmaṇa behaving like humans and even exhibiting the defects of human beings. For instance, we find Lakṣmaṇa saying this:

*kausalyā caiva rājā ca
tathaiva jananī mama
nāśamse yadi jīvanti
sarve te śarvarīm imām*

“I don’t think that Queen Kausalyā, the king and My mother will continue to live. If all of them do live, they [will do so only] till tonight.”¹¹⁷

But it did not happen that way at all. This does not mean that these *viṣṇu-tattvas* are filled with *bhrama* or *pramāda*. They are just behaving like defective humans.

Those in *premā* are entirely in *śuddha-sattva*, the platform wherein one has direct knowledge of Lord Kṛṣṇa. As per this statement by Lord Śiva:

*sattvaṁ viśuddhaṁ vasudeva-śabditaṁ
yad īyate tatra pumān apāvṛtaḥ
sattve ca tasmin bhagavān vāsudevo
hy adhokṣajo me namaśā vidhīyate*

“I am always engaged in offering obeisances to Lord Vāsudeva in pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Kṛṣṇa consciousness is always pure consciousness, in which the Supreme Personality of Godhead, known as Vāsudeva, is revealed without any covering.”¹¹⁸

In fact, Lord Śiva is himself a fine example of someone who appears to exhibit defective behavior even though he is himself on the platform of *śuddha-sattva*.

¹¹⁷ *Rāmāyaṇa* 2.51.14.

¹¹⁸ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 4.3.23.

Being fully conscious of Kṛṣṇa also means being fully conscious of Kṛṣṇa’s material energies. One cannot argue that a person in *premā* only has spotless knowledge of Kṛṣṇa, but not spotless knowledge of this world, for when you directly see Kṛṣṇa, you also see His energies, correctly:

*bhakti-yogena manasi
samyak praṇihite 'male
apaśyat puruṣam pūrṇam
māyām ca tad-apāśrayām*

“Thus he fixed his mind, perfectly engaging it by linking it in devotional service [*bhakti-yoga*] without any tinge of materialism, and thus he saw the Absolute Personality of Godhead along with His external energy, which was under full control.”¹¹⁹

This *śloka* shows that the pure devotee perfectly sees the Lord’s material energy along with Kṛṣṇa.

As to why some people have no problem with anything that Śrīla Prabhupāda did or said and why others simply cannot accept some of the things he said, that has more to do with one’s state of faithful surrender than anything else. In his translation and purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 3.2.10, Śrīla Prabhupāda says:

*devasya māyayā sprṣṭā
ye cānyad asad-āśritāḥ
bhrāmyate dhīr na tad-vākyair
ātmany uptātmano harau*

Translation

Under no circumstances can the words of persons bewildered by the illusory energy of the Lord deviate the intelligence of those who are completely surrendered souls.

Purport

Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead according to all the evidences of the *Vedas*. He is accepted by all *ācāryas*, including Śrīpāda Śaṅkarācārya. But when He was present in the world, different classes of men accepted Him

¹¹⁹ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 1.7.4.

differently, and therefore their calculations of the Lord were also different. Generally, persons who had faith in the revealed scriptures accepted the Lord as He is, and all of them merged into great bereavement when the Lord disappeared from the world. In the First Canto we have already discussed the lamentation of Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira, to whom the disappearance of Lord Kṛṣṇa was almost intolerable up to the end of their lives.

The Yādavas were only partially cognizant of the Lord, but they are also glorious because they had the opportunity to associate with the Lord, who acted as the head of their family, and they also rendered the Lord intimate service. The Yādavas and other devotees of the Lord are different from those who wrongly calculated Him to be an ordinary human personality. Such persons are certainly bewildered by the illusory energy. They are hellish and are envious of the Supreme Lord. The illusory energy acts very powerfully on them because in spite of their elevated mundane education, such persons are faithless and are infected by the mentality of atheism. They are always very eager to establish that Lord Kṛṣṇa was an ordinary man who was killed by a hunter due to His many impious acts in plotting to kill the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Jarāsandha, the demoniac kings of the earth. Such persons have no faith in the statement of the Bhagavad-gītā that the Lord is unaffected by the reactions of work: *na mām karmāṇi limpanti*. According to the atheistic point of view, Lord Kṛṣṇa’s family, the Yadu dynasty, was vanquished due to being cursed by the *brāhmaṇas* for the sins committed by Kṛṣṇa in killing the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, etc. All these blasphemies do not touch the heart of the devotees of the Lord because they know perfectly well what is what. Their intelligence regarding the Lord is never disturbed. But those who are disturbed by the statements of the *asuras* are also condemned. That is what Uddhava meant in this verse.

