**SEPTEMBER 28, 2008 THESKEPTICARENA.COM**

[**Argument #15: "Skeptics are defending science and reason from a rising tide of irrationality."**](http://www.victorzammit.com/skeptics/winston.html#top)

**This phrase has often been used in articles and websites of skeptical organizations and magazines, including CSICOP’s Skeptical Inquirer and others. Fortunately, this phrase is now critiqued by skeptics themselves, and used less. Michael Sofka of ISUNY and author of the article Myths of Skepticism, points out that CSICOP often uses it in their fundraising requests. Folklorist Stephanie Hall comments on this in her article Folklore and the Rise of Moderation Among Organized Skeptics:**

**"Another change advocated by many Skeptics is in the choice of language used to represent skepticism to others. For instance, a phrase that has commonly appeared in articles by Skeptics and in statements in the brochures or Web sites of skeptic groups was an expression of concern about "the rising tide of irrationality." But although this phrase became an identity marker demonstrating alliance with organized skepticism and a statement of shared concern, it has increasingly been criticized by Skeptics themselves. At the NCAS Millennial Madness workshop in May 1999, Chip Denman critiqued this phrase as, perhaps, skepticism's own bit of Millennialism, asking questions such as, "What do we mean by irrationality? How is it measured? How do we know it is rising?"**

**WINSTON, THESE VALID QUESTIONS HAVE ANSWERS. I HAVE ALREADY DEFINED IRRATIONALITY. THERE ARE AS MANY WAYS TO MEASURE IT AS YOU CAN DEVISE: FOR INSTANCE, YOU COULD CONSIDER THE PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO HOLD IRRATIONAL BELIEFS, OR YOU COULD MEASURE WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THEIR BELIEFS ARE IRRATIONAL, OR CHOOSE FROM MANY OTHER METHODS AVAILABLE. IF SOMEONE MAKES THE CLAIM THAT IRRATIONALITY IS RISING, THEN THE BURDEN IS ON THEM TO PROVE THAT THEIR CLAIM IS TRUE. I HAVE SEEN NO EVIDENCE EITHER WAY.**

**BUT WINSTON, YOU REPRESENT THE RISE OF IRRATIONALITY - AND I REPRESENT THE CURE.**

**These events are an indication to me as a researcher**

**WINSTON, PLAYING VIDEO GAMES DOES NOT QUALIFY YOU AS A RESEARCHER.**

**that Skepticism is going through changes as it grows, as we might expect in any social movement, and that local groups are beginning to discover the things they have in common. Perhaps because the movement has steadily grown and this may inspire confidence and stability, Skeptics also seem increasingly willing to critique themselves and express strong views on the ways they do and do not want skepticism to be presented to the public. This self-analysis is, of course, a good thing, for any rational endeavor should be willing to critique itself."**

**WINSTON, SCIENCE HAS BEEN CRITIQING ITSELF SINCE THE BEGINNING. THAT IS HOW SCIENCE WORKS.**

**Chip Denman, quoted above by Hall, makes a good point. The statement fails to define what is considered to be irrational.**

**WINSTON, IF YOU DEFINED “IRRATIONAL” EVERYTIME YOU PUT IT IN A SENTENCE PEOPLE WOULD STOP READING ALTOGETHER. THE SENTENCE WASN’T MEANT TO BE A DEFINITION; IT WAS MEANT TO CONVEY AN IDEA. IF YOU COME ACROSS WORDS YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND WHILE READING - THEN LOOK THEM UP.**

**Most likely, what they mean by irrational is anything others believe in that doesn’t fit their world view or hasn’t been proven their way.**

**WRONG AGAIN WINSTON.**

**SPEND MORE TIME IN THE DICTIONARY / LESS TIME IN VIDEO ARCADES.**

**Therefore, this is more a statement of bias and faith, rather than fact. If by irrational they mean unproven, then this is false too as there is strong evidence for many paranormal and psychic phenomena.**

**FINALLY WINSTON, YOU GOT IT ALL OUT. YOUR PARANORMAL AND PSYCHIC PHENOMENA HAVE NO PROOF, BUT, YOU DESPERATELY WANT TO BELIEVE IN THEM, SO YOU’RE MAD AT SKEPTICS BECAUSE, UNLIKE YOU, THEY DEMAND PROOF BEFORE THEY GRANT BELIEF.**

