**SKEPTICS – ONLY ACCEPT AS TRUE ONLY THAT WHICH HAS BEEN PROVEN TO BE TRUE BY THE APPLICATION OF SOME FORM OF THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD.**

**The Scientific Method is a process whereby mankind seeks to learn the truths of the universe through a series of steps that consist of:**

1. **Hypothesis (or as it is known in logic “the premise”).**
2. **Gathering of evidence; subject to the principles of reasoning.**
3. **Testing or experimentation (which must be ‘falsifiable’ and ‘reproducible’ and of course they must withstand scrutiny as to validity).**
4. **Conclusion (accepted as fact until disproven or replaced by a better conclusion).**

**TRUE BELIEVERS, ON THE OTHER HAND – ACCEPT CLAIMS ON BLIND FAITH WITHOUT REQUIRING PROOF (AND I AM REFERRING TO REAL, ACTUAL PROOF – NOT THE THINGS THAT TRUE BELIEVERS TRY TO CLAIM IS PROOF).**

**HOWEVER, THERE IS ONE TIME THAT THEY DO REQUIRE PROOF; AND THAT IS WHEN THEY ARE ARGUING AGAINST SCIENCE.**

**WHY DO THEY REQUIRE PROOF OF SCIENCE, BUT HAVE NO PROBLEM BELIEVING OTHER CLAIMS THAT HAVE NO PROOF?**

**BECAUSE THEIR UNSUPPORTED BELIEFS ALWAYS FAIL SCIENTIFIC STANDARDS OF PROOF AND THEREFORE THEY MUST REJECT SCIENCE IN ORDER TO HOLD ONTO THEIR BELIEFS.**

**\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

**Date: 8 Apr 1998**

**From: DOwens6683 <dowens6683@aol.com>**

**Newsgroups: alt.paranormal**

**Subject: Stupid Skeptic Tricks**

**AND HE WILL LIST THE ‘TOP TEN STUPID SKEPTIC TRICKS’.**

**SO I GET THE IMPRESSION THAT THIS IS A DAVID LETTERMAN**

**RIPOFF.**

**Ever get into an argument with a skeptic only to end up**

**exasperated and feeling you've been bamboozled? Skeptics are**

**often highly skilled at tying up opponents in clever verbal**

**knots. Most skeptics are, of course, ordinary, more-or-less**

**honest people who, like the rest of us, are just trying to make**

**the best sense they can of a complicated and often confusing**

**world. Others, however, are merely glib sophists who use**

**specious reasoning to defend their prejudices or attack the ideas and beliefs of others, and even an honest skeptic can innocently fall into the mistake of employing bad reasoning.**

**HE HAS COMPLETELY TURNED THE TRUTH AROUND 180 DEGREES AND TRIED TO CLAIM THAT SKEPTICS ARE GUILTY OF THE THINGS, THAT ACTUALLY DESCRIBE THE WAY THAT TRUE BELIEVERS ARGUE. LET ME REREAD THAT LAST SENTENCE SUBSTITUTING TRUE BELIEVERS FOR SKEPTICS.**

**.........**

**NOW THAT WOULD BE AN ACCURATE STATEMENT.**

**In reading, listening to and sometimes debating skeptics over the years, I've found certain tricks, ploys and gimmicks which they tend to use over and over again. Here are some of 'em. Perhaps if you keep them in mind when arguing with a skeptic, you'll feel better when the debate is over. Shucks, you might even score a point or two.**

**\* \* \***

**1.) RAISING THE BAR (Or IMPOSSIBLE PERFECTION): This trick consists of demanding a new, higher and more difficult standard of evidence whenever it looks as if a skeptic's opponent is going to satisfy an old one. Often the skeptic doesn't make it clear exactly what the standards are in the first place. This can be especially effective if the skeptic can keep his opponent from noticing that he is continually changing his standard of evidence. That way, his opponent will eventually give up in exasperation or disgust. Perhaps best of all, if his opponent complains, the skeptic can tag him as a whiner or a sore loser.**