In other words, according to the state of one’s own consciousness, one will see the Lord and His pure devotees in different ways. That is why the atheists were convinced that Lord Kṛṣṇa was killed by the arrow of a hunter—and why His pure devotees never accepted that. With Śrīla Prabhupāda, too, some want to see him as a conditioned soul—even if they sometimes say they do not—and others want to see him as a pure devotee.

Saṅgati (application)

Because Śrīla Prabhupāda is a uniquely qualified pure devotee and unprecedentedly empowered *ācārya*, it follows that his words never have the four defects of a conditioned soul. Hence, Kṛṣṇa instructs that the *ācārya* should never be subjected to criticism of any kind.¹²⁰

However, Kaunteya Prabhu says,

In some cases (and I emphasize: "in some cases"; not in all cases) we could and should simply say: "Those were ideas Śrīla Prabhupāda acquired in his earthly embodied experience from problematic sources or were expressions of his unconventional use of terminology; we do not identify with such statements; they don't constitute official positions of ISKCON." And then we should move on, remaining loyal to his spiritual, universal scriptural teachings, but cautious about what he spoke that didn't come directly from Vedic or mystical revelation.¹²¹

It certainly sounds like Kaunteya here advises committing *gurv-aparādha* and then “moving on” without guilt; he attempts to rationalize this by using a neo-Advaitin dichotomy that enables one to “surrender” subjectively.

But ISKCON should present Śrīla Prabhupāda in just the same way Śrīla Prabhupāda presented his own Guru Mahārāja, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura—as “a Vaikuṅṭha man.” And Śrīla Prabhupāda knew very well that his own Guru Mahārāja was quite controversial—much more so than our own Prabhupāda was, in fact. And Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura himself presented his own Guru Mahārāja as having had a spotless understanding of the material world—even though his guru was illiterate. On 1 November, 1930, on the disappearance festival of Śrīla Gaurakiśora dāsa Bābājī, Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura's homage to his Guru Mahārāja declared:

¹²⁰ Śrīmad-bhāgavatam, 11.17.27

¹²¹ TQDA 359.

śravaṇa ka’rte ha’be baṭe, kintu ki śravaṇa ka’rte habe? skūla kaleje ta’ āmarā aneka śravaṇa ka’re thāki; kintu yān’rā āmādera kāche ei sakala śravaṇīya viṣaya kīrtana karena, tān’rā ke? tāndera ki vyārāmaṭā bhāla ha’yeche? bhrama, pramāda, karaṇāpāṭava, vipralipsā—mānavera yeguli svābhāvika doṣa āche, sei doṣa thākte tān’rā kirūpe svataḥ vā parataḥ ālocanā karbena? yini e sakala doṣa ha’te sampūrṇa-bhāve mukta tān’ra āśraya vyatīta ki prakāre āmarā bhramādi-nirmukta satya-kathā śravaṇa ka’rte pāri? yini bhagavat-pāda-padmera sarvadā anuśīlana karena, tān’ra ānugatyamayī sevā dvārā tini yān’ra sevā karena, tān’ra anusandhāna pāoyā yete pāre, anya bhāve pāoyā ye’te pāre na.

“We should hear, indeed, but what are the topics worth hearing about? We hear a lot in schools and colleges, but who are those who speak to us the subjects to be heard? Have they themselves become cured? *Bhrama, pramāda, karaṇāpāṭava, vipralipsā*—these are the inherent human defects. How will these teachers judge whether they themselves have those defects—by analyzing it themselves or by discussing it with others? How can we possibly hear truthful infallible words without attaining the shelter of those who are completely free from these defects? We can approach such persons—who always perform devotional service to the lotus feet of the Supreme Personality of Godhead—only by faithfully following their example and serving them, there is no other way.”

