**12/7/8 THESKEPTICARENA.COM**

**SUMMARY OF THE WEBSITE OF WINSTON WU**

**For 22 weeks now, I have examined the website of famed skeptic debunker, Winston Wu. You have now heard all of his arguments against skepticism. You have also heard my replies to each and every one of his arguments.**

**Week after week I exposed the countless logical fallacies that pervade his thinking; his arguments read like a list of logical fallacies - I don’t think that he missed a single one. I exposed the distraction techniques that he uses to draw attention away from the fact that his beliefs have zero supporting evidence.**

**But if there was one overriding theme to his debating style it would be the tactic of “throwing it back.” This is a tactic mastered on the playground by most children in the third grade: when one kid rightfully accuses another, the accused distracts everyone by turning the accusation around and “throwing it back” at the accuser.**

**For example: ‘A’ says to ‘B’, “you stole my bike.” Instead of responding to the charge, ‘B’ distracts ‘A’ and any onlookers by saying “you stole my backpack.” ‘A’ is then tricked into defending against the bogus attack since the onlookers are all looking at him and awaiting his response. ‘A’ and the onlookers completely forgot about the original accusation. This tactic is so successful, that it is employed from the third grade on. Adults are just as susceptible as kids.**

**When someone does this to you, it is important that you prevent them from succeeding by demanding that they answer your accusation or claim. Don’t let them distract you. That is what learning critical thinking skills is all about. That is how you learn to defend yourself from people who want to manipulate your thinking.**

**Winston relies heavily on the writings of a “Victor Zammit.” Their thinking is so similar I was wondering if they were, in fact, one in the same? The advantage to that being true, is that it would mean that there was only one person, instead of two, whose mind was completely screwed up beyond repair. It is less comforting to know there are two of them; and it is absolutely terrifying to know that the vast majority of people think as they do.**

**If you choose to follow Winston down the path of irrationality that is your right to do so. That path leads to a warm fuzzy feeling that everything you want to be true - is true. It leads to the feeling that you have all the answers to everything and that all of your answers are correct. Your “ego” will be in complete control of your brain. From that point on, you will only believe claims that agree with what you already believe. Anything that does not fit in with what you believe will be discarded by your ego - your brain will never get the opportunity to examine it. It wouldn’t matter anyway because any conclusion arrived at by your brain would be discarded by your ego, if it disagreed with what you already believed to be true.**

**In arguments and debates your mind will be closed to any and all evidence which disagrees with what you believe. In order to defend your beliefs you will be forced to resort to “logical fallacies” and “distraction techniques.” These tactics will win you many debates and reinforce your confidence in your knowledge. Basically, all learning will be shut down till you die.**

**On the other hand, choosing to train yourself in critical thinking skills will teach you to base your conclusions on evidence - regardless of whether or not that evidence supports what you want to believe. This means you will change your opinion - often. This means you will admit you are wrong - often. It also means you will learn new things - often.**

**Studying the mental defects of Winston Wu was very instructive for anyone who wants to learn to think rationally, but it is now time to move on.**

**In the coming weeks, I will be discussing various topics from Bob Carroll’s Skeptical Dictionary. The topics will range from alternative medicine to pseudoscience. His dictionary does not deal much with religion. That topic will come at a future date. The website for the skeptic’s dictionary is:**

[**www.skepdic.com**](http://www.skepdic.com)

**Up until now I have been very “good” about not making fun of Winston’s last name “Wu.” In skeptical circles, people who are incredibly gullible and believe in all the nonsense that is used to attract their dollars, are referred to as woo-woo’s. co-inky-dink? Probably, I doubt Winston’s name was the source of the derogatory term. Actually, I really don’t know where it came from.**

**As this is the final show about his website, I have decided that I have been good long enough and it is time for a little going-away party for Mr. Wu.**