**Skeptic: I am willing to consider the psi hypothesis if you will**

**only show me some sound evidence.**

**Opponent: There are many thousands of documented reports of**

**incidents that seem to involve psi.**

**S: That is only anecdotal evidence. You must give me laboratory evidence.**

**0: Researchers A-Z have conducted experiments that produced**

**results which favor the psi hypothesis.**

**S: Those experiments are not acceptable because of flaws X,Y and Z.**

**0: Researchers B-H and T-W have conducted experiments producing positive results which did not have flaws X,Y and Z.**

**S: The positive results are not far enough above chance levels**

**to be truly interesting.**

**0: Researchers C-F and U-V produced results well above chance**

**levels.**

**S: Their results were achieved through meta-analysis, which is a highly questionable technique.**

**O: Meta-analysis is a well-accepted method commonly used in**

**psychology and sociology.**

**S: Psychology and sociology are social sciences, and their**

**methods can't be considered as reliable as those of hard sciences such as physics and chemistry.**

**Etc., etc. ad nauseum.**

**REFUTING ARGUMENTS IS NOT THE SAME THING AS ‘RAISING THE BAR’. ‘RAISING THE BAR’ OCCURS WHEN AN ANSWER IS GIVEN AND THE OTHER PERSON CAN’T DEAL WITH THE ANSWER SO THEY ASK ANOTHER QUESTION THAT IS EVEN MORE DIFFICULT. NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES YOU ANSWER THEIR QUESTION, THEY WILL NEVER DEAL WITH YOUR ANSWER BECAUSE THEY CAN’T, SO THEY RESORT TO ASKING QUESTIONS THAT GET MORE IMPOSSIBLE TO ANSWER. THEIR GOAL IS TO FINALLY GET YOU INTO A POSITION WHERE YOU CAN’T ANSWER THEIR IMPOSSIBLE QUESTION AND THEN THEY WILL STOP RAISING THE BAR AND CLAIM VICTORY.**

**DON’T LET THEM RAISE THE BAR ON YOU. ONCE YOU REALIZE WHAT THEY ARE UP TO, YOU HAVE TO STOP THEM BY REFUSING TO PLAY ALONG.**

**SKEPTICS TRAIN TO AVOID COMMITTING LOGICAL FALLACIES. ‘TRUE BELIEVERS’ ARE THE ONES WHO USE THIS TACTIC, NOT SKEPTICS.**

**2.) SOCK 'EM WITH OCCAM: Skeptics frequently invoke Occam's Razor as if the Razor automatically validates their position. Occam's Razor, a principle of epistemology (knowledge theory), states that the simplest explanation which fits all the facts is to be preferred -- or, to state it another way, entities are not to be multiplied needlessly. The Razor is a useful and even necessary principle, but it is largely useless if the facts themselves are not generally agreed upon in the first place.**

**I AGREE WITH HIS CONCLUSION (LAST SENTENCE).**

**3.) EXTRAORDINARY CLAIMS: Extraordinary claims, says the**

**skeptic, require extraordinary evidence. Superficially this**

**seems reasonable enough. However, extraordinariness, like**

**beauty, is very much in the eye of the beholder. Some claims, of**

**course, would seem extraordinary to almost anyone (e.g. the claim that aliens from Alpha Centauri had contacted you telepathically and informed you that the people of Earth must make you their absolute lord and ruler). The "extraordinariness" of many other claims, however, is at best arguable, and it is not at all obvious that unusually strong evidence is necessary to support them. For example, so many people who would ordinarily be considered reliable witnesses have reported precognitive dreams that it becomes difficult to insist these are "unusual" claims requiring "unusual" evidence. Quite ordinary standards of evidence will do.**

**I AGREE WITH HIS CONCLUSION (LAST SENTENCE).**

**4.) STUPID, CRAZY LIARS: This trick consists of simple slander.**

**Anyone who reports anything which displeases the skeptic will be accused of incompetence, mental illness or dishonesty, or some combination of the three without a single shred of fact to**

**support the accusations. When Charles Honorton's Ganzfeld**

**experiments produced impressive results in favor of the psi**

**hypothesis, skeptics accused him of suppressing or not publishing the results of failed experiments. No definite facts supporting the charge ever emerged. Moreover, the experiments were extremely time consuming, and the number of failed, unpublished experiments necessary to make the number of successful, published experiments significant would have been quite high, so it is extremely unlikely that Honorton's results could be due to selective reporting. Yet skeptics still sometimes repeat this accusation.**