**I CAN JUST SEE WINSTON NOW, LEAVING THE VIDEO ARCADE ON SUNDAY MORNING TO GO TO CHURCH, WHERE EVERYBODY SINGS AND PRAYS TO INVISIBLE IMAGINARY BEINGS. ANYONE WHO DOESN’T GO ALONG WITH THOSE BELIEFS IS OUTCAST AND CRITICIZED (WHICH IS FAR BETTER THAN WHAT USED TO HAPPEN TO THEM). THEN AFTER CHURCH, IT’S BACK TO THE ARCADE.**

**In fact, there does not seem to be any evidence of an increase in irrationality or superstition.**

**WINSTON, AS YOU YOURSELF SAID: HOW DO YOU MEASURE THAT? LACKING THE ABILITY TO MEASURE IT, HOW CAN YOU MAKE ANY CLAIM REGARDING IRRATIONALITY OR SUPERSTITION? IF YOU CAN’T MEASURE IT, WHAT KIND OF EVIDENCE ARE YOU EVEN TALKING ABOUT?**

**I would challenge any skeptic to show me a mass poll where a high percentage of people admit literally that they believe in "superstition and irrationality".**

**WINSTON, THAT’S THE POINT: EVERYONE THINKS THEY ARE RATIONAL - NO MATTER HOW MANY IRRATIONAL BELIEFS THEY HOLD. YOUR “MASS POLL” WOULD BE A “MASS WASTE OF TIME.”**

**There probably aren’t any, because most people don’t label their beliefs as superstition or irrationality. It is the skeptics who label paranormal beliefs as such.**

**WRONG WINSTON. SKEPTICS DON’T LABEL THEM - THE DEFINITION OF RATIONAL THINKING LABELS THEM. AS A BELIEVER IN UNSUPPORTED CLAIMS, YOU JUST AREN’T HAPPY WITH THE LABEL GIVEN TO YOU, NOT BY SKEPTICS, BUT BY THE DEFINITION.**

**That’s an important thing to remember. Even the polls published over the years in Skeptical Inquirer indicate at most a shift in emphasis as one belief replaces another in the popular imagination. Moreover, to the extent that polls have been done we find church attendance dropping, and people shifting from organized religions to less formal or more individualized forms of spirituality. In the traditional religious sense, our society is more secular now than before.**

**WINSTON, THANKS FOR GIVING US THAT RAY OF HOPE.**

**It appears that on the whole irrationality, belief, and credulity are at about the same level as they have always been, just distributed in different ways.**

**WINSTON, I DON’T KNOW HOW YOU DETERMINED THAT, BUT IT SOUNDS FAIRLY REASONABLE. REMEMBER, I ADMITTED THAT EVEN THE MOST IRRATIONAL PEOPLE HAVE THEIR RATIONAL MOMENTS. BUT DON’T WORRY - THEY NEVER LAST VERY LONG.**

**What probably is going on is that this phrase is used to describe new and expanded beliefs (i.e. New Age type beliefs) versus established beliefs in society, with the new beliefs appearing as though there is an increase.**

**BYE, WINSTON.**

[**Argument # 19: "Miracles are impossible and defy everything we know about science and anatomy."**](http://www.victorzammit.com/skeptics/winston.html#top)

**This is an extreme claim**

**WINSTON, HAVEN’T YOU GOT IT BACKWARDS?**

**and while not all skeptics adhere to it, there are some that do nevertheless.**

**NO WINSTON, ALL SKEPTICS DO ADHERE TO IT. ANYONE THAT DIDN’T, WOULD NOT BE A SKEPTIC. SKEPTICS DO NOT BELIEVE IN MIRACLES OF ANY KIND, END OF STORY, PERIOD.**

**This claim is based on an a priori assumption that our known physical laws are all there is.**

**WINSTON, THAT IS NOT AN “A PRIORI” ASSUMPTION. THAT IS THE RESULT OF SCIENCE.**

**How would skeptics know all that is possible and impossible though?**

**WINSTON, SKEPTICS DO NOT MAKE THAT CLAIM - ONLY BELIEVERS DO.**

**Our natural laws are our interpretation of how the universe works. These laws are subject to change as new discoveries are made, which is how science has always been. Current scientific principles only reflect the current knowledge that has been tested and replicated, not all that is or can be. In fact, what is considered to be miraculous or supernatural at first has often turned out to be natural once it’s understood. Dean Radin elaborates on this in his book The Conscious Universe: The Scientific Truth of Psychic Phenomena: "But a few hundred years ago virtually all natural phenomena were thought to be manifestations of supernatural agencies and spirits.**