**For those of you listening on talkshoe, you will have to go to my website at “theskepticarena.com” and go to the archives page where you will be able to see a file from this show (#38). This word doc contains a map of a mythical university, named appropriately: woo-woo university. I believe this is where Winston went to school. And while you are at the site, be sure to check out some of the other links. Many lead to great science websites.**

**WOO - WOO UNIVERSITY**

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**THE SCIENCE SEGMENT**

**Tardigrades (commonly known as water bears) form the phylum Tardigrada, part of the superphylum Ecdysozoa. They are small, water-dwelling, segmented animals with eight legs. Tardigrades were first described by Johann August Ephraim Goeze in 1773 (kleiner Wasserbär = little water bear). The name Tardigrada means "slow walker" and was given by Spallanzani in 1777. The biggest adults may reach a body length of 1.5 mm, the smallest below 0.1 mm. Freshly hatched larvae may be smaller than 0.05 mm.**

**More than 1,000 species of tardigrades have been described. Tardigrades occur over the entire world, from the high Himalayas (above 6,000 m), to the deep sea (below 4,000 m) and from the polar regions to the equator.**

**The most convenient place to find tardigrades is on lichens and mosses. Other environments are dunes, beaches, soil and marine or freshwater sediments, where they may occur quite frequently (up to 25,000 animals per litre). Tardigrades often can be found by soaking a piece of moss in spring water.**

**Tardigrades are able to survive in extreme environments that would kill almost any other animal. Some can survive temperatures close to absolute zero, temperatures as high as 151 °C (303 °F), 1,000 times more radiation than any other animal, nearly a decade without water, and even the vacuum of space.**

**Tardigrades have a body with four segments (not counting the head), four pairs of legs without joints, and feet with claws or toes. They have a ventral nervous system and a multi-lobed brain. The pharynx is of a triradiate, muscular, sucking kind, armed with stylets. Although some species are parthenogenetic, males and females are usually present, each with a single gonad. Tardigrades are oviparous. Some tardigrade species have as many as about 40,000 cells in each adult's body, others have far fewer.**

**Most tardigrades are phytophagous or bacteriophagous, but some are predatory (e.g. Milnesium tardigradum).**

**Extreme environments**

**Tardigrades are very hardy animals; scientists have reported their existence in hot springs, on top of the Himalayas, under layers of solid ice and in ocean sediments. Many species can be found in a milder environment like lakes, ponds and meadows, while others can be found in stone walls and roofs. Tardigrades are most common in moist environments, but can stay active wherever they can retain at least some moisture.**

**Tardigrades are one of the few groups of species that are capable of reversibly suspending their metabolism and going into a state of cryptobiosis. Several species regularly survive in a dehydrated state for nearly ten years. Depending on the environment they may enter this state via anhydrobiosis, cryobiosis, osmobiosis or anoxybiosis. While in this state their metabolism lowers to less than 0.01% of normal and their water content can drop to 1% of normal. Their ability to remain desiccated for such a long period is largely dependent on the high levels of the non-reducing sugar trehalose, which protects their membranes.**

**Tardigrades have been known to withstand the following extremes while in this state:**

**Temperature — tardigrades can survive being heated for a few minutes to 151 °C or being chilled for days at –200 °C, or for a few minutes at –272 °C. (1 °C warmer than absolute zero).**

**Pressure — they can withstand the extremely low pressure of a vacuum and also very high pressures, many times greater than atmospheric pressure. It has recently been demonstrated that tardigrades can survive the vacuum of open space and solar radiation combined for at least 10 days. Recent research has notched up another feat of endurance: they can withstand 6,000 atmospheres pressure, which is nearly six times the pressure of water in the deepest ocean trench.**

**Dehydration - tardigrades have been shown to survive nearly one decade in a dry state. Another researcher reported that a tardigrade survived over a period of 120 years in a dehydrated state, but soon died after 2 to 3 minutes. Subsequent research has cast doubt on its accuracy since it was only a small movement in the leg.**