**THE LOGICAL FALLACY OF PERSONAL ATTACK IS EMPLOYED**

**BY EVERYONE, HOWEVER SINCE SKEPTICS SHOULD BE TRAINED IN THEIR USE, I BELIEVE THAT THAT TACTIC WOULD**

**MUCH MORE LIKELY TO BE EMPLOYED BY A ‘TRUE BELIEVER’.**

**REGARDING THE GANZFELD EXPERIMENTS I WOULD REFER YOU TO THESKEPTICARENA.COM – SKEPTIC’S DICTIONARY WHERE YOU WILL FIND AN IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION OF THE EXPERIMENTS BY PEOPLE FAR MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE AND UNBIASED THAN D.OWENS.**

**5.) THE SANTA CLAUS GAMBIT: This trick consists of lumping**

**moderate claims or propositions together with extreme ones. If**

**you suggest, for example, that Sasquatch can't be completely**

**ruled out from the available evidence,the skeptic will then**

**facetiously suggest that Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny can't**

**be "completely" ruled out either.**

**WHO DETERMINES WHAT CONSTITUTES A ‘MODERATE’ V. ‘AN**

**EXTREME’ CLAIM? HE HAS TAKEN THE POSITION THAT**

**‘SASQUATCH’ IS A MODERATE CLAIM – SKEPTICS WOULD DISAGREE.**

**6.) SHIFTING THE BURDEN OF EVIDENCE: The skeptic insists that he doesn't have to provide evidence and arguments to support his side of the argument because he isn't asserting a claim, he is merely denying or doubting yours. His mistake consists of assuming that a negative claim (asserting that something doesn't exist) is fundamentally different from a positive claim. It isn't. Any definite claim, positive or negative, requires definite support. Merely refuting or arguing against an**

**opponent's position is not enough to establish one's own**

**position.. In other words, you can't win by default.**

**I BELIEVE THAT D.OWENS’ INVENTION OF THE CONCEPT OF ‘NEGATIVE CLAIM’ IS COMPLETELY ILLOGICAL.**

**FOR EXAMPLE:**

**IF I CLAIM I CAN FLOAT UP TO THE CEILING,**

**THE BURDEN OF PROOF IS ON ME TO PROVE THAT I CAN DO IT.**

**YOU HAVE NO OBLIGATION TO TRY TO PROVE THAT I CAN’T.**

**AND BY NOT BELIEVING ME (WITHOUT PROOF) THAT DOES “NOT” MEAN THAT YOU ARE MAKING A CLAIM ‘THAT I CAN’T DO IT’. I WOULD BE THE ONE MAKING THE CLAIM.**

**THIS IS THE MOST COMMON (AND UNFORTUNATELY, PROBABLY THE MOST SUCCESSFUL) TRICK USED BY TRUE BELIEVERS TO CONVINCE PEOPLE OF THINGS WHEN THEY CANNOT PROVE THEIR CLAIMS.**

**SKEPTICS BELIEVE IN WHAT HAS BEEN PROVEN BY SCIENCE.**

**IF HE WANTS TO DEBATE GRAVITY THEN LET’S GO OUTSIDE**

**AND GO TO A ROOFTOP AND WE’LL TEST HIS THEORY AGAINST NEWTON’S.**

**As arch-skeptic Carl Sagan himself said, absence of evidence is**

**not evidence of absence. If someone wants to rule out vistations by extra-terrestrial aliens, it would not be enough to point out that all the evidence presented so far is either seriously flawed or not very strong. It would be necessary to state definite reasons which would make ET visitations either impossible or highly unlikely. (He might, for example, point out that our best understanding of physics pretty much rules out any kind of effective faster-than-light drive.)**

**The only person exempt from providing definite support is the**

**person who takes a strict "I don't know" position or the agnostic**

**position. If someone takes the position that the evidence in**

**favor of ET visitations is inadequate but goes no farther, he is**

**exempt from further argument (provided, of course, he gives**

**adequate reasons for rejecting the evidence). However, if he**

**wants to go farther and insist that it is impossible or highly**

**unlikely that ET's are visiting or have ever visited the Earth,**

**it becomes necessary for him to provide definite reasons for his**

**position. He is no longer entitled merely to argue against his**

**opponent's position.**

**AGAIN, THE ILLOGICAL CONCEPT OF ‘NEGATIVE CLAIM’**

**HAS SHIFTED THE BURDEN AWAY FROM THE PERSON WHO CANNOT DEFEND OR PROVE HIS CLAIM**

**(WHICH JUST HAPPENS TO BE THE INTENT OF THE TRUE BELIEVER)**

**There is the question of honesty. Someone who claims to take the agnostic position but really takes the position of definite**

