

Evolving Religion-Science Perspectives of the Bhaktivedanta Institute and ISKCON

Oliver Zambon and Thomas Aechtner

ABSTRACT: The Bhaktivedanta Institute was established in 1976 as a research branch of ISKCON, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, popularly known as the Hare Krishnas. This article examines the history and ongoing activities of this institute as it has shaped ISKCON's official religion-science discourses. Early Bhaktivedanta Institute documents are compared with data gathered from a 2019 Bhaktivedanta Institute for Higher Studies workshop. While the Bhaktivedanta Institute's media initially described science and scientists as malign forces, the 2019 workshop disclosed more complex stances towards biological evolution and scientific researchers. Consequently, this article illustrates the ways in which a contemporary branch of the Bhaktivedanta Institute has attempted to reconcile ISKCON's worldview with modern science, while also distancing itself from the movement's previous science-religion conflict narratives.

KEYWORDS: International Society for Krishna Consciousness, ISKCON, Bhaktivedanta Institute, Bhaktivedanta Institute for Higher Studies, religion and science, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda

In 1974, the founder of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami (1896-1977), met with a prominent disciple in Vrindavan, Uttar Pradesh, India, a holy town regarded as the location where Krishna grew up. The disciple, Swarūpa Dāmodara Dāsa (1937-2006), had graduated

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with a PhD in physical organic chemistry from the University of California, Irvine, and as the two conversed, Bhaktivedanta showed him a collection of magazines from the Oriental Research Institute based in Vrindavan.¹ The swami then asked whether ISKCON could likewise establish a research institute of its own to “preach Krishna consciousness among the intellectuals all over the world.”² Two years later, on 10 December 1976, the swami and five of his disciples would officially establish the Bhaktivedanta Institute (BI) in North America as ISKCON’s research branch, which would go on to epitomize Hare Krishna engagement with the sciences and Vaiṣṇava theology.³ While the BI would steer ISKCON’s discourses on science for years to come, however, the institute has received little scholarly attention, and recent developments within the organization have gone largely unnoticed outside ISKCON.⁴ In an effort to add additional insights concerning the motivating forces behind the institute and ISKCON’s often provocative stand on science-religion interactions, this article re-examines Hare Krishna history alongside an analysis of Bhaktivedanta Institute’s media products and the institute’s current activities. In doing so, this article illustrates the ways in which a contemporary branch of the Bhaktivedanta Institute, the Bhaktivedanta Institute for Higher Studies (BIHS), has attempted to reconcile ISKCON’s worldview with modern science, while also distancing itself from the movement’s previous science-religion conflict narratives.⁵

ISKCON was founded in New York City in 1966 by the Indian holy man A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, who came to be known by the honorific Śrīla Prabhupāda (one who sits at the Lord’s feet). With teachings based on the late-medieval Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition,⁶ the modern “Krishna consciousness” movement is known for its colorful street parades, vegetarian Indian food distribution, and public chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra. Throughout the late 1960s and the 1970s, ISKCON’s following increased, developing from a group linked to the American counterculture movement into a global religious organization with many Indian and Indian American members. After Bhaktivedanta’s death in 1977, however, ISKCON communities faced a series of upheavals, resulting in widespread financial strain, declining numbers of new converts, and mass defections.⁷ Most significantly, this period saw a shift away from ISKCON’s early monasticism, as devotees increasingly married and entered into family life.⁸ Whereas ISKCON had previously valorized the renunciation of worldly pleasures, communal living, and full-time commitment to the movement’s “radical project of promoting world transformation,”⁹ devotee families integrated into mainstream society to secure employment, housing, and education for their children.¹⁰ Consequently, many devotees “came increasingly to appreciate those who were striving for worthwhile goals in the external society,”¹¹ and thus ISKCON’s previous “images of a ‘corrupt’ and ‘demonic’ society

requiring reform and transformation [became] difficult to sustain.”¹² From the late 1980s onwards, therefore, ISKCON gradually transitioned from its countercultural, renunciative beginnings into a movement increasingly open to integrating with wider society.¹³ This ongoing shift was reflected in the movement’s changing discourses on marriage, women’s rights, and inter-religious dialogue.¹⁴ Moreover, as this article demonstrates, recent developments within ISKCON’s Bhaktivedanta Institute for Higher Studies suggest that the movement also has transitioned towards more accommodating expressions of science-religion discourse.

As a prominent new religious movement, ISKCON has attracted significant scholarly attention over the past five decades, and a small subsection of this scholarship has focused on the organization’s extensive engagements with science. Scholarly research on views expressed on science by ISKCON representatives has concentrated primarily on media produced prior to the year 2000, highlighting the considerable tensions that devotees perceived between modern science and their Vaiṣṇava worldview. For instance, religion scholar Mikael Rothstein argues that ISKCON members perceived science to be a “fundamentally malevolent system that leads away from the religious truth,” while simultaneously emphasizing Hare Krishna teachings at the exclusion of all foreign “concepts and social systems.”¹⁵ Similarly, historian of South Asian religions C. Mackenzie Brown has drawn parallels between Christian Young Earth creationism and ISKCON’s “Hindu creationism,” noting their shared “disdain for establishment science,” and their common efforts to denounce evolutionary theory as a form of atheistic religion.¹⁶ Religious studies scholar Benjamin E. Zeller has further documented an increase in hostility from ISKCON towards science as the movement grew during the 1970s.¹⁷ Zeller explains that while contemporaneous new religious movements attempted to “guide” or “absorb” science, ISKCON sought to “replace” modern science altogether.¹⁸ Moreover, religious studies scholar Anna S. King has argued that in early ISKCON media, “‘science’ and ‘scientism’ [became] inextricably muddled,” and this conflation has continued to influence the movement’s often “impoverished and hostile understandings” of the relation between science and religion.¹⁹

These scholars have accurately depicted the main thrust of ISKCON’s largely oppositional science-religion engagements. Nevertheless, religion and science scholars Oliver Zambon and Thomas Aechtner have recently drawn attention to layers of complexity and ambiguity within ISKCON’s religion and science discourse. In addition to problematizing the view that Bhaktivedanta Swami was strictly opposed to modern science, Zambon and Aechtner have also highlighted relatively accommodating religion-science viewpoints that have emerged within recent ISKCON media.²⁰ The present article builds

upon these studies by examining conflict and complexity in ISKCON's religion-science discourse.

Most significantly, this article contrasts ISKCON's early attacks on science with more recent, and comparatively accommodating, Bhaktivedanta Institute messaging, which reveals a reconciliatory shift in Hare Krishna science-religion perspectives. This article draws upon a range of early BI documents, including original and hitherto unexamined archival materials. Details from these records are further coupled with more recent data gathered from recordings of the "Evolutionary Narratives in Krishna Consciousness" internal workshop hosted by the Bhaktivedanta Institute for Higher Studies in June 2019. This examination first demonstrates an early antagonism towards science and scientists, voiced by BI pundits, which shaped ISKCON's official religion-science discourse for years to come. The institute's hostile stance marked BI media broadcasts in the years immediately following the institute's founding, which were produced for Hare Krishnas throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s. Secondly, this article then reveals the ways in which contemporary BI leaders are actively debating and reconsidering this inherited antagonistic religion-science position as they attempt to establish greater coherence between modern science and the movement's own Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition. These recent debates demonstrate a growing awareness within the BI of complexity in Bhaktivedanta's religion-science discourses as well as the potential for compatibility between Caitanya Vaiṣṇava theology and evolutionary biology. Furthermore, in contrast with previous BI approaches, these discussions highlight the extent to which contemporary institute members have now attributed value to reconciling ISKCON's teachings with established science. Such developments are exemplified by BIHS efforts to have *Life Comes from Life* (1979), ISKCON's most influential anti-science text attributed to A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, withdrawn from print,²¹ and by the institute's reconceptualization of its work as "natural philosophy" instead of "science," in recognition of modern disciplinary boundaries. Thus, while early Bhaktivedanta Institute media construed science as a misguided and ultimately harmful force, the 2019 BIHS workshop disclosed far more complex and accommodating considerations of science. Through analysis of these BI communications and subsequent developments, this article underscores ISKCON's shifting perspectives on religion, science, and evolutionary theory to the present day.