**Radiation — as shown by Raul M. May from the University of Paris, tardigrades can withstand 5,700 grays or 570,000 rads of x-ray radiation. (Ten to twenty grays or 1,000–2,000 rads could be fatal to a human). The only explanation thus far for this ability is that their lowered hydration state provides fewer reactants for the ionizing radiation.**

**Recent experiments conducted by Cai and Zabder have also shown that these tardigrades can undergo chemobiosis — a cryptobiotic response to high levels of environmental toxins. However, their results have yet to be verified.**

**In September 2008, a space launch showed that tardigrades can survive the extreme environment of outer space for 10 days. After being rehydrated back on earth, over 68% of the subjects protected from high-energy UV radiation survived and many of these produced viable embryos, and a handful survived full exposure to the sun.**

**Evolutionary relationships and history**

**The minute sizes of tardigrades and their membranous integuments make their fossilization both difficult to detect and highly unlikely. The only known fossil specimens comprise some from mid-Cambrian deposits in Siberia and a few rare specimens from Cretaceous amber.**

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**THE ARENA GOES ABROAD**

**11/15/08 MÜNSTER, Germany -- Muhammad Sven Kalisch, a Muslim convert and Germany's first professor of Islamic theology, fasts during the Muslim holy month, doesn't like to shake hands with Muslim women and has spent years studying Islamic scripture. Islam, he says, guides his life.**

**So it came as something of a surprise when Prof. Kalisch announced the fruit of his theological research. His conclusion: The Prophet Muhammad probably never existed.**

**Muslims, not surprisingly, are outraged. Even Danish cartoonists who triggered global protests a couple of years ago didn't portray the Prophet as fictional. German police, worried about a violent backlash, told the professor to move his religious-studies center to more-secure premises.**

**"We had no idea he would have ideas like this," says Thomas Bauer, a fellow academic at Münster University who sat on a committee that appointed Prof. Kalisch. "I'm a more orthodox Muslim than he is, and I'm not a Muslim."**

**When Prof. Kalisch took up his theology chair four years ago, he was seen as proof that modern Western scholarship and Islamic ways can mingle -- and counter the influence of radical preachers in Germany. He was put in charge of a new program at Münster, one of Germany's oldest and most respected universities, to train teachers in state schools to teach Muslim pupils about their faith.**

**Muslim leaders cheered and joined an advisory board at his Center for Religious Studies. Politicians hailed the appointment as a sign of Germany's readiness to absorb some three million Muslims into mainstream society. But, says Andreas Pinkwart, a minister responsible for higher education in this north German region, "the results are disappointing."**

**Prof. Kalisch, who insists he's still a Muslim, says he knew he would get in trouble but wanted to subject Islam to the same scrutiny as Christianity and Judaism. German scholars of the 19th century, he notes, were among the first to raise questions about the historical accuracy of the Bible.**

**Many scholars of Islam question the accuracy of ancient sources on Muhammad's life. The earliest biography, of which no copies survive, dated from roughly a century after the generally accepted year of his death, 632, and is known only by references to it in much later texts. But only a few scholars have doubted Muhammad's existence. Most say his life is better documented than that of Jesus.**

**"Of course Muhammad existed," says Tilman Nagel, a scholar in Göttingen and author of a new book, "Muhammad: Life and Legend." The Prophet differed from the flawless figure of Islamic tradition, Prof. Nagel says, but "it is quite astonishing to say that thousands and thousands of pages about him were all forged" and there was no such person.**

**All the same, Prof. Nagel has signed a petition in support of Prof. Kalisch, who has faced blistering criticism from Muslim groups and some secular German academics. "We are in Europe," Prof. Nagel says. "Education is about thinking, not just learning by heart."**

**Prof. Kalisch's religious studies center recently removed a sign and erased its address from its Web site. The professor, a burly 42-year-old, says he has received no specific threats but has been denounced as apostate, a capital offense in some readings of Islam.**