**disbelief is, of course, misrepresenting his views. For example,**

**a skeptic who insists that he merely believes the psi hypothesis**

**is inadequately supported when in fact he believes that the human mind can only acquire information through the physical senses is simply not being honest.**

**CAN’T AGRUE WITH THAT.**

**7.) YOU CAN'T PROVE A NEGATIVE: The skeptic may insist that he is relieved of the burden of evidence and argument because "you can't prove a negative." But you most certainly can prove a**

**negative! When we know one thing to be true, then we also know that whatever flatly contradicts it is untrue. If I want to show my cat's not in the bedroom, I can prove this by showing that my cat's in the kitchen or outside chasing squirrels. The negative has then been proven. Or the proposition that the cat is not in the bedroom could be proven by giving the bedroom a good search without finding the cat. The skeptic who says, "Of course I can't prove psi doesn't exist. I don't have to. You can't prove a negative," is simply wrong. To rule something out, definite reasons must be given for ruling it out.**

**I AGREE WITH D.OWENS THAT YOU ‘CAN’ PROVE A NEGATIVE.**

**BUT AGAIN, THE BURDEN OF PROOF IS NOT ON THE SKEPTIC TO PROVE THAT NEGATIVE. THE BURDEN OF PROOF IS ON THE CLAIMANT TO PROVE HE CAN DO WHAT HE SAYS HE CAN DO, OR, TO PROVE THAT WHAT HE BELIEVES IS IN FACT TRUE.**

**JUST BECAUSE I CAN’T PROVE THAT HE CAN’T FLOAT UP TO THE CEILING DOES NOT MEAN THAT I HAVE TO ACCEPT HIS CLAIM. I WILL ACCEPT HIS CLAIM WHEN HE PROVES HE CAN DO IT.**

**BUT THE TRUE BELIEVERS NEVER CAN PROVE THEIR CLAIMS WHICH IS WHY THEY RESORT TO THE DISTRACTION TECHNIQUE OF TRYING TO TRICK YOU INTO THINKING THAT YOU MUST DISPROVE THEIR CLAIM. YOU DON’T HAVE TO DISPROVE ANYTHING.**

**Of course, for practical reasons it often isn't possible to**

**gather the necessary information to prove or disprove a**

**proposition, e.g., it isn't possible to search the entire**

**universe to prove that no intelligent extraterrestrial life**

**exists. This by itself doesn't mean that a case can't be made**

**against the existence of extraterrestrial intelligence, although**

**it does probably mean that the case can't be as air-tight and**

**conclusive as we would like.**

**AGAIN, I AGREE WITH HIS CONCLUSION.**

**8.) THE BIG LIE: The skeptic knows that most people will not**

**have the time or inclination to check every claim he makes, so he knows it's a fairly small risk to tell a whopper. He might, for**

**example, insist that none of the laboratory evidence for psi**

**stands up to close scrutiny, or he might insist there have been**

**no cases of UFO's being spotted by reliable observers such as**

**trained military personnel when in fact there are well-documented cases. The average person isn't going to scamper right down to the library to verify this, so the skeptic knows a lot of people are going to accept his statement at face value. This ploy works best when the Big Lie is repeated often and loudly in a confident tone.**

**FIRST SENTENCE:**

**THE SKEPTIC DOES NOT MAKE THE CLAIM. THIS STEMS FROM**

**HIS MISUSE OF THE CONCEPT OF ‘NEGATIVE CLAIM’ ABOVE.**

**CONCLUSION:**

**I WOULD TOTALLY AGREE WITH HIS CONCLUSION – IF IT WERE DESCRIBING A ‘TRUE BELIEVER’. THE REASON ‘WHY’ A TRUE BELIEVER MUST RESORT TO THIS TACTIC IS PRECISELY BECAUSE THEY DO NOT HAVE THE FACTS AND/OR EVIDENCE ON THEIR SIDE.**