REACHING THE ELITE: BHAKTIVEDANTA AND THE EARLY BHAKTIVEDANTA INSTITUTE

In 1965, at the age of sixty-nine, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami arrived in America with the intention of fulfilling the order of his guru,

Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī (1874-1937), to “preach Lord Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s message throughout the world.”²² After twelve months of effort with minimal success, he eventually discovered a receptive audience in the countercultural hub of East Village, New York, and subsequently founded ISKCON.²³ The swami befriended such leading countercultural figures as Allen Ginsberg (1926-1997) and George Harrison (1943-2001), who helped popularize ISKCON in its fledgling years.²⁴ After its successful start in New York City, the Hare Krishna movement began spreading across America and around the world, attracting crowds of primarily young followers hailing from the hippie movement.²⁵ Though gaining this countercultural following may have been a key strategic move for launching ISKCON, this demographic was not Bhaktivedanta’s first preference when it came to ideal converts. As Bhaktivedanta biographer Joshua Greene has explained, the swami initially had set “his sights on older, more mature candidates for Krishna consciousness.” It was only after failing to attract “the dignitaries he had imagined reaching,” and almost abandoning his mission, that he found himself surrounded by a “ragtag group” of young people.²⁶

Bhaktivedanta’s aspirations of reaching a respectable, influential audience reflected similar goals maintained by the swami’s immediate Caitanya Vaiṣṇava forerunners. Both Bhaktivedanta’s guru, Bhaktisiddhānta, and Bhaktisiddhānta’s father and guru, Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura (1838-1914),²⁷ had also emphasized communicating their Vaiṣṇavism to the intellectual elite. Bhaktivinoda was a court magistrate for the British Raj in India and a prominent member of the *bhadralok*, the class of English-educated Indians of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Calcutta.²⁸ For many in these circles, Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism was thought to be “a degenerate and debased form of religion—the concern of libertines, prostitutes, Untouchables, and beggars.”²⁹ Bhaktivinoda, however, was convinced that the tradition contained “religious truths” that could meet the intellectual demands of his peers and the world at large. Therefore, he sought to repair any disrepute and restore the tradition to what he believed was a “pure” and “original” form.³⁰ Targeting India’s literate middle-class, Bhaktivinoda utilized printing press technology to publish and widely circulate books and a monthly periodical, *The Harmonist*, as he strove to systematically redefine Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism “according to the culture of the modern world.”³¹ Bhaktivinoda’s son, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī (1874-1937), pursued a similar project, taking over as editor of *The Harmonist* and working to establish his father’s teachings through the formation of a monastic religious institution known as the Gaudiya Math.³² He would invite “prominent scientists to lead interactive discussions” at various Gaudiya Math events and, through *The Harmonist*, publish articles engaging a broad range of topics relevant to an educated audience. These publications often endeavored to integrate contemporary discourses on

such topics as science into the teachings of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism in an effort to reach educated audiences.³³

As with these Caitanya Vaiṣṇava predecessors, Bhaktivedanta would go on to produce a periodical, the English-language *Back to Godhead* magazine, by which he sought to address current political, social, and economic subject matter through the lens of Vaiṣṇavism. He also wrote several letters to scientists and political figures, stressing the importance of his mission while petitioning for their support. Indeed, his first book, *Easy Journey to Other Planets* (1960), was “dedicated to the scientists of the world,” and included Bhaktivedanta’s personal correspondence with Dr Y. G. Naik, Dean of the Faculty of Science at Gujarat University in Ahmedabad.³⁴ This effort to engage with scientists, while trying to integrate ideas he interpreted from modern science, was a consistent theme in Bhaktivedanta’s work before and after founding ISKCON. This may have served simply as a legitimization strategy to increase the credibility of his preaching by appealing to the authority of science.³⁵ At the same time, such references to science appear to have functioned as a means by which Bhaktivedanta was able to broach notions of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism in reference to popular, contemporary discourses.

Despite not finding a receptive audience among “mature” citizens or “dignitaries” of American society, the swami would discover that among his band of young countercultural followers were many relatively well-educated individuals with middle-class backgrounds. It would be with these adherents specifically that he would engage in topics related to science, culminating in the establishment of the Bhaktivedanta Institute in 1976. In the year before the BI was launched, the Hare Krishna devotee Bhaktisvarūpa Damodāra gathered together twenty-one of ISKCON’s comparatively better-educated followers to form the “members of the faculty” of a future Bhaktivedanta Institute for Vedic Studies.³⁶ Six members of this group boasted PhDs, while seven had Master’s degrees, one was a medical doctor, and three more had Bachelor of Arts degrees. This group was commissioned to help fulfill the Bhaktivedanta Institute’s mission. As the earliest available Bhaktivedanta Institute document makes clear, this mission included forming ISKCON’s “official institution of higher learning and research” that would eventually offer bachelor, master’s, and doctoral degrees. Importantly, the institute was to distinguish itself from the “hundreds of departments of knowledge” that currently existed by teaching “the science of *ātmā* [*sic*], the ‘self.’” This science was touted as the “most important branch of knowledge,” and its regrettable neglect had resulted in undue suffering and confusion for people around the world. The main purpose of the Bhaktivedanta Institute, therefore, was to “fulfil this basic necessity of utmost importance” by imparting the “imperishable supreme science to everyone.”³⁷

ISKCON has yet to attain the lofty goals set for Bhaktivedanta Institute in the 1970s, which sought to make it “the highest standard of excellence” for education that would be unparalleled “by any other school or discipline in the world.”³⁸ Nevertheless, such early Bhaktivedanta Institute documents reveal numerous themes regarding ISKCON’s perspectives on science that have marked Hare Krishna religion and science discourses ever since.

DECLARING WAR ON MATERIALISM: EARLY BHAKTIVEDANTA INSTITUTE MEDIA

Throughout the late 1970s and the early 1980s, members of the Bhaktivedanta Institute would go on to produce a range of media products for the broader ISKCON community that served to define the institute’s strategies and global mission while delineating its posture toward science and the scientific establishment. In addition to communications intended for the wider Hare Krishna community, institute members also produced a number of more technical papers designed to address such topics as quantum mechanics, information theory, and, most prominently, evolutionary biology for its more academically minded audiences. Nevertheless, it would be the generic, institutionally oriented media that developed ISKCON’s outward-facing religion-science stances. By exploring these messages, which epitomize the world-rejecting attitudes characteristic of the young Hare Krishna movement, it is possible to highlight how a particular mode of discourse emerged and gained traction throughout the ISKCON movement following the institute’s launch. This further reveals current challenges faced by contemporary Hare Krishna devotees who have attempted to reconsider the Bhaktivedanta Institute’s earlier, and often antagonistic, messaging around science in order to reconceptualize the ISKCON religion-science discourses for present-day contexts.

Guerilla Tactics and Cosmic Battles: Bhaktivedanta Institute’s Early Media Strategies

With Bhaktisvarūpa Damodāra’s assembled team of educated adherents, and the establishment of the Bhaktivedanta Institute, the founder of the Hare Krishnas was now closer to fulfilling his dream of reaching those whom he gauged to be the influential “intelligent class” of society.³⁹ In fact, during the final months of his life, Bhaktivedanta Swami stressed the importance of the Bhaktivedanta Institute as a vital apparatus for bringing intellectual esteem to ISKCON, which would extend the movement’s reach into scientific circles. The BI, he declared,

maintained the “greatest responsibility for enhancing the prestige of ISKCON,” while it was also the movement’s “most important preaching arm.”⁴⁰ Keeping to the theme of boosting the organization’s credibility, he further instructed his academically minded disciples to abandon their robes and dress in ways that “command respect,”⁴¹ including clothes befitting a “scientist—in suit and tie—for preaching.”⁴² He further promised to provide the BI with all the necessary resources it might need to achieve success, as it would represent the leading edge of ISKCON’s academic and intellectual activities.

In addressing the Bhaktivedanta Institute’s aims and objectives, the swami rallied his disciples to “destroy the bogus speculation and cheating which goes on under the banner of scientific advancement.”⁴³ He qualified this command by stating that “we do not condemn the material scientists for their work, but at least they should not neglect the existence of the Supreme Being, God, Kṛṣṇa.”⁴⁴ More specifically, he told ISKCON adherents to disprove the “theory that life comes from matter.” He also instructed his followers to study “the fifth canto” of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* so that they could establish a Vaiṣṇava-consistent model of the universe for display in a Temple of the Vedic Planetarium, which ISKCON currently is constructing in the sacred Caitanya Vaiṣṇava town of Mayapur, Bengal.⁴⁵ Furthermore, BI members were directed to engage in “research work for the improvement of the economic condition of the world.”⁴⁶ Bhaktivedanta Swami insisted that the Bhaktivedanta Institute “should be based on Bhagavad-gītā,” thus providing novel solutions for the world’s economic and agricultural problems while further developing measures to protect cows, a sacred animal for Vaiṣṇavas and many Hindu traditions.⁴⁷ The swami’s enthusiasm for “preaching to the scholars and scientists” was made clear, but exactly how these initiatives would be completed was left largely in the hands of BI members. As the swami admitted having “never studied science,” he delegated such tasks to Bhaktisvarūpa Damodāra and his team to accomplish.⁴⁸ The “next phase is yours,” he told his more scholarly minded devotees, commissioning them to “establish our movement as a genuine scientific movement.”⁴⁹

In what appears to have been a concerted effort to realize the swami’s wishes, members of the Bhaktivedanta Institute went on to generate a range of documents throughout 1978-1981, which included descriptions of the organization’s strategic agenda. For instance, the 1978 leaflet, “General Meeting of the Bhaktivedanta Institute,” identified four key cohorts that the BI would target with its “preaching mission”: “1) the academic and scientific professionals, 2) the college and university students, 3) the general public, and 4) the [ISKCON] devotees.”⁵⁰ Additionally, its authors set out a multi-phase plan to infiltrate and revolutionize the academic establishment, which would initially involve the production of academic literature, as well as networking with scientists

and recruiting new members from the scientific community.⁵¹ Parallel with these efforts would be several popularization strategies, involving religion and science-themed outreach media targeted at wider audiences. These preliminary initiatives would then enable a refutation of materialistic science. Accordingly, in order to “gain recognition and respect as members of the same community,” BI members wrote, the “first step will be the cultivation of contacts, getting to know who’s who, finding out who has power to get articles published in professional journals and presented in professional conferences.” Subsequently, the plan called on institute representatives to submit articles to academic journals, which would deliberately integrate arguments “supportive of our [ISKCON] philosophy,” without explicitly presenting them as such.⁵²