**"Maybe people are speculating that some idiot will come and cut off my head," he said during an interview in his study.**

**A few minutes later, an assistant arrived in a panic to say a suspicious-looking digital clock had been found lying in the hallway. Police, called to the scene, declared the clock harmless.**

**A convert to Islam at age 15, Prof. Kalisch says he was drawn to the faith because it seemed more rational than others. He embraced a branch of Shiite Islam noted for its skeptical bent. After working briefly as a lawyer, he began work in 2001 on a postdoctoral thesis in Islamic law in Hamburg, to go through the elaborate process required to become a professor in Germany.**

**The Sept. 11 attacks in the U.S. that year appalled Mr. Kalisch but didn't dent his devotion. Indeed, after he arrived at Münster University in 2004, he struck some as too conservative. Sami Alrabaa, a scholar at a nearby college, recalls attending a lecture by Prof. Kalisch and being upset by his doctrinaire defense of Islamic law, known as Sharia.**

**In private, he was moving in a different direction. He devoured works questioning the existence of Abraham, Moses and Jesus. Then "I said to myself: You've dealt with Christianity and Judaism but what about your own religion? Can you take it for granted that Muhammad existed?"**

**He had no doubts at first, but slowly they emerged. He was struck, he says, by the fact that the first coins bearing Muhammad's name did not appear until the late 7th century -- six decades after the religion did.**

**He traded ideas with some scholars in Saarbrücken who in recent years have been pushing the idea of Muhammad's nonexistence. They claim that "Muhammad" wasn't the name of a person but a title, and that Islam began as a Christian heresy.**

**Prof. Kalisch didn't buy all of this. Contributing last year to a book on Islam, he weighed the odds and called Muhammad's existence "more probable than not." By early this year, though, his thinking had shifted. "The more I read, the historical person at the root of the whole thing became more and more improbable," he says.**

**He has doubts, too, about the Quran. "God doesn't write books," Prof. Kalisch says.**

**Some of his students voiced alarm at the direction of his teaching. "I began to wonder if he would one day say he doesn't exist himself," says one. A few boycotted his lectures. Others sang his praises.**

**Prof. Kalisch says he "never told students 'just believe what Kalisch thinks' " but seeks to teach them to think independently. Religions, he says, are "crutches" that help believers get to "the spiritual truth behind them." To him, what matters isn't whether Muhammad actually lived but the philosophy presented in his name.**

**Germany's Muslim Coordinating Council withdrew from the advisory board of Prof. Kalisch's center. Some Council members refused to address him by his adopted Muslim name, Muhammad, saying that he should now be known as Sven.**

**German academics split. Michael Marx, a Quran scholar at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, warned that Prof. Kalisch's views would discredit German scholarship and make it difficult for German scholars to work in Muslim lands. But Ursula Spuler-Stegemann, an Islamic studies scholar at the University of Marburg, set up a Web site called solidaritymuhammadkalisch.com and started an online petition of support.**

**Alarmed that a pioneering effort at Muslim outreach was only stoking antagonism, Münster University decided to douse the flames. Prof. Kalisch was told he could keep his professorship but must stop teaching Islam to future school teachers.**

**The professor says he's more determined than ever to keep probing his faith. He is finishing a book to explain his thoughts. "I'm convinced that what I'm doing is necessary. There must be a free discussion of Islam," he says.**

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**FAMOUS QUOTES**

**Ethan Allen (January 10, 1738 – February 12, 1789) 51 years.**

**He was an early American revolutionary and guerrilla leader who fought against the Province of New York's settlement of Vermont, and later for its independence during the American Revolutionary War.**

**HIS QUOTE:**

**"Those who invalidate reason ought seriously to consider**

**whether they argue against reason with or without reason;**

**if with reason, then they establish the principle that they are laboring to dethrone:**

**but if they argue without reason**

**(which, in order to be consistent with themselves they must do),**

**they are out of the reach of rational conviction,**

**nor do they deserve a rational argument."**