**WINSTON, THAT IS REALLY EASY TO DISPROVE. THEY HAD GRAVITY FIGURED OUT 400 YEARS AGO. RADIN’S ASSERTION OF “VIRTUALLY ALL NATURAL PHENOMENA” IS ABSURD.**

**Through years of systematic investigation, many of these phenomena are now understood in quite ordinary terms.**

**WINSTON, THAT IS EXACTLY WHAT IS HAPPENING TO ALL YOUR BELIEFS. AS SCIENTISTS LEARN MORE ABOUT THE HUMAN BRAIN, THE ROLE OF THE IMAGINATION IS BECOMING MORE CLEAR. PRETTY SOON, THE ONLY BELIEF YOU WILL HAVE LEFT WILL BE SANTA CLAUS. WE’LL LET YOU KEEP THAT ONE SO YOU WON’T WIND UP JUMPING OFF THE GOLDEN GATE OR OD’ING ON PILLS.**

**Thus, it is entirely reasonable to expect that so-called miracles are simply indicators of our present ignorance.**

**WINSTON, YOU OMITTED THE LOGICAL EXPLANATION - FANTASY.**

**Any such events may be more properly labeled first as paranormal, then as normal once we have developed an acceptable scientific explanation.**

**WINSTON, YOU HAVE HAD MORE THAN ENOUGH TIME. IF YOU GUYS FIND SOMETHING THEN FINE. OTHERWISE, STAY IN THE VIDEO ARCADES WHERE YOU BELONG.**

**As astronaut Edgar Mitchell put it: "There are no unnatural or supernatural phenomena, only very large gaps in our knowledge of what is natural, particularly regarding relatively rare occurrences."**

**WINSTON, EDGAR MITCHELL? YOU ARE QUOTING THAT NUT JOB? TALK ABOUT SPENDING A LITTLE TOO MUCH TIME IN SPACE - AT LEAST WE NOW CAN SEE WHAT THE EFFECTS ARE.**

**History has shown that those who use the word "impossible" are usually proven wrong one way or another.**

**WINSTON, THAT’S WHAT THOSE YOGIC FLYERS FROM THAILAND SAY AS THEY BOUNCE AROUND THE ROOM ON THEIR BUTTS CLAIMING THAT THEY ARE ACTUALLY FLYING.**

**Many things that were said to be impossible at one point were later proved to be possible such as flight, travel into space, relativity, quantum theory, etc.**

**WINSTON, IT WAS THE SCIENTISTS WHO BELIEVED IN THOSE THINGS YOU LISTED AND MADE THEM A REALITY. YOU KNOW, THE SAME PEOPLE YOU ACCUSE OF NOT BEING OPEN-MINDED.**

**As Arthur C. Clarke, inventor of the communications satellite and author of 2001 A Space Odyssey, states:**

**"When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong."**

**- Arthur C. Clarke's First Law**

**WINSTON, JUST FOR YOUR INFORMATION: CLARKE WAS A SKEPTIC.**

**In either case, miracles do happen. Most doctors and nurses can attest to this.**

**WINSTON - KEEP TELLING YOURSELF THAT. MEANWHILE WE WON’T HOLD OUR BREATH WAITING FOR THE PROOF. BUT I FIND IT FLATTERING THAT YOU CONSIDER SCIENTIFIC ADVANCEMENTS EQUAL TO MIRACLES. ESPECIALLY AFTER ALL THE MEAN THINGS YOU’VE SAID ABOUT SKEPTICS AND SCIENTISTS.**

**AS FOR DOCTORS AND NURSES, THEY ARE NOT USING THE WORD “MIRACLE” IN THE SAME WAY AS YOU ARE.**

**The question is, and skeptics like to point this out too, is how you define a miracle. Skeptics will usually accept miracles such as the miracle of life and science, or miracles due to flukes and rare chance occurrences, but not if they involve supernatural forces or divine intervention.**

**WINSTON, YOU ARE VERY CONFUSED … AGAIN. MIRACLES OF LIFE AND SCIENCE ARE EXPLAINED BY NATURAL LAWS. FLUKES AND CHANCE OCCURRENCES ARE NOT MIRACLES.**

**THEY DON’T ACCEPT “SUPERNATURAL” MIRACLES OR “DIVINE” INTERVENTION BECAUSE THERE HAS NEVER BEEN ANY PROOF THAT EITHER EXIST.**