According to the Bhaktivedanta Institute’s General Meeting notes of September 1978, these publications would eventually form the basis of an academically grounded ISKCON book, serving as the movement’s consummate scientific “‘coming out,’ where we put all our cards on the table” with regards to the apparent empirical and philosophical support for ISKCON’s views. Since the supporting material for this *oeuvre* would already have been published in peer-reviewed academic journals, it was thought that this strategy would “make it difficult for the establishment to dismiss the book as a crackpot or fringe attempt.” Supplementary initiatives to reach the BI’s targeted cohorts would include producing short films, as well as inviting academic researchers to participate in the institute’s own symposiums. The “possibility of some Institute members taking academic or professional positions” within the scientific world was also considered. To set in motion the BI’s initiatives, an institute representative was to be assigned to “oversee recruitment on [university] campuses.” This enlistment program would function “under the direction of the Bhaktivedanta Institute,” though it would clandestinely “not be publicly associated with it.” The General Meeting document also indicates that the Bhaktivedanta Institute’s objective of preaching “to the general public” would primarily be conducted through a newly dedicated section of the Hare Krishna magazine *Back to Godhead*. Additionally, two BI representatives would be in charge of producing newsletters and audiovisual media to ensure “everyone in ISKCON is aware of the progress and achievements of the Institute.”⁵³

Although it is difficult to trace the specific activities and outcomes of the Bhaktivedanta Institute’s efforts to cultivate relationships with non-Hare Krishna academics and university students, the institute’s media engagement directed toward fellow Hare Krishna adherents is far more identifiable. In coming decades, such messages broadcast the religion-science perspectives that would come to characterize ISKCON’s stance on such notions as biological evolution to audiences around the world. These messages included the 1979 pamphlet, *Bhaktivedanta Institute*

Temple Newsletter, intended exclusively for an internal ISKCON readership. It served to provide fellow devotees with a preliminary expression of the Bhaktivedanta Institute's goals, and it narratively framed the organization's views toward science. The newsletter indicated explicitly that the publication was "not intended for outsiders" since it contained "confidential stuff." As its authors made clear: "From time to time we need to communicate very frankly and confidentially with our ISKCON Godbrothers and -sisters about the kind of work we are doing," and the "progress we are making."⁵⁴

The secrecy pertained to letting ISKCON devotees "in on the strategy we are employing to invade the fortress of material science."⁵⁵ As this and other statements reveal, early Bhaktivedanta Institute media products employed a rhetorical motif centered around combat, narratively pitting ISKCON against an apparent hegemony of materialistic, atheistic scientists that constituted the science community. Such messaging stressed the gravity of the BI's work and the need for Hare Krishnas to covertly infiltrate the counter-theist ranks of the scientific establishment. This would be necessary for having ISKCON's world-changing message empirically and philosophically corroborated and heard. As one *Bhaktivedanta Institute Temple Newsletter* contributor explained, though the "BI may have many powerful arguments and scientifically sound conclusions," these are of limited use "if no one is even going to hear us."⁵⁶ Scientific credibility garnered from within the scientific academy itself would be crucial for getting BI's transformative Hare Krishna ideas out to global audiences.

Fellow devotees were further told that the chief problem with trying to accomplish this goal pertained to difficulties associated with getting pro-ISKCON messages and messengers into the scientific establishment in the first place, because there was "no institution so closed, narrow-minded, and rigid as that of modern Western science."⁵⁷ An additional goal, therefore, included gaining access to the restricted confines of science and tearing down its materialistic suppositions with the truth of ISKCON's Vaiṣṇavism. This strategy was relayed via martial analogies, for as the author expounded:

The BI has a bomb in its hands—the "bomb" of the Absolute truth, as delivered to us so very wonderfully by Śrīla Prabhupāda. This bomb is so powerful that it can bring down the whole edifice of modern materialistic science. However, for the bomb to be effective, *it has to explode inside the building*. If it blows up in the street, it may rattle a few windows and raise some dust, but it will essentially be ineffective. Thus, the initial problem we face is to get the bomb inside the building. Then we can detonate it.⁵⁸

Effectuating such a counter-materialist insurgency would prove difficult, because members were "attacking the central dogmas of science." To help achieve this objective, Bhaktivedanta Institute members were

instructed to gain scientific reputability; a first step toward infiltrating science would be “not even to secure agreement, but simply to become accepted as scientifically and intellectually respectable.” At the very least, in hope of brokering this acceptance, ISKCON members sought to get scientists to an initial position in which they might concede to BI representatives, “Well, I don’t agree with you, but you aren’t crackpots either.”⁵⁹

In an extension of warfare imagery, the *Bhaktivedanta Institute Temple Newsletter* disclosed further details about the institute’s covert strategy. This plan, readers were told, had previously been prepared during the BI’s 1978 General Meeting, discussed above. The plan would begin with targeted academic presentations and peer-reviewed journal articles covering a variety of research fields. Each of these papers would include some validation of an essential Hare Krishna notion, while not necessarily mentioning its connection to ISKCON. This would include addressing such topics as the apparent empirical case against evolutionary theory, or defenses of the existence of God and the soul. “In this way, we break our case down into its smallest components, and bit by bit, we publish it now in this journal, now in that [journal], now in mathematics, now in physics, now in chemistry, now in neurology, now in philosophy.”⁶⁰ Through this publishing subterfuge, individual elements of ISKCON’s Vaiṣṇavism would gradually be validated by the academy itself, while omitting overt references to their actual Hare Krishna provenance. After this had been suitably completed, BI members would then be armed with accepted academic literature that could be used to assault systematically the materialistic foundations marring modern science:

Finally, when a good portion of our case has been published and defended against criticism, and thus firmly implanted in the edifice of science—just as, to revert to our bomb analogy, saboteurs might smuggle a bomb into the target building in bits and pieces—then we bring all the parts together, and WHAMMO! Let’s suppose our assembled bomb is a book spelling out the whole case—something our critic understandably wants. The materialistic scientists and philosophers may be aghast and horrified, but because all the reference and footnotes will be to articles *published in their own journal and presented in their own professional gatherings*, what could they then say? At this point they would find it very difficult to argue that we are kooks and crackpots. And because of the scientifically sound method of presentation, we will also make many allies in the ranks of established scientists.⁶¹

A significant contest would then ensue, featuring materialistic scientists on one side, and BI members with their allies on the other. This dispute would reflect cosmological combat ceaselessly occurring between good and evil, such that, “The eternal dichotomy of *sura*

[divine] and *asura* [demonic] will be manifest in the scientific establishment, and the real debating will begin.”⁶²

Though ISKCON remains a nonmilitant organization, the rhetorical motif of violence and warfare against atheistic scientists was prominent in internal Bhaktivedanta Institute publications during its early days. For example, an article titled “Saint and Revolutionary,” in the 1979 pamphlet *Perspectives on Bhaktivedanta Institute*, features a collage of Bhaktivedanta’s most “fiery” comments about science.⁶³ This collage omitted the swami’s more moderate or ambiguous statements that relayed some sympathy towards scientific ideas. In another of the pamphlet’s articles, “Logic and Argument: A Bona Fide Weapon to Defeat the Atheists,” a BI contributor explains that the “problem is simply this: the materialists, devoted to their own mental speculations, have concocted a plethora of ideologies and philosophies hostile to the conclusion of devotional service.” Therefore, the “materialists must be defeated,” and it is the BI’s mission to “break this death-grip of material science from the throat of the people.” Elucidating a grand conspiracy narrative, this author pronounces that scientists have subjugated the “majority of people” through materialism and the snare of hedonic pursuits. This is because people “blindly follow the established orthodoxy of the material scientists and thus automatically become perpetual slaves to the culture of sense gratification.” From childhood these masses are “indoctrinated with the theory that life is just matter, that it comes from matter alone, and that the universe and all it contains can be explained in terms of the laws that govern matter.”⁶⁴ As a result:

Bereft of any trace of transcendental vision, the victims of the teaching seek frantically to gratify their senses to the maximum, thus becoming the abject slaves of the industrial and technological machine civilization, desperate consumers haunted by fear of the void. In this way they become ever more dependent upon the scientific technocrats, who promise them (just around the corner!) freedom from death, old age, disease, if they just “keep those dollars coming in.” Thus, the very scientists who plant the seeds of voidism in the minds of youth reap the harvest of profit, adoration, and distiction [*sic*] later on. As a result, the intellectual elite, the vested interests in voidism, secures its position and extends its technocracy into every corner of human life.⁶⁵

This threat, readers are told, requires that Hare Krishnas stand up against the demonic forces of science. For a religious organization that prides itself on nonviolence, compassion, vegetarianism, and striving for world peace, such warfare themes appear uncharacteristic. Nevertheless, combat motifs were frequently employed by the BI’s members when they addressed science and the ISKCON movement’s mission to reform it.