*jñāne prayāsam udapāsyā namanta eva
jīvanti san-mukharitām bhavadīya-vārtām
sthāne sthitāḥ śruti-gatām tanu-vān-manobhir
ye prāyaśo ’jita jito ’py asi tais tri-lokyām*

[“Those who, even while remaining situated in their established social positions, throw away the process of speculative knowledge and with their body, words and mind offer all respects to descriptions of Your personality and activities, dedicating their lives to these narrations, which are vibrated by You personally and by Your pure devotees, certainly

conquer Your Lordship, although You are otherwise unconquerable by anyone within the three worlds.”]¹²²

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura criticizes mundane teachers as being unable to free themselves from *bhrama*, *pramāda*, *vipralipsā* and *karṇāpāṭava*—the four defects of a conditioned soul—and then declares that only by hearing from those who are free from such defects can one possibly hear truthful and infallible words. In this address of course, he was especially venerating his Guru Mahārāja as just such a pure devotee.

As Śrīla Prabhupāda says in his purport to *Nectar of Instruction*, text 6:

It is also an offense to consider an empowered Vaiṣṇava an object of disciplinary action. It is offensive to try to give him advice or to correct him. One can distinguish between a neophyte Vaiṣṇava and an advanced Vaiṣṇava by their activities. The advanced Vaiṣṇava is always situated as the spiritual master, and the neophyte is always considered his disciple. The spiritual master must not be subjected to the advice of a disciple, nor should a spiritual master be obliged to take instructions from those who are not his disciples. This is the sum and substance of Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī’s advice in the sixth verse.¹²³

This leaves no room for criticizing a pure devotee. The prohibition is absolute. As such, the only remaining question (in Kaunteya’s mind) is whether or not Śrīla Prabhupāda is a pure devotee. Considering everything stated above about the contents and rhetoric in Kaunteya’s TQDA publication, it appears that Kaunteya’s only possible aim is nourishing and popularizing doubts about Śrīla Prabhupāda’s spiritual status. Every other possibility has already been explored and dismissed as explained above.

According to the *sadācāra* (standard etiquette) prescribed in the *dharmaśāstras*, the guru may not be criticized even if the criticism is warranted.

*guror yatra parivādo
nindā vā'pi pravartate
karṇau tatra pidhātavyau
gantavyaṃ vā tato'nyataḥ*

¹²² Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.14.3.

¹²³ *Nectar of Instruction*, text 6, purport.

“Where there is censure [*parīvāda*, attributing wrongs really committed] or defamation [*nindā*, attributing evils not present] of one’s teacher, one should either close his ears or go elsewhere.”¹²⁴

*parīvādāt kharo bhavati
śvā vai bhavati nindakaḥ
paribhoktā kṛmirbhavati
kīṭo bhavati matsarī*

“Through censure one becomes an ass, and the defamer becomes a dog; he who enjoys it becomes a worm, and he who is envious becomes an insect.”¹²⁵

If even censuring faults actually present in a bona fide guru who may not be a pure devotee is prohibited, then it is even more abominable to censure the pure devotee who is so widely revered as faultless. As already presented at length, such faults in the body or words of a pure devotee are not actual faults. Therefore any criticism of a pure devotee is prohibited; it is *pratikūla*--unfavorable to *bhakti*--not *anukūla*.

For example, consider the implications of this syllogism:

- 1) No pure devotee can be criticized.
- 2) Śrīla Prabhupāda is a pure devotee.
- 3) Therefore, Śrīla Prabhupāda cannot be criticized.

To change Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books in the way that Kaunteya suggests while also following these explicit and unambiguous scriptural prohibitions, one would have to prove definitively (and publicly), that Śrīla Prabhupāda is not a pure devotee. And if Prabhupāda is not a pure devotee, then however pious he might otherwise be considered, his work would nevertheless be demoted to the level of any other speculative philosopher. The words and actions of Śrīla Prabhupāda would come to be considered as *doṣa-pūrṇa*, full of faults.

But if one then says: “No, no. When Prabhupāda quotes *śāstra*, that alone is faultless,” then one has put himself in the position of being able to “fact check” Śrīla Prabhupāda, which implies that one’s own authority is as good as or better

¹²⁴ *Manusmṛti with commentary of Medhātithi*, trans. Gaṅgānātha Jhā (*śloka* 2.200) Accessed on 29 April 2023 at the [Wisdom Library](#)

¹²⁵ *Manusmṛti with commentary of Medhātithi*, trans. Gaṅgānātha Jhā (*śloka* 2.201) Accessed on 29 April 2023 at the [Wisdom Library](#)

than Śrīla Prabhupāda’s. And that attitude leaves no room (or need) for humility. Certainly, one with that mentality cannot accept that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books are the “lawbooks for the next ten-thousand years” and considered to be as good as *śāstra*, like *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, etc.