**9.) DOUBT CASTING: This trick consists of dwelling on minor or**

**trivial flaws in the evidence, or presenting speculations as to**

**how the evidence might be flawed as though mere speculation is**

**somehow as damning as actual facts. The assumption here is that any flaw, trivial or even merely speculative, is necessarily**

**fatal and provides sufficient grounds for throwing out the**

**evidence. The skeptic often justifies this with the**

**"extraordinary evidence" ploy.**

**In the real world, of course, the evidence for anything is seldom**

**100% flawless and foolproof. It is almost always possible to**

**find some small shortcoming which can be used as an excuse for tossing out the evidence. If a definite problem can't be found, then the skeptic may simply speculate as to how the evidence \*might\* be flawed and use his speculations as an excuse to discard the information. For example, the skeptic might point out that the safeguards or controls during one part of a psi experiment weren't quite as tight as they might have been and then insist, without any supporting facts, that the subject(s) and/or the researcher(s) probably cheated because this is the "simplest" explanation for the results (see "Sock 'em with Occam" and "Extraordinary Claims"; "Raising the Bar" is also relevant).**

**THE ULTERIOR MOTIVE BEHIND THE USE OF NEARLY ALL OF THE LOGICAL FALLACIES IS ‘DISTRACTION’.**

**WHAT HE DESCRIBED WAS, AGAIN, MAINLY A PLOY USED BY TRUE BELIEVERS (WHO ARE RARELY TRAINED IN THE USE OF LOGICAL FALLACIES), NOT SKEPTICS (WHO ARE TRAINED IN THAT AREA).**

**10.) THE SNEER: This gimmick is an inversion of "Stupid, Crazy**

**Liars." In "Stupid, Crazy Liars," the skeptic attacks the**

**character of those advocationg certain ideas or presenting**

**information in the hope of discrediting the information. In "THE**

**SNEER," the skeptic attempts to attach a stigma to some idea or**

**claim and implies that anyone advocating that position must have something terribly wrong with him. "Anyone who believes we've been visited by extraterresrial aliens must be a lunatic, a fool, or a con man. If you believe this, you must a maniac, a simpleton or a fraud." The object here is to scare others away from a certain position without having to discuss facts.**

**THIS IS BASICALLY A REHASH OF #4 ABOVE: SAME REPLY.**

**(THE LOGICAL FALLACY OF PERSONAL ATTACK IS EMPLOYED BY EVERYONE, HOWEVER SINCE SKEPTICS SHOULD BE TRAINED IN THEIR USE, I BELIEVE THAT THAT TACTIC WOULD MUCH MORE LIKELY TO BE EMPLOYED BY A ‘TRUE BELIEVER’.)**

**\* \* \***

**To be fair, some of these tricks or tactics (such as "The Big**

**Lie," "Doubtcasting" and "The Sneer") are often used by believers as well as skeptics. Scientifc Creationists and Holocaust Revisionists, for example, are particularly prone to use "Doubtcasting." Other ploys, however, such as "Sock 'em with Occam" and "Extraordinary Claims," are generally used by skeptics and seldom by others.**

**IT DOESN’T SURPRISE ME THAT HE WOULD MAKE THIS STATEMENT BECAUSE I GOT THE IMPRESSION THAT HE IS BASICALLY A ‘FAIR’ PERSON.**

**Unfortunately, effective debating tactics often involve bad**

**logic, e.g. attacking an opponent's character, appeals to**

**emotion, mockery and facetiousness, loaded definitions, etc. And certainly skeptics are not the only ones who are ever guilty of using manipulative and deceptive debating tactics. Even so,**

**skeptics are just as likely as anyone else to twist their**

**language, logic and facts to win an argument, and keeping these**

**tricks in mind when dealing with skeptics may very well keep you from being bamboozled.**

**I THINK THAT SKEPTICS ARE FAR LESS LIKELY TO COMMIT THE OFFENSES HE LISTED THAN ARE THEIR ‘TRUE BELIEVER’ COUNTERPARTS (BY A WIDE MARGIN); MOSTLY BECAUSE OF THEIR TRAINING IN CRITICAL THINKING.**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**When the pin is pulled, Mr. Grenade is no longer our friend.**

**FINALLY – COMMON GROUND!**