SHIFTING MESSAGES ON SCIENCE: FROM WARFARE TO A WORKSHOP

In 2000, the historian Federico Squarcini proposed that, as ISKCON continues to adapt and integrate with external society, it is likely to “forget the myth of a direct ‘sabotage’ of the materialistic social system, and will begin to remember the importance, for its own identity, of making a substantial, practical and generous contribution to the wider world.”⁶⁶ Recently, there have been indications that this broad organizational transition towards more “balanced and harmonic”⁶⁷ engagements with society is also having an influence on the ISKCON religion-science discourse. In particular, the tenor of some BI messaging and perspectives have shifted subtly from the more dominant claims expressed in the organization’s earliest publications. During the 1980s BI broadcasts reduced emphasis on militant themes, and some recent publications have lessened their focus on the ostensible evils of science as well as the need for Hare Krishnas to combat the scientific establishment. Interspersed within ISKCON’s contemporary and largely conflict-oriented religion-science rhetoric can be found a scattering of more moderate, conciliatory voices.⁶⁸ These voices reflect broader ISKCON trends toward world-accommodation rather than simply the austere renunciation of society and culture. They are also indicative of Bhaktivedanta’s own ambiguities and intermittent attempts at adapting certain scientific ideas in an effort to make them correspond with Vaiṣṇava theology. Further corroborating these findings have been observations of tensions expressed by ISKCON devotees about whether Hare Krishnas should continue to oppose science and covertly attempt to disrupt the scientific establishment, or instead focus on ways to accommodate such sciences as biological evolution.⁶⁹

Evolutionary theory has remained a primary point of contention in ISKCON materials, though Bhaktivedanta Swami himself seemed to show little interest in the topic before travelling to America. In fact, during his sixteen years of writing the *Back to Godhead* magazine in India (1944-1960), the swami did not mention Darwin at all, and he remarked upon the evolution of species only once, describing the “progressive evolution by a gradual process” from aquatic animals up to the human form.⁷⁰ Even after he first arrived in America, Bhaktivedanta did not express that biological evolution was a particularly threatening idea, as he insisted that Hindu scriptures had long since referred to evolutionary processes. This sentiment was conveyed in a 1969 talk, one of the first times he mentioned Darwin after arriving in North America. “We are evolving by the evolution theory,” he explained. “It is not theory,” though of course “Mr. Darwin has called it theory.” For as Bhaktivedanta claimed, evolution’s premises had already been articulated in the *Padma Purāṇa*, a text within the Vaiṣṇava canon,

in which apparently “this evolutionary process is very nicely explained.”⁷¹ Nevertheless, in subsequent years Bhaktivedanta increasingly voiced concerns regarding the danger of evolution as a materialistic, counter-theistic scientific notion. Thus, his messages began equating evolution with atheism, and characterizing the theory as an enemy of the Krishna Consciousness movement. The Bhaktivedanta Institute subsequently picked up this line of argumentation, and biological evolution developed into a central focus of the organization’s ire.⁷²

Though evolution was explicitly targeted, BI members wanted to distance themselves from Christian creationists while still being sympathetic to creationist attacks on the theory. In 1979, for instance, the authors of the *Bhaktivedanta Institute Temple Newsletter* noted that “Christian fundamentalist scientists” have been “waging the anti-evolutionary battle for some time,” with “some excellent criticisms of evolution (for the fossils do indeed say ‘no’).” However, they underlined that “we don’t want the Bhaktivedanta Institute to become another Creation Research Institute.” Rather, the BI would “have a powerful impact on the scientific establishment itself,” whereas Christian creationists were suffering the “ignominious fate” of being “banished into the wilderness of the loonies.”⁷³ Forty years on, however, it is apparent that the Bhaktivedanta Institute has not fared much better than its Christian counterparts in steering the scientific establishment away from evolution. Nevertheless, after producing numerous antievolutionist books and articles since the 1970s, as well as collaborating with key non-ISKCON Intelligent Design theorists, it seems that some Hare Krishna leaders have been questioning this focus and its lack of success.

Workshop on Evolutionary Narratives in Krishna Consciousness

A recent attempt to review and potentially revise ISKCON’s official stance toward evolution was undertaken at a 2019 Bhaktivedanta Institute for Higher Studies workshop entitled “Evolutionary Narratives in Krishna Consciousness.” Notably, in 2019, the BIHS was appointed by the Governing Body Commission, ISKCON’s highest managerial authority, to become the official science advisors for the Temple of the Vedic Planetarium.⁷⁴ As the largest and most expensive project in ISKCON’s history, the Temple of the Vedic Planetarium was originally poised to challenge modern science by depicting “a solid scientific alternative explanation of the origins of life and the universe” based on Vaiṣṇava scriptures.⁷⁵ However, as indicated at the “Evolutionary Narratives in Krishna Consciousness” workshop, the BIHS is now attempting to temper this approach in order to avoid directly contradicting modern scientific viewpoints. Accordingly, one expressed motive for the workshop was to address the need to design a planetarium exhibit

reflecting contemporary Hare Krishna understandings of evolutionary science, which may not necessarily position biological evolution in direct conflict with Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism.

This in-house workshop was held in Gainesville, Florida, and it was headed by the co-director of the BIHS, an ISKCON devotee and professional research scientist who sought to bring together influential Hare Krishnas committed to religion-science discourse.⁷⁶ Of the twelve men and three women who attended the event, five held doctorates, one had a master's degree, and another possessed a bachelor's degree. While most attendees were white Americans, there were also white British and Latin American contributors, as well as one African American participant. Attendees' ages ranged from early twenties to seventies, with the majority being over forty. The BIHS director described the group as including both conservative and liberal ISKCON devotees. Most attendees had extensive experience in secular universities and workplaces, and several participants were also prominent leaders and authors within ISKCON. The workshop was video-recorded.⁷⁷ Notably, the workshop recordings present hitherto unexamined insights into contemporary ISKCON debates around biological evolution, as reflected by members of a North American BI branch. Their content reveal how some Hare Krishna adherents have expressed doubts that science and scientists are misleading the public, while they have also reconsidered the movement's position on evolution as well as ISKCON's strategy of trying to assault the scientific establishment from within.

Early in the workshop, a senior BI member noted that "ultimately our narrative protects our values. It's our identity. And why are we very sensitive on this subject? Because we see conflicting narratives seeming to attack our values." Accordingly, the topic of values was raised as "an essential problem" when considering the BI's past and present responses to evolutionary theory. Several participants questioned what the BI's values were in the past, while querying what sorts of values they would embed in their future narratives about evolutionary theory. Critically, it was asked why it is "important for us to present an evolution narrative that may not be the same as in all of the textbooks."

While devotees agreed that ISKCON has distinctive knowledge that its members would "like to share" with the public, they also conceded that the BI's early science-religion media products no longer reflect ISKCON's current values system. This point was very clearly expressed in one participant's comment about ISKCON's infamous antievolutionist text, *Life Comes from Life* (1979), a redacted collection of conversation transcripts recorded between Bhaktivedanta and his disciples. Though heavily redacted and published posthumously, the book is attributed to the swami himself. Accordingly, *Life Comes from Life* has been particularly influential in ISKCON's religion-science discourse. The conference participant explained that this book, had been "written in the early days,

when the movement was young and somewhat fanatical, and so the subject matter and presentation of that book fit with the values of the time.” However, ISKCON has “changed over the years,” and “our values, for many devotees, have changed, to the point that the narrative in *Life Comes from Life* is almost embarrassing for some of us.” Several participants appeared to agree with this devotee when she later explained that the renunciative, “world-rejecting” attitudes of young Hare Krishnas in the early days of the movement not only fail to reflect current ISKCON values, but also “tragically” misrepresent core theological tenets of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism.⁷⁸ Accordingly, these members maintained that it was time for ISKCON as an organization to move forward, away from the old antagonistic ISKCON-science plotlines, toward more positive modes of discourse that embody contemporary devotees’ sense of themselves in relation to science and the modern world.

In addition to re-evaluating “the values that we’re creating our narratives through, to reflect the current state of ISKCON,” as one participant described it, the workshop also identified a need to reassess evolution-related discourse in the work of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami and ISKCON’s forerunners. In this regard, one senior participant stressed that staunch antievolutionism not only contradicts modern science, it also diverges from the teachings of ISKCON’s forerunners. In his view, Bhaktivinoda, the father and guru of Bhaktisiddhānta, had sought to “embrace and engage the new paradigms, scientific and otherwise,” and thus “seemed to externally embrace the new notions of evolution.” In addition to the “evolution of individual forms,” the workshop participant explained, Bhaktivinoda believed in cultural and cosmic evolution, so “life and intelligence and beings are actually evolving as cosmic phenomenon.” Concerning ISKCON’s founder, the same devotee insisted that Bhaktivedanta had “very specifically” described the “emergence of forms on Earth,” so there is “no question” that he indicated “there is a progressive appearance” of species. To substantiate this claim, the devotee cited a transcript in which he had, in 1977, personally been Bhaktivedanta’s interlocutor. Here, the swami explained that in “this material world, life begins from water” and then “develops, evolves.” The “sea does not generate life,” he elaborated, but life begins with “an exhibition” in the “form of sea animals or fish or similar,” which is followed by vegetables. After this there appear “moving animals and ants, reptiles,” followed by “birds, beast, then four-legged animals, then uncivilized man, then civilized man with Vedic knowledge, then God realization.” According to Bhaktivedanta, “This is the process,” and the workshop attendee contended such teachings reflected the swami’s acceptance of evolution.⁷⁹

Over the course of the workshop, similar passages from Bhaktivedanta’s books, correspondence, and transcripts were referenced, with several participants agreeing that such accounts were

“basically, in a qualitative sense” comparable to modern biological descriptions of the emergence of species. Although these quotes suggested to workshop contributors a degree of compatibility between evolution and the swami’s teachings, it was acknowledged that Bhaktivedanta also “had the ability to say provocative things” about science. Interestingly, however, while early BI media tended to focus on these provocative statements, most members at the recent BIHS workshop downplayed those in favor of the swami’s more accommodating perspectives. In particular, attendees stressed the importance of contextualizing Bhaktivedanta’s oppositional statements toward science, while being open to their “latent complexity”—that is, not simply taking such comments at face value, or mindlessly assuming that even negative comments encapsulate the sum of his opinions on modern science. For example, one devotee pointed out that the swami had never actually attempted to present a “comprehensive academic analysis” of evolutionary theory in relation to ISKCON theology. Rather, he had simply responded to his disciples’ questions about evolution during conversations in which the topic was raised. In the course of such conversations, it seemed apparent to a workshop participant that while the swami was ostensibly replying to concerns “about Darwin or whoever,” he prioritized addressing “the doubt of that person expressing the discourse.” Rather than systematizing his views on Vaiṣṇava theology and evolution, Bhaktivedanta’s ostensible conversational teaching method was focused on protecting and nurturing his young disciples’ faith in Krishna. Several workshop participants contended that, although Bhaktivedanta was sometimes “very strident with Darwinian theory,” his negative comments were always made under the assumption that atheism was “being presented in the name of Darwinian theory.” As one devotee noted, you “could make those [atheistic] arguments in the name of [University of Florida] Gators football, and he would push back just as vehemently.” Thus, in revisiting Bhaktivedanta’s teachings, a reconceptualized image of the swami emerged for workshop attendees, in which his critiques of evolution were not directed at science per se, but rather to underlying atheistic conclusions presented in the guise of science that may have threatened the faith of devotees.