So, our goal should simply be to properly understand whatever Śrīla Prabhupāda is teaching us—and not to try changing it into whatever we would rather understand.

But even if someone who thinks he can fact-check Śrīla Prabhupāda on *śāstra* were to try to maintain a façade of venerating him, he would also have to corrupt or remove from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books—or even from *śāstra* itself—statements that say a pure devotee cannot be criticized. In other words, to protect a policy of criticizing pure devotees, one must invalidate or remove Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements prohibiting that criticism. In this way, the scope of censoring Śrīla Prabhupāda extends well beyond the categories of statements that Kaunteya initially suggests.

And why stop with Śrīla Prabhupāda? Anything is offensive if one says it is. There are plenty of statements about women in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* and the *Bhāgavatam* that modern people are likely to find objectionable:

*virakta sannyāsī āmāra rāja-daraśana
strī-daraśana-sama viṣera bhakṣaṇa*

“Since I am in the renounced order, it is as dangerous for Me to meet a king as to meet a woman. To meet either would be just like drinking poison.”¹²⁶

*ākārād api bhetavyaṁ
strīṇāṁ viṣayiṇām api
yathāher manasaḥ kṣobhas
tathā tasyākṛter api*

“Just as one is immediately frightened upon seeing a live serpent or even the form of a serpent, one endeavoring for self-realization should similarly fear a materialistic person and a woman. Indeed, he should not even glance at their bodily features.”¹²⁷

¹²⁶ *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā, 11.7 translation.*

¹²⁷ *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 11.11 translation.*

*śarat-padmotsavam vaktram
vacaś ca śravaṇāmṛtam
hṛdayam kṣura-dhārābham
strīṇām ko veda ceṣṭitam*

“A woman’s face is as attractive and beautiful as a blossoming lotus flower during autumn. Her words are very sweet, and they give pleasure to the ear, but if we study a woman’s heart, we can understand it to be extremely sharp, like the blade of a razor. In these circumstances, who could understand the dealings of a woman?”¹²⁸

*tad etan me vijānīhi
yathāham manda-dhīr hare
sukham buddhyeya durbodham
yoṣā bhavad-anugrahāt*

“My dear son, Kapila, after all, I am a woman. It is very difficult for me to understand the Absolute Truth because my intelligence is not very great. But if You will kindly explain it to me, even though I am not very intelligent, I can understand it and thereby feel transcendental happiness.”¹²⁹

In the purport, Śrīla Prabhupāda also says that understanding the Absolute Truth is especially difficult for women. “By the grace of Kapiladeva it was quite possible for her to understand the Absolute Truth, even though the subject matter is very difficult for ordinary persons, especially women.”

This further shows that Śrīla Prabhupāda’s statements about women Kaunteya objects to are not based on antiquated science, but upon *śāstra*. So if one still asserts that Prabhupāda’s views are antiquated, one tacitly asserts that the *śāstras* Prabhupāda accepted are also antiquated—which is essentially atheism.

Hence, Kaunteya’s objections are not limited to Śrīla Prabhupāda but include a wide range of statements from the entire *guru-paramparā* up to Kṛṣṇa. Criticising Śrīla Prabhupāda for alleged mistakes is non-different from criticizing Lord Kṛṣṇa Himself. After all, *Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (*Ādi-līlā*, 1.58) declares that:

¹²⁸ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 6.18.41 translation.

¹²⁹ *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*, 3.25.30 translation.

“Since one cannot visually experience the presence of the Supersoul, He appears before us as a liberated devotee. Such a spiritual master is none other than Kṛṣṇa Himself.”

If you criticize the statements of one, you criticize the statements of both. Whatever one could conceivably gain by trying will result in total ruin.

Hence, revising or removing content from Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books—for pragmatic reasons, organizational objectives, or to appease certain social or professional groups—should never be contemplated. It is a sinful offense.

For example, in commenting on Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 4.25.41, Kaunteya says,

Śrīla Prabhupāda wrote a sentence that caused (and is causing) much confusion and condemnation. That paragraph generated (and is generating) virulent vilification of the Founder-Ācārya not only as a sexist but even as a defender of rape. The accusations are totally unfounded, but the choice of words do appears [sic] regrettable and disastrous: “Although rape is not legally allowed, it is a fact that a woman likes a man who is very expert at rape.” (SB 4.25.41 purport)¹³⁰

But if the vilification of Śrīla Prabhupāda and the accusations against him “are totally unfounded,” then, instead of just showing how Prabhupāda’s critics are invalid, why even criticize his choice of words as “regrettable and disastrous”? That is an *aparādha*. We do not “protect” Śrīla Prabhupāda by joining those criticizing him or by distancing ourselves from his statements. We are not allowed to do so; both *śāstra*, and *sadācāra* prohibit this.

