**SEPTEMBER 7, 2008 THESKEPTICARENA.COM**

**Argument # 12: "Skeptics don’t have beliefs. They base their views and judgments on the degree of evidence."**

**WINSTON, BEFORE YOU BEGIN YOUR TIRADE, I JUST WANT TO COMMENT ON THAT STATEMENT. THE SECOND SENTENCE IS ABSOLUTELY CORRECT: WE BASE OUR JUDGEMENTS ON THE DEGREE OF EVIDENCE. AS FOR THE FIRST SENTENCE, I THINK YOU HAVE TRIED TO CREATE YET ANOTHER STRAW MAN. THERE ARE MANY THINGS THAT ARE NOT KNOWN. SKEPTICS, LIKE ANYONE ELSE, WILL HOLD A CERTAIN DEGREE OF BELIEF BASED ON WHATEVER EVIDENCE IS AVAILABLE. LACKING EVIDENCE, YOU CAN BE SURE THAT THEIR BELIEF, IF IT EXISTS, IS VERY WEAK; AS COMPARED TO A MUCH STRONGER BELIEF IN SOMETHING THAT IS SUPPORTED BY STRONG EVIDENCE.**

**Not all skeptics claim to be immune to beliefs, but there are some that do. This is plain silly though, because statements of belief can be found in almost anything someone says. We all do things and say things based on assumptions we have, which are formed in part based on beliefs. These assumptions are sometimes in the line of beliefs because they are not always based on hard evidence, but our world views, predisposition, and natural tendencies. Beliefs are especially found in the skeptical arguments discussed so far, as most of the skeptical arguments in this article are clear statements of a priori belief,**

**WINSTON, “A PRIORI BELIEF” IS THE HALLMARK OF THE IRRATIONAL MIND, NOT THE SKEPTICAL THINKER.**

**RATIONALS (THAT WOULD BE ME) AND IRRATIONALS ALIKE (THAT WOULD BE YOU WINSTON), BOTH HOLD “A PRIORI” BELIEFS. WHERE YOU SEPARATE THE MEN FROM THE BOYS - I MEAN THE RATIONALS FROM THE IRRATIONALS - IS HOW EACH HANDLES EVIDENCE THAT CONTRADICTS THEIR “A PRIORI BELIEFS.”**

**THE IRRATIONAL WILL ONLY ACCEPT EVIDENCE THAT SUPPORTS WHAT THEY WANT TO BELIEVE. THEY WILL DISMISS ALL OTHER EVIDENCE. THE RATIONAL, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS THE ONLY ONE OF THE TWO, THAT IS CAPABLE OF CHANGING THEIR OPINION BASED ON CONTRADICTORY EVIDENCE. THAT IS ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING THAT THE SKEPTICAL MIND IS THE ONLY ONE THAT IS “OPEN.” THE IRRATIONAL MIND IS THE ONE THAT IS “CLOSED.”**

**such as "It is irrational to believe anything that hasn’t been proven"**

**WINSTON, THAT IS PRETTY MUCH THE DEFINITION OF IRRATIONALITY. UNTIL YOU HAVE PROOF, THERE IS NO REASON TO BELIEVE IN SOMETHING. THAT DOESN’T MEAN THAT YOU CAN’T THINK IT IS POSSIBLE, BUT THAT IS NOT THE SAME THING AS BELIEVING SOMETHING TO BE TRUE.**

**and "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence."**

**WINSTON, I ALREADY GAVE YOU THAT ONE A LONG TIME AGO. EXTRAORDINARY CLAIMS ONLY REQUIRE EVIDENCE, NOT EXTRAORDINARY EVIDENCE.**

**Further common skeptical beliefs include "Believers in the paranormal are irrational", "Psi is improbable", "Psychics and mediums prey on the gullible" and "Psi experiments show no better than chance results when proper controls are put into place".**

**WINSTON, I HAVE TO PLEAD GUILTY TO ALL OF THE ABOVE. UNTIL PARANORMAL ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN PROVEN, IT IS IRRATIONAL TO BELIEVE THEY EXIST. BASED ON YEARS OF UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS TO PROVE THE EXISTENCE OF “PSI,” IT DOES APPEAR TO BE IMPROBABLE. PSYCHICS AND MEDIUMS DO PREY ON THE GULLIBLE AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO AS LONG AS GULLIBLE PEOPLE NEED TO BE SEPARATED FROM THEIR EXCESS MONEY. YOUR LAST SENTENCE “PSI EXPERIMENTS SHOW NO BETTER THAN CHANCE RESULTS WHEN PROPER CONTROLS ARE PUT INTO PLACE,” IS EXACTLY TRUE AS WRITTEN.**

