Second Annual Conference of the ISKCON Academy of Arts and Sciences

New Vrndavana, West Virginia
December 15-17, 2007

Conference Program

Schedule of Events

Day 1 – December 15th

9:00am: Breakfast and Registration

10:00am – 10:15am: Welcoming announcements by Janakirama dasa

10:15am – 1:00pm: *Introductions.*
This is a roundtable discussion, in which attendees have the chance to introduce themselves to the group and to update everyone on what he or she has been working on.
Chair: Drutakarma dasa

1:30pm: Lunch

2:30pm – 5:30pm: Panel 1. *ISKCON's Academic Contributions.*
The purpose of this panel is to examine the contributions that ISKCON has made and could make to the academic world and how this relates with the ultimate goals of helping people become free from suffering and achieving love for God. Speakers may discuss a particular contribution they feel is noteworthy and why, as well as their vision about how ISCKON's academic projects can develop in the future. Followed by Q&A and discussion.

Speakers:
- Hridayananda dasa Goswami
- Sadaputa dasa
- Garuda dasa

Chair: Janaki-rama dasa

6:15pm: Dinner, followed by Gaura-arati and free time for devotees to meet and catch up informally.

ISKCON's Contribution to Contemporary Epistemology
Hridayananda dasa Goswami

Epistemology is "the theory of knowledge, esp. with regard to its methods, validity, and scope. Epistemology is the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion."

As the word Veda suggests, Vedic culture is intensely concerned with epistemological issues. In his theological skirmish with Sarvabhauma Bhattacarya, Lord Caitanya emphasized that the Veda is *svatah-pramana*, literally "evidence from itself," ie "self-evident."

Self-evident "facts" are the traditional starting points of many western philosophies, especially those subscribing to various rational and empirical forms of "foundationalism." Modern challenges to foundationalism from "coherentism" and "reformed epistemology" are interesting to Gaudiya Vaishnavas.

I will explore:
1. Our Gaudiya Vaishnava epistemology.
2. The Gaudiya Vaishnava contribution to contemporary epistemological concerns.
3. The importance, in teaching Krishna consciousness to intelligent people, of making them philosophically comfortable with our epistemology.

Interpretation and the *Srimad Bhagavatam*
Sadaputa dasa

Lord Chaitanya is famous for giving 61 meanings of the atmarama verse to Sanatana Gosvami. Here I would like to offer some insights on meaning in the *Bhagavatam* based on a scientific background.

Example 1. In the *Bhagavatam*, the time for integration of 18 atoms is one truti or 8/13,500 seconds. Conceptually, this agrees with the modern atomic definition of time, but the time interval is too long. The modern "truti" is about 1/1000000000000 sec, approximately.

Instead of seeing a contradiction here, let us try accepting the basic idea, while allowing for different time intervals. This allows us to consider the *Surya-siddhanata* truti = 1/33,750 seconds. Using 1/33,750 seconds of Brahma as a truti (moment) of Brahma, and referring to the stories of King Kakudmi and the stealing of the cowherd boys, we can calculate that King Kakudmi spent 3,456 seconds of Brahma in Brahmaloka, or about one hour (3600 seconds of Brahma).

The time interval of 3,456 seconds fits the story of King Kakudmi, and it is surely no coincidence. So we see that something is going on behind the scenes here. Let us generalize on this: Statements in the Bhagavatam may have a variety of natural meanings which may involve alterations in quantitative values.

Example 2. Picture by Badarayana Murthy. Here we see the earth supported on a mountain extending up from Bharata-varsha in Bhumandala. This is problematic, but *Siddhanta-siromani* (by Bhaskaracharya, 11th century) gives another way of relating the earth to Bhumandala:

"Most learned astronomers have stated that Jambhudvipa embraces the whole northern hemisphere lying north of the salt sea; and that the other six dvipas and the seven seas ... are all situated in the southern hemisphere."

This shows that "most learned astronomers" regarded the earth globe as Bhumandala itself, not as an object situated next to Bhumandala in space. But why would Bhumandala be wrapped around the earth?

The scholar W. Randolf Kloetzli gave an answer in an article interpreting Bhumandala as an astrolabe – a navigational computer based on a stereographic mapping of the earth's surface onto a flat plate. This shows that by allowing Bhaskaracharya's interpretation, and not rejecting it as contradictory, we are led to an interpretation of the Bhumandala disk as a sophisticated computer.

But what can we say about the large magnitude of Bhumandala in contrast with the small earth? Let us turn to an interpretation which takes this into account.

Diagram by Tiruvenkata Ramanuja Jiyar Swami of the 19th century, that I discovered in the town of Melkote in India. Let's look at the planetary orbits shown in this diagram.
Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn are all shown orbiting the sun, and the sun is shown orbiting the earth. This, in fact, is the geocentric system of the famous Danish astronomer Tycho Brahe.

I have pointed out before that any planet can be taken as the center of motion in the solar system. In particular, the earth can be taken as the center of motion and we can accept a geocentric model of the solar system. We have to be careful, however, to not claim that the earth is absolutely the center of motion after placing it in the center by a relativistic argument.

Consider the following relativistic statement of the heliocentric system: "Any planet can be taken as the fixed coordinate frame for all movement in the solar system. This planet is, by definition, stationary. The sun is seen to revolve around this planet, and the other planets are all seen to orbit around the sun." This statement is relativistic in the sense that it does not single out any planet for special attention. It includes the geocentric model of Tycho Brahe and Tiruvenkata Swami. It also includes, for example, a perspective in which the planet Venus is fixed and the earth orbits around the sun. Indeed, it contains five perspectives in which the earth orbits around the sun.

If we avoid making a relativistic argument and drawing an absolute conclusion, we must see Tycho's (and Tiruvenkata's) diagram as one instance of a relativistic, heliocentric model.

At the same time, we are free to follow the *Bhagavatam* and place the earth in the center. This leads to an interpretation in which the Fifth Canto offers a perspective on the solar system, rather than describing an absolute physical disk.

What do we see if we pursue this idea? It turns out that the combination of geocentric and heliocentric motion gives the planets spirograph-like orbital paths. These orbital paths are

tangent to the circular features of Bhumandala – a point that I discuss in detail in my book *Mysteries of the Sacred Universe*. Thus the circular features of Bhumandala provide an accurate map of the solar system as seen from a geocentric perspective.

Our conclusion is that the *Bhagavatam* can be understood from a multi-perspectival standpoint that emerges with clarity when the text is seen against a background of deep knowledge. This is a conclusion that could be of interest to scholars.

The Greatest Gifts

Garuda dasa

As ISKCON devotee scholars, what have we contributed to the academic world for understanding the love of God? Have we truly illuminated the great gifts that Mahaprabhu Gauranga gave to the world, that Srila Prabhupada brought to us? Have we ourselves received these gifts in such a way so as to give them to others, specifically here the intellectual world? My discussion will focus on what might be the greatest gifts we can offer to the world and the academy, and how we can offer them, and how this question challenges us as both scholars and devotees.