And why should anyone want to misrepresent something someone else has said? Someone may misunderstand, but when shown the evidence that he has misunderstood, an honest man will apologize and accept the right understanding. A dishonest man will never accept—just as a person merely feigning sleep can never be roused. This is *vipralipsā*—the cheating propensity in action. Such bewildered conditioned souls committing offenses to Śrīla Prabhupāda should be openly and directly challenged. That will publicly expose their dishonesty.

For example, Śrīla Prabhupāda told Adi-keśava Swami that in court, everyone should hear that the present society is a “licking of vagina civilization.” He wanted this published, and he felt the court was a good opportunity to do so.

¹³⁰ TQDA 437.

Prabhupāda: We are preaching. It does not mean that we are forcing. We are saying that "Your brain is in stool. Wash it like this. If one agrees, he does it. Not that in our movement all world has joined. One who is intelligent, he has agreed, 'Yes.' I am not forcing. If I would have possessed that forcive power, what right you have got to bring me in the court? You are forcing me to stop this. You are forcing. Nobody can force, but you are forcing." You should take this argument and expose them at least in the court: licking of the vagina civilization, like dog. Yes, animals do that.

Ādi-keśava: I think the more strongly we preach in this way, that we don't try to give in and compromise...

Prabhupāda: No, no, no.

Ādi-keśava: ...the more that everyone will hear about this issue...

Prabhupāda: We must expose them, that's all. This is our business. This is a good opportunity in the court, so that it will be published. People will know what is our philosophy. Licking of vagina civilization, this. Publish.¹³¹

In 1977, many devotees were fearful of the courts (most ISKCON devotees then were only new Western devotees in their twenties), but Śrīla Prabhupāda in contrast became totally enlivened because he saw the tremendous opportunity to preach that his disciples’ fears blinded them to. Śrīla Prabhupāda was thus extremely enthusiastic and pushed disciples to prove that our time-honored position is solidly grounded in the *śāstras* and accepted by all *ācāryas*.

So, in the case of defending Śrīla Prabhupāda’s purport to *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* 4.25.41, why not also follow the example and instruction Śrīla Prabhupāda gave to Ādi-keśava Mahārāja? If the allegations against Śrīla Prabhupāda are “totally unfounded,” as Kaunteya Prabhu says, why not expose his critics for intentionally misrepresenting him? Many will appreciate our effort to expose such dishonest people. And we can also counter-attack, too. If anything, the “licking of vagina civilization” has only gotten worse, and the demons driving it need to be exposed more than ever. This is a positive alternative to weak apologetics, and it demonstrably follows in Śrīla Prabhupāda’s footsteps much more directly.

The problem is that Kaunteya does not agree. In the 666 pages of his book, there is not even a slight suggestion that those criticizing Śrīla Prabhupāda should be confronted. Wherever Kaunteya quotes secular experts, he does so without scepticism. He does not say anything bad about them. Rather, his criticism is always directed towards Śrīla Prabhupāda, his traditional views, or those who would defend them. The orthodox are the only “baddies” in Kaunteya’s book.

¹³¹ Room Conversation with Ādi-keśava Swami - 19 Feb 1977, Māyāpur

And he is not apologizing or inquiring submissively; he is criticizing—plain and simple. Because of this salient bias, Kaunteya’s book loses scientific objectivity, and because it embraces prohibited offenses, it also loses devotional credibility.

So, our final observations and recommendations are:

- 1) Śrīla Prabhupāda is a pure devotee. Consequently, criticizing him or distancing ourselves from his statements does not “defend” his Divine grace. Attempting to do so is an offense, and it is forbidden by *śāstra* and by *sadācāra*.
- 2) Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books are *smṛti* and therefore must not be modified any further.
- 3) There are many instances of Śrīla Prabhupāda being self-evidently and deliberately provocative in his speech or written text. Hence, mere criticism from outsiders (and even from insiders who rarely read Bhaktivedānta purports) cannot justify changing them.
- 4) Substantial efforts should be made to correct the misunderstandings of people who criticize Śrīla Prabhupāda or harbor doubts about him.¹³² And it must be recognized that this effort demands tremendous personal *adhikāra*, genuine saintliness, mature spiritual advancement. Those who stubbornly refuse to accept reasonable presentations should be challenged as far as possible.
- 5) Additionally, instead of trying to modify Śrīla Prabhupāda’s books, concerned devotees should start writing their own commentaries on Śrīla Prabhupāda’s works in order to explain points that they feel continue to be misunderstood.