**Though skeptics will claim that their views are based on the evidence that they’ve examined, they rarely apply their skepticism to their own beliefs, which any true skeptic would do.**

**WINSTON, THEN WHY DON’T YOU FIND THESE TRUE SKEPTICS? WHY DO YOU WASTE YOUR TIME ON FALSE SKEPTICS?**

**Furthermore, upon close scrutiny it’s obvious that they prefer false explanations to paranormal ones,**

**WINSTON, WHAT DO YOU THINK PARANORMAL EXPLANATIONS ARE? OH YEAH, I FORGOT.**

**resort to character assassinations,**

**WINSTON, I HAVEN’T HEARD ANYONE CALL YOU THE “ARCH-BELIEVER.”**

**and ignore data that doesn’t fit their hypotheses.**

**WINSTON, THEY DON’T IGNORE DATA THAT DOESN’T FIT THE HYPOTHESIS; THEY IGNORE DATA THAT DOESN’T QUALIFY AS EVIDENCE.**

**Strange behavior for people who don’t have beliefs! Rather, I think that skeptics are using this "I don’t have beliefs" argument to excuse themselves from having to defend their views, while shifting the burden to believers and paranormalists.**

**WINSTON, THE BURDEN OF PROOF RESTS WITH THE CLAIMANT. IT IS TRUE IN COURT - IT IS TRUE IN LIFE. THE ONLY ONE SHIFTING THE BURDEN OF PROOF IS YOU AND THAT IS BECAUSE YOU CANNOT PROVE YOUR BELIEFS.**

**[Argument # 13: "A common myth is that Skepticism is cynicism. It is not. Skepticism is a method of inquiry."](http://www.victorzammit.com/skeptics/winston.html%22%20%5Cl%20%22top)**

**This statement is usually found in introductions or FAQ’s sections of skeptical websites and books. Here is an example from the website of The Skeptics Society: "What does it mean to be a skeptic? Some people believe that skepticism is rejection of new ideas, or worse, they confuse "skeptic" with "cynic" and think that skeptics are a bunch of grumpy curmudgeons unwilling to accept any claim that challenges the status quo. This is wrong. Skepticism is a provisional approach to claims. It is the application of reason to any and all ideas—no sacred cows allowed. In other words, skepticism is a method, not a position."**

**WINSTON, THEY PRETTY MUCH NAILED IT.**

**What these skeptics don’t understand is that people in general don’t have misconceptions about skepticism as a concept.**

**WINSTON, YOU ARE PROOF THAT PEOPLE DO HAVE MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SKEPTICISM.**

**The cynicism that people see in so called "skepticism" is not due to their misunderstanding of the word itself, but due to the cynical WORDS and ACTIONS of the PEOPLE who call themselves skeptics.**

**WINSTON, THEY ONLY SEEM CYNICAL BECAUSE NOTHING IN SCIENCE SUPPORTS ANYTHING THAT YOU BELIEVE IN.**

**When pseudo-skeptics make cynical statements such as in the arguments presented in this article, they portray to others a cynical closed method of thinking, dismissing anything that they don’t understand or consider possible.**

**WINSTON, THAT IS A PERFECT DESCRIPTION OF HOW YOU, AND OTHER IRRATIONALS, THINK. SKEPTICS ARE THE ONLY ONES WHO ARE OPEN TO EVALUATING NEW EVIDENCE. IRRATIONALS ONLY ACCEPT NEW EVIDENCE THAT SUPPORTS THEIR BELIEFS AND THEY DISMISS ANY AND ALL EVIDENCE THAT CONTRADICTS THOSE BELIEFS. WINSTON, THE THINGS YOU ACCUSE SKEPTICS OF BEING GUILTY OF, ARE IN FACT, THE THINGS THAT IRRATIONALS ARE GUILTY OF, NOT SKEPTICS.**

 **That’s where this impression comes from.**

**NO WINSTON. THAT IS NOT WHERE THE IMPRESSION COMES FROM. IT COMES FROM THE FACT THAT SKEPTICS DO NOT ACCEPT UNPROVEN CLAIMS, WHICH COINCIDENTALLY HAPPEN TO INCLUDE, ALMOST ALL OF YOUR BELIEFS.**

**Cynics who masquerade behind science and skepticism often reveal their cynicism through their words, thinking methodologies, closed system of beliefs, and dogmatic assertions.**

**ONCE AGAIN WINSTON, YOU HAVE PERFECTLY DESCRIBED THE IRRATIONAL MIND. YOU SHOULD LOOK UP THE WORD “DOGMATIC” AND DISCOVER THAT IT REFERS TO BELIEFS THAT ARE NOT SUPPORTED BY EVIDENCE. THOSE WOULD BE YOUR BELIEFS WINSTON.**