In addition to contextualizing the swami’s statements within time, place, and the broader scope of his teachings, workshop participants also drew attention to the way that Bhaktivedanta’s message had sometimes been misconstrued within ISKCON’s published works. This trend was specifically highlighted in the book *Life Comes from Life*. Focusing on this text, one workshop contributor presented a comparison of the original unedited transcripts and the published book, demonstrating how the latter was replete with embellishments, additions, and omissions. Initially, the workshop participant stated, he “had a hard time matching” any part of the book with the original transcripts. When tracing the

history of the text, he found that the conversations had first been translated into German in 1974 by young devotees who “got very excited” and subsequently wrote “a dramatic telling of how Prabhupāda answered their questions and concerns about science.” In 1979, devotees then translated the “German dramatization of the recordings” back into English to make a book that has since been distributed to the public and circulated widely in ISKCON centers, contributing “probably more than any other work” to the current “standard of [scientific] discourse in ISKCON.” Interestingly, immediately following the workshop contributor’s comments, the director of the BIHS announced that, as a result of the institute’s analysis of the inaccuracies in *Life Comes from Life*, ISKCON’s publishing house, the Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, had withdrawn the book from print. According to the director, the combative, counter-science mentality that led to the publication of this book reflects a “problem” that is “embedded in ISKCON culture, up and down.” Therefore, he explained, one of “the missions of our BI” is to “improve that culture through literature.”

The workshop discussion about *Life Comes from Life* represents the extent to which some contemporary ISKCON devotees have attempted to review and revise the conflict-oriented religion-science discourses that characterized much of the BI’s early publications. Yet it also illustrates some of the complexities involved in changing the course of a narrative that has proven to be influential within an organization. As the BIHS director indicated, the production of new literature will be an essential part of changing the culture of ISKCON’s approach to science. However, as the workshop leader went on to acknowledge, for this to be successful the BI would need to articulate a convincing and “internally consistent” alternative religion-science narrative to the one espoused during the 1970s and 1980s. This, he added, was “proving to be very difficult.” Although substitute models of how ISKCON might interact with science were proposed during the workshop, no single template was agreed upon by the conclusion of the proceedings. In fact, some participants questioned the possibility of accommodating the disparate perspectives on science maintained by devotees within a single ISKCON-supported evolution narrative. Rather, as one participant indicated, it is likely that the Hare Krishna movement will shelter a spectrum of “center-right and center-left syntheses” of science and theology, epitomizing both conflict-oriented and non-combative positions under one roof.

Nevertheless, significant time was spent at the workshop considering the validity of evolutionary science, and how it may or may not be reconciled with the Hare Krishna worldview. These conversation points were pursued with the aim of updating ISKCON’s messaging around evolution, which would eventually be conveyed through the production of media and an exhibit at the Temple of the Vedic Planetarium. Not

surprisingly, a diversity of outlooks was expressed. Some participants described evolution as “the best game in town, in terms of a well-wrought and coherent, and established-over-time theory about the origin of biological complexity.” Such supporters of evolution explained that it is a “remarkably consistent story” about how “life on earth has evolved from simple to more complex over time.” Other participants, however, were more cautious in their appraisals, with several identifying what were perceived to be inconsistencies between the current evolutionary model and ISKCON’s teachings. Nonetheless, over the course of the workshop there emerged a consensus that ISKCON’s spiritual framework could, at the very least, accommodate a scientific account of life as described by modern evolutionary biology. Tentative solutions were thus put forward to minimize apparent incompatibilities between ISKCON theology and evolution. For example, one participant suggested that the theory of evolution involves an unnecessarily slow and inefficient mechanism for divine creation. In response, another devotee pointed out that the vast cosmic timescales described in Vaiṣṇava scriptures actually make the evolutionary process seem rather quick. Similarly, when Bhaktivedanta’s negative assertions about evolution were raised, some participants countered with references to the swami’s more accommodating statements. Moreover, unlike the messaging of earlier BI media, most workshop participants came to agree that there is, in actuality, no intrinsic link between evolutionary theory and atheism.

At the same time, several workshop participants expressed unfavorable opinions of an antievolutionist perspective known as Intelligent Design theory, which maintains that complex biological adaptations could not have resulted from natural selection or any other materialistic processes. Instead, the biological intricacies of life are best explained with reference to interventions by a super-intelligent designer.⁸⁰ Notably, the BIHS workshop participants’ negative assessment of this theory departed from the pro-Intelligent Design sentiments articulated throughout a significant corpus of ISKCON literature addressing evolution.⁸¹ Though some individuals were more sympathetic to Intelligent Design than others, several devotees agreed that Intelligent Design offers neither a legitimate scientific theory nor a useful modality for Hare Krishna engagement with science and theology. In addition to the perception that Intelligent Design maintained a “very off-putting” connection with Christian antievolutionism, participants considered the theory ill-equipped for communicating the nuances of the Vaiṣṇava spiritual tradition. A senior BI member went so far as to warn that while “plagiarizing” from Intelligent Design theorists would make “many devotees happy,” it would ultimately “compromise” the BI’s integrity. Similarly, another senior member cautioned against “going down that particular route [of Intelligent Design theory],” because ISKCON adherents are “not creationists” in

the usual sense of this term as it relates to Christian Young Earth Creationism and Intelligent Design.

It was thereby acknowledged that the Bhaktivedanta Institute would need to fashion a narrative about Vaiṣṇavism and evolution that differed from Intelligent Design theory, which was also not necessarily opposed to science in the manner articulated throughout earlier BI communications. In fact, each participant affirmed that the institute must move away from the belligerent religion-science themes accentuated in twentieth-century Bhaktivedanta Institute messaging. With that goal in mind, the workshop attendees endeavored to find ways of accommodating the methods and evidence of modern science without compromising core tenets of the Hare Krishna tradition. For example, several participants considered “consciousness” and the role of “desire” and “intent” to be crucial, non-negotiable concepts within ISKCON’s theological system. It was then emphasized that these concepts could fit neatly within notions of evolutionary science, and perhaps even provide a “missing link” between current scientific models and ISKCON beliefs. Through this lens, one presenter detailed a “science-consistent” interpretation of evolution that, he argued, aligns with the “fossil record, evolutionary biology, evolutionary psychology, trees of life, zoology, morphology,” while still adhering to the group’s theological convictions. “I think there is an evolution or at least a sequential manifestation” of species on Earth, he explained. Regarding the sequence of evolution proposed by modern science, the participant concluded: “I would say, all right, that’s probably how it happened. I would see that fit together. I don’t see it as being a conflict.” The scientific explanation is cogent and does not need to be understood as incompatible with ISKCON’s central teachings. According to the presenter, both evolution and Vaiṣṇavism can coincide without mutual hostility.

In response to the participant’s comments on evolution, the BIHS director stated, “If I’m getting this right, you’re proposing a scientific theory.” The presenter, however, replied in the negative, whereupon the director then asked whether he was “proposing a scientific hypothesis.” The presenter again replied that he was not, clarifying that instead of trying to create an alternative science, he was simply attempting to provide a “science-consistent” ISKCON narrative through which it was “possible to interpret the scientific data.” The perceived intellectual honesty of this approach was commended by many workshop attendees, including the workshop leader, who was then prompted to ask what the role of the Bhaktivedanta Institute would actually be in future. Should the institute pursue the study of “science,” “metaphysics,” or the “philosophy of science”? In response to this question, several participants argued that “science should be science” and, therefore, ISKCON should respect the disciplinary standards established within scientific fields. Accordingly, these devotees agreed that it would be more accurate

for the Bhaktivedanta Institute to present its work in terms of theology or “natural philosophy,” rather than a radical new form of science framed within a motif of cosmological battle, which had so often been proposed in early BI documents. Several workshop participants, furthermore, agreed that ISKCON members should withhold criticism of science unless they themselves were academically trained in the targeted fields; or, if they were equipped, to make critiques using the standards and tools accepted within the scientific establishment itself. As one devotee explained, if “we’re critiquing biology as it’s conceived by biologists, then the standards of that critique” would need to be “the standard for the discourse” accepted by biologists themselves. Another participant agreed, remarking that “if you’re going to make an argument about biology, you’d better know how biologists think and work.”⁸²