Sincerely,

Your servants from the ISKCON India Scholars Board

p.s. As to how Śrīla Prabhupāda should be defended when attacked on some of the matters Kaunteya tried to address in his book, we present a vindication of a statement that Kaunteya’s book suggests was faulty on the part of Śrīla Prabhupāda. We hold this out as an example to follow in defending him:

¹³² As major *ācāryas* comment on *Bhagavad-gītā* 4.10, such is the “austerity of knowledge.”

An authentic exegesis of one of Śrīla Prabhupāda's remarks contradicted by modern science

During a conversation with the GBC in Los Angeles, dated 25 May 1972, Śrīla Prabhupāda said:

The world is degrading to the lowest status, even less than animal. The animal also do not support homosex. They have never sex life between male to male.

But in response to this statement, Kaunteya says:

It turns out that animals do engage in homosexual behavior: "Various forms of this are found in every major geographic region and every major animal group . . . documented in over 450 species of animals." a comprehensive Wikipedia article explains, "In fact, apparent homosexual individuals are known from all of the 293 traditional domestic species, from sheep, cattle and horses to cats, dogs and budgerigars [parakeets]."¹³³

And after some further discussion, Kaunteya concludes that Śrīla Prabhupāda's statement contradicted by scientific evidence demonstrates that even a pure devotee can make the same kinds of mistakes that a conditioned soul can make.

Srila Prabhupada saying that animals "do not support homosex" appears to corroborate the principle that his words should be taken as completely authoritative when based on sastra, but not necessarily in areas not directly illuminated by scriptural revelation. Srila Prabhupada views on non-sastric topics (or in fields for which he didn't not possess a specialized expertise) could presumably have been affected by his cultural background and by the data, possibly inaccurate or incomplete, available to him.¹³⁴

This understanding is rejected because it requires us to believe that Śrīla Prabhupāda is affected by the four defects of a conditioned soul; in the body of a pure devotee, there can be no faulty cognitions or transmissions of knowledge on account of *bhrama*, *pramāda*, *vipralipsā* and *karaṇāpāṭava*. But there are plausible, alternative understandings of Śrīla Prabhupāda's statement that are compatible with the characteristics of a pure devotee as described in *śāstra*.

This is one such understanding:

Modern scientific consensus may or may not contradict Śrīla Prabhupāda's comment that there is no homosexuality among animals. But when it does, it gives rise to the following doubt: how could a pure devotee's perception, which is free from the four defects, be false?

¹³³ TQDA 292: Also quoted in this paper on pages viii and 3.

¹³⁴ TQDA 294: This quote was also given on page 10 of this paper.

In order to settle this doubt, first we should not be in any doubt whatsoever about Śrīla Prabhupāda’s status as a pure devotee and the implications of that status. A proper understanding must begin with the words of *guru*, *sādhū* and *śāstra*. We cannot form an opinion based merely upon modern scientific consensus, as it has a history of biased research, unreliable communication, and faulty analysis.

Even accepting the modern scientific consensus that homosexual behavior is found among animals, Śrīla Prabhupāda’s comment is not in the least rendered false. In this regard, the logic of *āmraṇa-nyāya* (the “logic of the mango-forest”) says that if mangoes are found prominently in some forest, then it is still considered “forest of mangoes” even if there are some other trees present.

Śrīla Prabhupāda many times makes general comments such as “women are less intelligent,” “All of my disciples must be clean shaved,” and so forth, without precisely identifying the subject of his speech. The readers are expected to know the context and have some common sense that he does not literally mean that there are no intelligent women in the world or that all his disciples, including his female disciples, should be clean shaved!

The *abhiprāya* (actual intent, purport) of Śrīla Prabhupāda’s comment is that people are becoming less than animal by indulging in homosexuality, and the cause for such less-than-animal-behavior is godlessness. So, the purport is: if animals (in general), who are not supposed to be God conscious, do not support homosexuality, then how can human beings, who are supposed to be God conscious, can do so?