**Several possible explanations of miracles are supernatural forces, divine intervention, psychic abilities, unknown powers and healing abilities of the mind, spontaneous remission of illness, chance, or natural causes not yet understood. Whatever the case, the "miracles are impossible" argument is illogical because miracles have happened already.**

**WINSTON - WHERE’S THE PROOF?**

**There is ample evidence of this both from anecdotals and hard evidence from X-Rays of the affected region of the patient’s body that were taken before and after the miracle. One famous documented case of a miracle is the case of Vittorio Michelli. Michael Talbot in his book The Holographic Universe describes the case:**

**"Perhaps the most powerful types of beliefs of all are those we express through spiritual faith. In 1962 a man named Vittorio Michelli was admitted to the Military Hospital of Verona, Italy, with a large cancerous tumor on his left hip. So dire was his prognosis that he was sent home without treatment, and within ten months his hip had completely disintegrated, leaving a the bone of his upper leg floating in nothing more than a mass of soft tissue. He was, quite literally, falling apart. As a last resort he traveled to Lourdes and had himself bathed in the spring (by this time he was in a plaster cast, and his movements were quite restricted). Immediately on entering the water he had a sensation of heat moving through his body. After the bath his appetite returned and he felt renewed energy. He had several more baths and then returned home.**

**Over the course of the next month he felt such an increasing sense of well-being he insisted his doctors X-ray him again. They discovered his tumor was smaller. They were so intrigued they documented every step in his improvement. It was a good thing because after Michelli's tumor disappeared, his bone began to regenerate, and the medical community generally view this as an impossibility. Within two months he was up and walking again, and over the course of the next several years his bone completely reconstructed itself.**

**A dossier on Michelli's case was sent to the Vatican's Medical Commission, an international panel of doctors set up to investigate such matters, and after examining the evidence the commission decided Michelli had indeed experienced a miracle.**

**WINSTON - THE VATICAN CERTIFYING A MIRACLE IS NOT UNUSUAL, IT’S WHAT THEY DO. THEY NEED AS MANY “MIRACLES” AS THEY CAN GET TO SUPPORT BELIEF IN THEIR RELIGION.**

**As the commission stated in its official report, "A remarkable reconstruction of the iliac bone and cavity has taken place. The X rays made in 1964, 1965, 1968 and 1969 confirm categorically and without doubt that an unforeseen and even overwhelming bone reconstruction has taken place of a type unknown in the annals of world medicine."**

**WINSTON, MEDICAL MIRACLES ARE NOT UNCOMMON. THE BODY, OF ALL ANIMALS - NOT JUST HUMANS, IS A REMARKABLE MACHINE THAT CAN DO WONDERS IN REPAIRING DAMAGE. CLAIMS OF CANCER REMISSION ARE NOT UNUSUAL.**

**THE FACT THAT HE WENT TO LOURDES AND URINATED IN THE WATER DOESN’T MEAN THAT GOD FIXED HIM. IF GOD COULD FIX ANYTHING THEN HE WOULD HAVE REGROWN AN ARM OR A LEG SOMEWHERE ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH - BUT HE HASN’T. THERE IS A REASON FOR THAT WINSTON: CANCER GOES INTO REMISSION, PEOPLE AWAKE FROM COMAS AFTER DECADES, MANY DISEASES ARE HEALED BY THE BODY, BUT HUMANS, UNLIKE LIZARDS, CANNOT REGROW MISSING LIMBS. SO THE QUESTION IS “WHY IS GOD LIMITED BY OUR NATURAL LAWS?” IF GOD WAS FIXING ANYBODY, WHY WOULDN’T HE RESTORE AN ARM OR A LEG? MANY OF THESE AMPUTEES ARE CHRISTIANS WHO PRAY WITH ALL THEIR HEART - YET GOD TURNS HIS BACK (ASSUMING HE HAS ONE).**

**Some skeptics claim that miraculous healings are due to flukes in the probability curve. Their reasoning goes like this: "Most people who are seriously ill are prayed for or seek divine intervention. The ones that don’t make it are considered tragedies and forgotten cases. The few cases that result in a sudden complete recovery or go into spontaneous remission are then noticed and attributed to prayer or divine intervention. These cases of course, are the ones that get media attention." However, this explanation is a lot like saying that anything we don’t understand must be due to chance. Sure spontaneous remission happens as well, even to those who are Atheists and those that haven’t been prayed for. But even so, who’s to say that spontaneous remission is solely the result of chance and luck? The bottom line is that miracles do happen, that is a fact. How we interpret them is the issue.**