**The six common flawed tactics described in the introduction of this article are the kind of things that give others the impression of cynicism. This is why even some of the well known skeptics and leaders of organized skeptic groups are perceived as cynics, including James Randi (the famous magician, author, debunker, and nemesis of Uri Geller), Michael Shermer (editor of Skeptic magazine), Joe Nickell (one of the leaders of CSICOP), Martin Gardner (psychic debunker), and Susan Blackmore (University of London Psychology Professor and proponent of the Dying Brain Hypothesis of NDE’s). These people use closed ways of thinking to dismiss data that don’t fit into their hypotheses, which is prevalent from statements made in their articles/books.**

**WINSTON, THEY DISMISS DATA FOR WHICH THERE IS NO PROOF. THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO DISMISS DATA THAT DOESN’T FIT INTO A PRECONCEIVED HYPOTHESES ARE IRRATIONALS. PEOPLE LIKE YOU WINSTON.**

**Therefore, these closed minded skeptics are the ones that have the misconception of mistaking their cynicism with true skepticism.**

**WINSTON, SKEPTICS ARE THE ONLY PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT CLOSE-MINDED. THEIR CONCLUSIONS ARE BASED ONLY ON THE PREPONDERANCE OF THE EVIDENCE. IT IS IRRATIONALS WHO MANIPULATE THE EVIDENCE IN AN ATTEMPT TO MAKE IT FIT THEIR CONCLUSIONS. IT IS IRRATIONALS, PEOPLE LIKE YOU WINSTON, WHOSE MINDS ARE COMPLETELY CLOSED.**

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**THE SCIENCE SEGMENT**

**INTERESTING METEOROLOGICAL FACTS**

**Troposphere (00-10m) contains all the Earth's weather.**

**clouds cover 60-67% of the Earth at any given time.**

 **they can be 50 miles high.**

 **at night these clouds (noctilucent) can still reflect sunlight**

**due to their altitude.**

**fog forms at about 1,200' (boundary layer) and then "grows" down.**

 **as cool air rises, it forms fog droplets and grows.**

**lightning it can be dangerous to talk on the phone during a**

**lightning storm.**

**rain Hydrogen is what makes rain acidic.**

**rainbow A rainbow's true shape is a circle (which you could see from a plane).**

 **From the ground you can only see the top half**

**because light is refracted (bent) by the water droplets.**

**Ave. temperature Earth = 22C (72F).**

**Ave. rainfall Earth = 30" / year**

**BONUS FACT FROM OCEANOGRAPHY:**

**valleys There is a 300' deep valley in the "surface" of the**

**Indian Ocean.**

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**THE ARENA GOES ABROAD**

**India: Stop "yoga evangelist" Swami Ramdev**

**Swami Ramdev expects a revenue of 40 million dollars this year. Selling India’s ancient, pre-scientific notion of health care and cure – repackaged as his very special brand – is good business. Thanks to his all-out marketing, Pranayama (ancient exercise in breath control) and ayurveda are big hits with the ever-growing and prospering Indian middle class. His daily early morning show has allegedly 20 million viewers. His 500 hospitals in the country are said to register 30,000 patients per day. His new headquarters in the “holy city” of Haridwar may soon be world’s largest center for yoga and ayurveda.

Swami Ramdev’s breathing routine as such may be as harmless as useless. But it comes with the stunning claim to cure all kinds of illnesses including cancer and HIV/Aids. His brand of yoga, so runs his pseudo medical argument, increases the CD4 count – the number of cells attacking the HIV virus. Such baseless and irresponsible claims, luring a vast number of patients in need of medical treatment into a false sense of security, turn Swami Ramdev’s yoga ministry into a disastrous venture.**

**“Swami Ramdev is a dangerous man”, said Sanal Edamaruku in a press statement. ’It is high time that the authorities put a stop to his activities. Claiming such absurdities is against the law. The magical remedies act of 1954 was brought in to stop people such as Baba Ramdev from promoting dangerous ideas about curing cancer and the like. But the political class is running scared of him and of the backlash that his legal prosecution might unleash."

the following article appeared in The Guardian.**

**TV swami offers a cure for all ills**

**Yoga evangelist has millions in his thrall,
but critics claim devotees are being duped**

**Randeep Ramesh
The Guardian, Saturday June 14 2008**

**At 5am beneath the Shivalik hills in northern India, Swami Ramdev sits cross-legged swaddled in saffron robes commanding the rapt attention of 500 devotees of his brand of yoga. The crowd is made up mostly of middle-class Indians, many suffering from chronic conditions for which traditional medicine has little to offer but comfort.**

 **Each "patient" has paid 7,000 to 40,000 rupees (£90 to £500) to be among the first to spend a week at the swami's newest venture: a village of 300 bungalows offering spiritual retreat in the shadow of eucalyptus trees. Swami Ramdev's pitch is that pranayama, the ancient Indian art of breath control, can cure a bewildering array of diseases. "Asthma, arthritis, sickle-cell anaemia, kidney problems, thyroid disease, hepatitis, slipped discs and it will unblock any fallopian tubes," he tells his audience in the yoga village, who line up to have their blood tested and receive herbal remedies.