A number of participants also raised concerns about the Bhaktivedanta Institute’s historical emphasis on preaching to scientists and scholars in an effort to “make more members.” This, it was voiced, seemed to be a “misappropriation” of scientific discourse, and even the word “science” itself sometimes was employed merely to serve ISKCON’s own proselytizing aims rather than to offer anything of true scientific merit. The question was then raised as to whether the BI was to operate as a theologically oriented “preaching arm” of ISKCON, or as a full-fledged research institute committed to academically rigorous science. In relation to such queries, the workshop leader and several attendees emphasized the need for the BI to cultivate respect for science while “accepting our limitations.” One senior participant, who happened to be an original BI member in the 1970s, insisted that “our biggest danger is our own arrogance, by which we [are convinced that we] know more than everyone and they know less than us.” This “huge danger” of unjustified conceit about science should be resisted on a daily basis. Likewise, when a young devotee dismissed Darwinism as unintelligible, the workshop leader pointed out that “just because we don’t understand something, doesn’t mean that there aren’t people out there who do.” In science, he explained, it is necessary “to spend a lot of time studying what’s already been done” in a particular field “before we can grasp it,” and then competently offer criticisms.⁸³

To illustrate this point, and in response to a participant raising doubts about the mechanisms of biological evolution, the workshop leader referenced correspondence between Bhaktivedanta and one of his disciples. In these communications, the swami recounted a story about Caitanya, who sat “for three days and nights” as he listened patiently and silently to an interlocutor’s arguments. Bhaktivedanta made clear that Caitanya was “always tolerant of others and appreciating their points of view.” Alluding to this anecdote, the workshop leader said:

I would like to, at some point, get a real evolutionary biologist in here and have you listen to them for three days without saying anything. And I'm serious. Because people who really learn evolutionary biology and are in a position to speak authoritatively about this, they spent four years here, sitting there listening to someone without saying anything, and then they're qualified to begin to start to analyze evidence.⁸⁴

With such statements in mind, it was apparent that many of the “Evolutionary Narratives in Krishna Consciousness” workshop participants were seeking to discard much of the militant anti-science rhetoric displayed in early Bhaktivedanta Institute media. With an eye for complexity, attendees revisited Bhaktivedanta’s teachings and found space for compatibility between ISKCON theology and evolutionary theory. Accordingly, workshop attendees conceded that modern science such as evolution is not actually the dire atheistic threat to Vaiṣṇavism that 1970s and 1980s BI materials had so frequently made it out to be. While accepting this point, some devotees still asserted that the term “science” in popular discourse has often been portrayed as something necessarily atheistic, opposed to religion, that can serve as a replacement for religious truth, meaning, and values. Accordingly, the target of BI’s media should instead be shifted from science more generally, and evolution specifically, to scientism masquerading as science. One senior BI member illustrated this position when he said, “we’re not arguing against science as a method for gaining knowledge,” and “we’re not actually arguing against scientific evidence.” However, he stressed, the BI *is* arguing against atheistic “narratives of scientism” that contradict ISKCON’s religious outlook and threaten to divert “the general public away from spiritual life.” Echoing these concerns, numerous participants agreed that “we want to defeat scientism, not science.” Yet, while some devotees felt that scientism had permeated academia and significantly influenced the public, others questioned the seriousness of this threat. For example, the workshop leader noted that he had rarely experienced scientism in his academic field of work. Furthermore, he had never witnessed a conspiracy within the scientific establishment, or an “ill motive by people trying to pull the wool over other peoples’ eyes and denying the existence of God.”⁸⁵ These comments again conveyed a stark counterposition to the fear-saturated, conspiracist narratives about science that marked early BI media.

The practical outcomes of the 2019 “Evolutionary Narratives in Krishna Consciousness” workshop are, for the most part, yet to be seen. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the Bhaktivedanta Institute for Higher Studies has already been instrumental in subtly shifting ISKCON’s religion-science discourse towards less antagonistic perspectives. The institute’s role in having ISKCON’s most influential anti-science text, *Life Comes from Life*, removed from print is an important development

and one of the BIHS's first concrete achievements in its endeavor to reform ISKCON discourse on religion-science. Moreover, it is significant that the BIHS has been elected the official science advisory team for the Temple of the Vedic Planetarium, the most ambitious project in ISKCON's history. Obtaining such a role demonstrates not only the prominence of the BIHS within ISKCON, but also the receptivity of ISKCON and Temple of the Vedic Planetarium leaders towards the institute's religion-science viewpoints. According to the BIHS's co-director, this partnership has already resulted in the Temple of the Vedic Planetarium leadership tentatively agreeing to reconceptualize the proposed "science museum" as a "museum of natural philosophy" in order to respect the modern disciplinary boundaries of science.⁸⁶ Such developments indicate a shift in BI discourse away from its early combat motifs and toward accommodation with science.

CONCLUSION

Although the Bhaktivedanta Institute was established over forty years ago, the 2019 Bhaktivedanta Institute for Higher Studies workshop on "Evolutionary Narratives in Krishna Consciousness" represented the first occasion the institute hosted a forum for members to review openly and critically ISKCON's past religion-science discourses. Spurred by the need to produce an exhibit for ISKCON's forthcoming Temple of the Vedic Planetarium, the workshop was organized in recognition of the need for a new Hare Krishna narrative on biological evolution, which would align with contemporary devotees' understanding of themselves, the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition, and modern science. Though the workshop did not result in a consensus, the event did serve as a platform for participants to explore potential compatibilities between ISKCON theology and evolutionary theory. After reviewing scriptural passages, and recontextualizing Bhaktivedanta's discourses within the broader scope of his teachings, most workshop attendees concluded that there exists no inherent conflict between Vaiṣṇava theology and evolutionary science. Indeed, several attendees proposed that ISKCON's spiritual framework could readily accommodate contemporary evolutionary models without contradicting Hare Krishna beliefs. Moreover, rather than attempting to compete with scientific methods and evidence, as was the tendency expressed in early BI media, a number of workshop participants discussed the need to respect academic disciplinary standards and scientific facts. These Hare Krishna devotees presented their perspectives on evolution not as science, but as "science-consistent" theological frameworks through which scientific data could be understood.

These accommodating outlooks depart sharply from the narratives of the Bhaktivedanta Institute's initial communications, which articulated a felt need to infiltrate and overthrow the scientific establishment. Consequently, by comparing early BI media with recent discussions of members of the North American BI branch known as the Bhaktivedanta Institute of Higher Studies, this article highlights a notable shift in ISKCON's religion-science engagements. More precisely, it reveals how members of the BIHS have sought to distance themselves from earlier conflict-oriented paradigms, while attempting to develop a more nuanced, accommodating posture toward science. This shift within the BIHS appears to have derived from a greater awareness among science-educated devotees about the complexities in Bhaktivedanta's religion-science discourses, coupled with increasingly nuanced interpretations of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, and a growing appreciation for the successes of modern science. Furthermore, according to some workshop participants, this change also reflects broader organizational developments within ISKCON, as many devotees have moved away from what are now perceived to be the over-zealous, renunciative attitudes maintained by earlier Hare Krishna devotees. Thus, while the Bhaktivedanta Institute's twentieth-century religion-science narratives were recurrently framed within a cosmological battle motif, featuring the demonic forces of materialistic science versus the emancipatory powers of Krishna Consciousness, attendees at the 2019 BIHS workshop called for a new approach to the movement's discourses to reflect contemporary ISKCON values and beliefs, while also acknowledging the validity of modern science and its practices. For as ISKCON's online news outlet reported, an important outcome of the BIHS workshop included a Hare Krishna "narrative that challenges the atheistic conclusions of Darwinism, while maintaining a respect for the science itself."⁸⁷

Oliver Zambon, University of Queensland, oliver.zambon@uqconnect.edu.au

Thomas Aechtner, University of Queensland, t.aechtner@uq.edu.au

ENDNOTES

¹ Thoudam Damodara Singh (Swarūpa Dāmodara dāsa), "Śrīla Prabhupāda's Vision for the Bhaktivedanta Institute," in *Perspectives on Bhaktivedanta Institute* (Philadelphia: Bhaktivedanta Institute, 1979), 10–15, available at <http://>

richardlthompson.com/sites/default/files/1979_Perspectives_Bhaktivedanta_Institute.pdf.

According to this pamphlet, the Oriental Research Institute was established in Vrindavan by Bon Maharāja, a fellow disciple of Bhaktivedanta's guru, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī. Although an institute of this name does not appear to exist in present-day Vrindavan, the Bon Maharaj Institute of Management and Technology remains located across the street from ISKCON's Vrindavan temple. See Bon Maharaj Institute of Management and Technology, <http://bimt.in/about-bimt/about-us/>, accessed 5 September 2021.

² Singh, "Śrīla Prabhupāda's Vision," 10.

³ "Bhaktivedanta Institute Charter," International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Potomac, Maryland, 10 December 1976, available at http://richardlthompson.com/sites/default/files/1976_BI_Charter_letter.pdf.

⁴ For an overview of the Bhaktivedanta Institute, with a focus on Swarūpa Dāmodara, see Benjamin E. Zeller, *Prophets and Prottons: New Religious Movements and Science in Late Twentieth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 104–05, 113; and Anna S. King, "Vedic Science and Modern Science," *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 25, no. 1 (2012): 60. For a discussion of the Bhaktivedanta Institute's 1986 conference, see Eileen Barker, "World Congress for the Synthesis of Science and Religion: A Personal Account," *ISKCON Review* 2 (1986): 133–47; and Mikael Rothstein, *Belief Transformations: Some Aspects of the Relation Between Science and Religion in Transcendental Meditation (TM) and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1996), 134–43.