**WINSTON, YOU CAN’T JUST PROCLAIM “MIRACLES DO HAPPEN, THAT IS A FACT.” YOU HAVE TO PROVE IT. SOUNDING SURE OF YOURSELF CONVINCES NO ONE BUT YOURSELF. WE KNOW YOU BELIEVE IT. YOU NEED TO PRODUCE EVIDENCE TO PROVE TO OTHERS THAT WE SHOULD BELIEVE IT. UNTIL YOU DO, WE WILL ALL ANXIOUSLY AWAIT YOUR RETURN.
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**THE SCIENCE SEGMENT**

**HUMAN EVOLUTION YEARS AGO EXTINCT**

**ARDIPITHECUS RAMIDUS 4.6 - 4.2**

**AUSTRALOPITHECUS ANAMENSIS 4.2 - 3.9**

**AUSTRALOPITHECUS AFARENSIS 3.9 - 3.0 OTHER AUSTRALOPITHECUS**

 **(2.7 - 1.0)**

**AUSTRALOPITHECUS AFRICANUS 3.0 - 2.3 HOMO HABILIS (2.2 - 1.6)**

**HOMO RUDOLFENSIS 2.3 - 1.8**

**HOMO ERGASTER 1.8 - 1.1 HOMO ERECTUS (1.3 - 0.2)**

**HOMO ANTECESSOR 1.1 - 0.7**

**HOMO HEIDELBERGENSIS 0.7 - 0.2 HOMO NEANDERTHALENSIS**

 **(0.3 - 0.03)**

**HOMO SAPIENS 0.2 - NOW**

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**THE ARENA GOES ABROAD**

**NEW ZEALAND**

**As reported in the New Zealand Herald, September 5, 2008,**

**Police in Wellington have called in two TV psychics from the show Sensing Murder. Deb Webber and Kelvin Cruickshank have been asked to help provide “any little piece of information” to help them solve the disappearance of physiotherapist who went missing while walking in Rimutaka Forest Park. Detective Senior Sergeant Ross Levy said “I’m on the fence (regarding psychics).” It seems odd that Sergeant Ross doesn’t realize that “any little piece” of WRONG information will actually impede his case. There’s a common misperception that calling in so-called psychics when a case is stalled can’t hurt. Well, it can. Taken seriously, the pronunciations of the psychics can divert valuable police resources into dead ends and wild guesses. The psychics are hoping that somehow the police will subsequently solve the case, and give them an avenue to say they “helped.”**

**Raybon Kan writing for stuff.co.nz (www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/4684231a1861.html) says the following: “Psychics are bogus. Psychics are pscum. Psychics are full of pshit.” Raybon goes on to make the following serious point: “If these people really could communicate with the dead, how about this: names of murderers please. Names, addresses, clues.” Those might indeed be helpful. And if our strong suspicions are correct and the so-called psychics actually have no powers, we have to consider the following:**

**Ads have to be honest. Why can a programme pretend to be factual when it's not? Shouldn't Sensing Murder have a disclaimer that the show is a paid advertisement for its two psychics? Isn't it time Fair Go took on Sensing Murder?**

**Fair Go is a New Zealand television show devoted to consumer affairs. And it’s a valid point.. these people are making money for giving what appear to be wild guesses and vague speculation to the police, who will use taxpayer resources to follow them up. It’s interesting that a person who didn’t claim to be psychic doing the same thing would be charged with obstruction.**

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**FAMOUS QUOTES**

**Clinton Rossiter (1917 – 1970) 53 Years.**

**He was an historian and political scientist who taught at Cornell University from 1946 until his suicide in 1970. He wrote The American Presidency along with 20 other books on American institutions and history. He won the Bancroft Prize and the Woodrow Wilson Foundation Award for his book Seedtime of the Republic.**

**HIS QUOTES:**

**"Under the pressure of the American environment,**

**Christianity grew more humanistic and temperate -**

**more tolerant with the struggle of the sects,**

**more liberal with the growth of optimism and rationalism,**

**more experimental with the rise of science,**

**more individualistic with the advent of democracy.**

**Equally important, increasing numbers of colonists,**

**as a legion of preachers loudly lamented,**

**were turning secular in curiosity and skeptical in attitude."**

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**"The twin doctrines of separation of church and state**

**and liberty of individual conscience**

**are the marrow of our democracy,**

**if not indeed America's most magnificent contribution to the freeing of Western man."**