Although India has a long tradition of mystical gurus, Swami Ramdev represents a new phenomenon: the television yoga evangelist. Almost all his congregation have been drawn through his shows on India's Aastha channel. Every morning, the swami appears on television chanting prayers and explaining that ailments, physical and mental, can be treated by what looks like little more than sharp intakes of air and painful-looking body contortions. More than 20 million tune in each day in India alone. The television guru, who is also known as Baba Ramdev, is also available across the world - including Britain. He has just finished teaching on a yoga cruise from India to China, which even after attracting corporate sponsorship still charged disciples £1,000 a ticket. Last year he appeared in Westminster to give British politicians a chance to sample his yogic wisdom.

Ludy Mantri, a housewife from Mauritius, has paid 40,000 rupees and travelled 4,000 miles to see "her swami" in the Haridwar yoga village in the hope he can help her find a cure for diabetes.

"I have been on medicines every day for the last 12 years. The chanting of Om has an amazing effect and the words of Ramdev energise one through the day."

Born into a farming family in north India he retains a common touch, making rustic jokes in chaste Hindi. The guru combines this with a gentle manner and a knack for public relations. The swami sells himself as a one-person health service. He says he only charges the wealthy and that the poor get his medicines for free.**

**It is no surprise that many sections of the Indian elite - including judges, ministers and Bollywood stars - have visited his camps. Such is his popularity that the Indian army incorporated Ramdev's techniques claiming it made for a "deadlier fighting force".

Ramdev often speaks less of spiritualism and more of the need to develop his country through yoga, portraying himself as an Indian nationalist. He attacks multinational companies for seeking to drain India of profits. He calls Coke and Pepsi good only for "toilet cleaning".

In a country where renunciation is seen as almost a divine virtue, Ramdev announces that he has long ago given up sex - because "it is not love". The adoration he inspires was seen in 2006 when Indian communists accused the guru of using human bones and animal parts in ayurvedic drugs produced by his pharmacy. His followers rioted and attacked the party headquarters. The Communist party backed down when it saw where public sympathy lay. In an interview with the Guardian, Ramdev said that the problem with communists was that they did not have "faith in spirituality and are philosophically against religion. My cures are clean but the communists have an agenda."

There is little controversy about his basic assertions. He says that following his yoga teachings for 30 minutes a day, along with a vegetarian diet of raw or lightly boiled food and no alcohol or tobacco, clears clogged arteries, reduces blood sugar and lowers blood pressure.

But the swami defended his more extravagant claims that yoga could cure terminal illnesses such as cancer. He also said he had evidence that breathing exercises could help Aids patients recover by enabling a rise in the number of cells that the HIV virus destroys.

Ramdev has an explanation for his success with cancer - that yoga oxygenates the blood which kills the tumour. "Yoga is self-healing and self-realisation. I have many cases of cancer which I can provide where patients have recovered. We have cured blood, throat, ovarian, uterine and throat cancers with yoga."

In the case of HIV, he says scientists "have not understood [it] properly". He says that "through yoga and lifestyle changes people increase their CD4 count [the cells the HIV virus attacks]. The truth seen for the first time does appear like a miracle."

Such claims have angered many doctors. Mohammed Abbas, The president of the Indian Medical Association, said that although yoga is "good exercise, it cannot be used to make ridiculous claims about curing HIV or cancer. This is false hope for ill people."**

 **The swami says patients are tested and improvements measured by "independent" doctors. Asked whether he has run any tests to analyse treatment, he offers a book of testimonies from disciples convinced they have been cured of cancer, cirrhosis and kidney failure.

Some have called for the swami to be prosecuted for "peddling quackery of the highest order".**

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**FAMOUS QUOTES**

**Chet Raymo (born September 17, 1936 in Chattanooga, Tennessee) Will be 72 in just over a week.**

**He is a noted writer, educator and naturalist. He is Professor Emeritus of Physics at Stonehill College, in Easton, Massachusetts. His weekly newspaper column Science Musings appeared in the Boston Globe for twenty years.**

**His most famous book was the novel entitled The Dork of Cork, and was made into the feature length film Frankie Starlight. Raymo is also the author of Walking Zero, a scientific and historical account of his wanderings along the Prime Meridian in Great Britain.**

**HIS QUOTE:**

**"Coincidence is the science of the true believer."**