⁵ Originally a single institute, the Bhaktivedanta Institute splintered into several autonomous branches during the 1990s. See Zeller, *Prophets and Prottons*, 104. The Bhaktivedanta Institute for Higher Studies is currently the most influential branch of ISKCON's Bhaktivedanta Institute.

⁶ ISKCON traces its teachings to the Vaiṣṇava saint Caitanya Mahāprabhu (1486–1533), who taught a path of devotional worship (*bhakti*) directed towards God in the form of Kṛṣṇa. Caitanya especially promoted chanting the *mahāmantra* as the most effective means by which aspirants can attain spiritual perfection. While Caitanya himself wrote only the brief sixteen verse *Sikṣāṣṭakam*, his successors known as the "six *gōsvāmīs* of Vrindavan" elaborated extensively on the saint's theological system. As Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas, ISKCON devotees not only follow Caitanya's Vaiṣṇava teachings, but also worship him as a combined incarnation of Kṛṣṇa and His divine consort Rādhārānī.

⁷ Federico Squarcini, "In Search of Identity within the Hare Krishna Movement: Memory, Oblivion and Thought Style," *Social Compass* 47, no. 2 (2000): 258; E. Burke Rochford, Jr., "Aligning Hare Krishna: Political Activists, Hippies, and Hindus," *Nova Religio* 22, no. 1 (August 2018): 47; and E. Burke Rochford, Jr., *Hare Krishna Transformed* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 14, 63–65.

⁸ Rochford, *Hare Krishna Transformed*, 7.

⁹ Rochford, *Hare Krishna Transformed*, 216.

¹⁰ E. Burke Rochford, Jr., "Demons, Karmies, and Non-Devotees: Culture, Group Boundaries, and the Development of the Hare Krishna in North America and Europe," *Social Compass* 47, no. 2 (2000): 170.

- ¹¹ Squarcini, “In Search of Identity within the Hare Krishna Movement,” 261.
- ¹² Rochford, *Hare Krishna Transformed*, 215.
- ¹³ Rochford, *Hare Krishna Transformed*, 201–17; John Fahy, *Becoming Vaishnava in an Ideal Vedic City* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2019), 1, 9–10.
- ¹⁴ Squarcini, “In Search of Identity within the Hare Krishna Movement,” 261; Rochford, *Hare Krishna Transformed*, 212–15; and Travis Vande Berg and Fred Kniss, “ISKCON and Immigrants: The Rise, Decline, and Rise Again of a New Religious Movement,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (2008): 88.
- ¹⁵ Rothstein, *Belief Transformations*, 18–23.
- ¹⁶ C. Mackenzie Brown, “Hindu and Christian Creationism: ‘Transposed Passages’ in the Geological Book of Life,” *Zygon* 37, no. 1 (March 2002): 96, 99, 110.
- ¹⁷ Zeller, *Prophets and Protons*, 92.
- ¹⁸ Zeller, *Prophets and Protons*, 113.
- ¹⁹ Anna S. King, “Vedic Science, Modern Science and Reason,” in *Asian Religions, Technology and Science*, ed. István Keul (New York: Routledge, 2015), 54–55, 57.
- ²⁰ Oliver Zambon and Thomas Aechtner, “Vaishnavism, Antievolutionism, and Ambiguities: Revisiting ISKCON’s Darwin-Skepticism,” *Zygon* 53, no. 1 (March 2018): 77–82, 88–91; and Thomas Aechtner and Oliver Zambon, “Convergent Antievolutionism and the Hare Krishnas,” *Theology and Science* 17, no. 3 (2019): 293–94.
- ²¹ A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, *Life Comes from Life: A Startling Challenge to the Modern Scientific Theory of the Origin of Life and the Universe* (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1979).
- ²² Satsvarūpa dāsa Goswāmī, *Śrīla Prabhupāda-līlāmṛta*, vol. 1, *A Lifetime in Preparation*, 2nd and enlarged ed. (Alachua, FL: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 2019), available at <https://www.vedabase.com/en/spl>.
- ²³ Joshua M. Greene, *Swami in a Strange Land: How Krishna Came to the West* (San Rafael, CA: Mandala Publishing, 2017), 86–89. This text is ISKCON’s most recent authorized biography of A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda.
- ²⁴ Paul Oliver, *Hindusim and the 1960s: The Rise of a Counter-Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 13, 113–14.
- ²⁵ Greene, *Swami in a Strange Land*, 108.
- ²⁶ Greene, *Swami in a Strange Land*, 107–08.
- ²⁷ Although Bhaktivinoda himself had not yet been formally initiated into a Vaiṣṇava lineage, he initiated his son into the chanting of the Hare Krishna mantra in 1881. In 1891, Bhaktisiddhānta received a second initiation from the renunciate Gaura Kiśora dāsa Bābājī, and henceforth regarded both Gaura Kiśora and Bhaktivinoda as his gurus. See Ferdinando Sardella, *Modern Hindu Personalism: The History, Life, and Thought of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 64, 76–77.
- ²⁸ Jason D. Fuller, “Re-membering the Tradition: Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura’s ‘*Sajjanaṭosānī*’ and the Construction of a Middle-Class Vaiṣṇava Samprādāya in Nineteenth-Century Bengal,” in *Hinduism in Public and Private: Reform, Hindutva, Gender, and Sampradaya*, ed. Antony Copley (New York: Oxford University Press,

2003), 205; Shukavak Das, *Hindu Encounter with Modernity: Kedarnath Datta Bhaktivinoda: Vaiṣṇava Theologian* (Los Angeles: Sanskrit Religions Institute, 1999), 47.

²⁹ Fuller, “Re-membering the Tradition,” 185.

³⁰ Fuller, “Re-membering the Tradition,” 185.

³¹ Fuller, “Re-membering the Tradition,” 185, 190–91; Shukavak N. Das, “Bhaktivinoda and Scriptural Literalism,” in *The Hare Krishna Movement: The Postcharismatic Fate of a Religious Transplant*, ed. Edwin F. Bryant and Maria L. Ekstrand (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 103.

³² Das, *Hindu Encounter with Modernity*, 11; Ferdinando Sardella, “Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati,” in *Brill’s Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, vol. 5: *Religious Symbols, Hinduism and Migration: Contemporary Communities outside South Asia, Some Modern Religious Groups and Teachers*, ed. Knut A. Jacobsen, with Helene Basu, Angelika Malinar, Vasudha Narayanan (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 415–23, accessed online at http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.library.uq.edu.au/10.1163/2212-5019_BEH_COM_9000000229.

³³ Ferdinando Sardella, *Modern Hindu Personalism: The History, Life, and Thought of Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 208. For an example of the accommodation and reappropriation of evolution theory in *The Harmonist*, see “The Gaudiya Math and History,” *The Harmonist* 32, no. 18 (1936): 409–14, available at <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.92643/page/n483/mode/2up>.

³⁴ A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, *Easy Journey to Other Planets (by Practice of Supreme Yoga)* (Delhi: Surendra Printers, 1960).

³⁵ For a discussion of Bhaktivedanta’s use of the word “science” as a legitimization strategy, see Benjamin E. Zeller, “Inverted Orientalism, Vedic Science, and the Modern World: Bhaktivedanta and the International Society for Krishna Consciousness,” in *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science*, ed. James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer (Boston: Brill, 2010), 250.

³⁶ Bhaktivedanta Institute for Vedic Studies, “What is Bhaktivedanta Institute?” December 1975, available at <http://richardlthompson.com/1975-what-bhaktivedanta-institute-aims-and-objectives-december-1975>.

³⁷ Bhaktivedanta Institute for Vedic Studies, “What is Bhaktivedanta Institute?”

³⁸ Bhaktivedanta Institute for Vedic Studies, “What is Bhaktivedanta Institute?”

³⁹ A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, “Letter to Balavanta, Ahmedabad, 13 December 1972,” in *The Bhaktivedanta VedaBase*, <https://vedabase.io/en/library/letters/letter-to-balavanta-6/>.

⁴⁰ Bhaktivedanta, as cited in Singh, “Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Vision,” 11; A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, “Letter to Dravida, Bombay, 2 April 1977,” in *Prabhupada Books*, <https://prabhupadabooks.com/letters/bombay/april/01/1977/dravida?d=1&f=594143>.

⁴¹ Bhaktivedanta, as cited in Singh, “Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Vision,” 11.

⁴² Bhaktivedanta, as cited in Singh, “Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Vision,” 11.

⁴³ Bhaktivedanta, “Letter to Dravida.”

⁴⁴ Bhaktivedanta, as cited in Singh, “Śrīla Prabhupāda’s Vision,” 14.

⁴⁵ A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, "Letter to Karandhara, Bhaktivedanta Manor, 19 July 1973," in The Bhaktivedanta VedaBase, <https://vedabase.io/en/library/letters/letter-to-karandhara-66/?query=Letter+to+Karandhara+73-07#bb135413>; A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, "Letter to Svarupa Damodara, Auckland, 27 April 1976," in The Bhaktivedanta VedaBase, <https://vedabase.io/en/library/letters/letter-to-svarupa-damodara-15/?query=Letter+to+Svarupa+Damodara+76-04#bb152673>.

As the birthplace of Caitanya Mahāprabhu, the town of Mayapura, Bengal, is one of the most sacred sites for ISKCON devotees. In response to Bhaktivedanta's instructions, ISKCON is midway through constructing an extravagant, 113-meter-high Temple of the Vedic Planetarium at the Mayapur Chandrodaya Temple at ISKCON's world headquarters. The planetarium, expected to be complete in 2023, will depict the universe "as described in the Vedic scriptures." See "Cosmic Chandelier: Model of the Universe according to the Vedas," Sri Mayapur Chandrodaya Mandir: Temple of the Vedic Planetarium, <https://tovp.org/vedic-science/vedic-planetarium/>, accessed 5 August 2021.

⁴⁶ A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, "Letter to Giriraja, Bhaktivedanta Manor, 24 July 1976," in The Bhaktivedanta VedaBase, <https://vedabase.io/en/library/letters/letter-to-giriraja-81/?query=Letter+to+Giriraja+76-07#bb154308>.

⁴⁷ Bhaktivedanta, as cited in Singh, "Śrīla Prabhupāda's Vision," 13.

⁴⁸ A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, "Letter to Hansadutta, Bombay, 12 November 1974," in The Bhaktivedanta VedaBase, <https://vedabase.io/en/search/?query=%E2%80%9CLetter+to+Hansadutta+%E2%80%94+Bombay%2C+12+November+1974%2C%E2%80%9D>; A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami, "Letter to Svarupa Damodara, Vrindaban, 8 September 1974," The Bhaktivedanta VedaBase, https://www.prabhupada.io/letters/740908_svarupa_damodara.

⁴⁹ Bhaktivedanta, cited in Singh, "Śrīla Prabhupāda's Vision," 11.

⁵⁰ "General Meeting of the Bhaktivedanta Institute, September 1978," available at <http://richardlthompson.com/1978-general-meeting-bhaktivedanta-institute-september-1978>.

⁵¹ Interestingly, the Bhaktivedanta Institute's 1978 strategy to revolutionize the scientific establishment shares distinct similarities with the notorious "Wedge Strategy" produced two decades later by a prominent non-ISKCON antievolutionist group known as the Discovery Institute. See Centre for the Renewal of Science and Culture, *The Wedge* (Seattle: Discovery Institute, 1998), https://ncse.ngo/files/pub/creationism/The_Wedge_Strategy.pdf. For a detailed analysis of the Wedge Strategy see Barbara Forrest and Paul R. Gross, *Creationism's Trojan Horse: The Wedge of Intelligent Design* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 3–33.

⁵² "General Meeting of the Bhaktivedanta Institute, September 1978."

⁵³ "General Meeting of the Bhaktivedanta Institute, September 1978."

⁵⁴ Draviḍa dāsa Brahmācārī, *Bhaktivedanta Institute Temple Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (May 1979): 1, available at <http://richardlthompson.com/1979-bhaktivedanta-institute-temple-newsletter-no-1-vol-1>. The overall commentary in this newsletter is by Draviḍa dāsa Brahmācārī (he concludes and signs the newsletter on page 6). Lengthy quotes from Jñāna dāsa Adhikārī and Ravindra Swarūpa dāsa are cited throughout.

- ⁵⁵ Draviḍa dāsa Brahmācārī, *Bhaktivedanta Institute Temple Newsletter*, 1.
- ⁵⁶ Ravindra Swarūpa dāsa, cited in *Bhaktivedanta Institute Temple Newsletter* 1, no. 1 (May 1979): 4.
- ⁵⁷ Ravindra Swarūpa dāsa, *Bhaktivedanta Institute Temple Newsletter*, 4.
- ⁵⁸ Ravindra Swarūpa dāsa, *Bhaktivedanta Institute Temple Newsletter*, 4.
- ⁵⁹ Ravindra Swarūpa dāsa, *Bhaktivedanta Institute Temple Newsletter*, 4.
- ⁶⁰ Ravindra Swarūpa dāsa, *Bhaktivedanta Institute Temple Newsletter*, 5.
- ⁶¹ Ravindra Swarūpa dāsa, *Bhaktivedanta Institute Temple Newsletter*, 5.
- ⁶² Ravindra Swarūpa dāsa, *Bhaktivedanta Institute Temple Newsletter*, 5.
- ⁶³ Michael A. Marchetti (Mādhava dāsa), “Saint and Revolutionary,” *Perspectives on Bhaktivedanta Institute* (N.p.: Bhaktivedanta Institute, 1979), 20–21, available at http://richardlthompson.com/sites/default/files/1979_Perspectives_Bhaktivedanta_Institute.pdf.
- ⁶⁴ William Deadwyler (Ravindra Swarūpa dāsa), “Logic and Argument: A Bona Fide Weapon to Defeat the Atheists,” *Perspectives on Bhaktivedanta Institute* (N.p.: Bhaktivedanta Institute, 1979), 22–24.
- ⁶⁵ Deadwyler, “Logic and Argument,” 24.
- ⁶⁶ Squarcini, “In Search of Identity within the Hare Krishna Movement,” 262.
- ⁶⁷ Squarcini, “In Search of Identity within the Hare Krishna Movement,” 262.
- ⁶⁸ Zambon and Aechtner, “Vaishnavism, Antievolutionism, and Ambiguities,” 77–82, 88–91.
- ⁶⁹ Aechtner and Zambon, “Convergent Antievolutionism and the Hare Krishnas,” 293–94.
- ⁷⁰ A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, “Nationalism of Pure Consciousness,” *Back to Godhead Magazine* 3, pt. 8 (1956), available at <https://prabhupadabooks.com/btg/12/12c>.
- ⁷¹ A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda, “Lecture at Arlington Street Church, Boston, 3 May 1969,” *The Bhaktivedanta Vedabase*, <https://vedabase.io/en/library/transcripts/6905031e-boston/?query=Lecture+at+Arlington+Street+Church+May+1969#bb543893>.
- ⁷² Examples abound—from the inaugural Bhaktivedanta Institute “Life Comes from Life” conference in 1977, to Michael A. Cremonese and Richard L. Thompson, *Forbidden Archaeology: The Hidden History of the Human Race* (Los Angeles: Bhaktivedanta Book Publishing, 1993), to Leif A. Jensen, with Jonathan Wells, William A. Dembski, Michael J. Behe, and Michael A. Cremonese, *Rethinking Darwin: A Vedic Study of Darwinism and Intelligent Design* (Alachua, Fla: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 2011). Lalitānātha Dāsa is Leif A. Jensen. He uses the name Leif A. Jensen on the cover of *Rethinking Darwin*.
- ⁷³ Ravindra Swarūpa dāsa, *Bhaktivedanta Institute Temple Newsletter*, 4.
- The Institute for Creation Research was founded in California by Henry Morris to “develop Bible-based explanations for scientific information resulting from fossil research.” See Michael Ruse, *The Evolution Wars: A Guide to the Debates* (Millerton, NY: Grey House Publishing, 2008): 121, 125–26. The Institute for Creation Research is now based in Dallas.
- ⁷⁴ Correspondence with BIHS co-director, 26 October 2019.

⁷⁵ Madhava Smullen, “TOVP Exhibits to Present ‘A Credible Scientific Alternative,’” *ISKCON News*, 2 June 2012, <https://iskconnews.org/tovp-exhibits-to-present-a-credible-scientific-alternative,3310/>.

⁷⁶ Though not a member of ISKCON, Oliver Zambon, who has published on the topic of the Hare Krishnas and science, was invited to attend as an interested researcher-observer. While there, he was asked to speak briefly on narrative theory and science-religion discourse in Bhaktisiddhānta’s periodical, *The Harmonist*.

⁷⁷ The director of the BIHS provided Oliver Zambon with digital access to the recordings.

⁷⁸ Interestingly, the workshop participant explicitly framed her comment in terms of Roy Wallis’ typology of “world-rejecting” and “world-affirming” new religious movements. See Roy Wallis, *The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life* (London: Routledge, 1984), 9–39. Sociological studies of ISKCON corroborate this participant’s observation that many devotees have now moved away from the world-rejecting attitudes of earlier Hare Krishna generations. For example, see Rochford, *Hare Krishna Transformed*, 205–07.

⁷⁹ “Evolutionary Narratives in Krishna Consciousness Workshop,” Bhaktivedanta Institute for Higher Studies, Gainesville, Florida, June 2019 [video recording].

⁸⁰ Thomas Aechtner, *Media and Science-Religion Conflict: Mass Persuasion in the Evolution Wars* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 9–10; Ronald L. Numbers, *The Creationists: From Scientific Creationism to Intelligent Design* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 374. See also, Michael Ruse, *The Evolution Wars: A Guide to the Debates* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2000), 127–31.

⁸¹ For example, see the interview with Lalitānātha Dāsa in “Intelligent Design and Krishna Consciousness,” *Back to Godhead Magazine* 43, no. 6 (1 November 2009), <http://www.backtogodhead.in/intelligent-design-and-krishna-consciousness/>; and Balázs Hornyánszky and István Tasi, *Nature’s IQ: Extraordinary Animal Behaviors That Defy Evolution* (Badger, CA: Torchlight Publishing, 2009).

⁸² “Evolutionary Narratives in Krishna Consciousness Workshop.”

⁸³ “Evolutionary Narratives in Krishna Consciousness Workshop.”

⁸⁴ “Evolutionary Narratives in Krishna Consciousness Workshop.”

⁸⁵ “Evolutionary Narratives in Krishna Consciousness Workshop.”

⁸⁶ Personal correspondence, 9 June 2020.

⁸⁷ Bhaktivedanta Institute Gainesville Team, “Using Science in Krishna’s Service,” *ISKCON News*, 18 October 2019, <https://iskconnews.org/using-science-in-krishnas-service,7129/>.