**AUGUST 24, 2008 THESKEPTICARENA.COM**

**Argument # 8: "There is no hard evidence to support any paranormal phenomena."**

**This is a vague argument because it doesn’t define what constitutes "hard evidence."**

**WINSTON, IF ANYTHING IS VAGUE - IT IS THE EVIDENCE FOR PARANORMAL PHENOMENA.**

**If by hard evidence they mean something solid and tangible, then it would not be possible to obtain this from certain things like UFO’s, ghosts, spirits, or ESP.**

**WINSTON, WHY NOT? WE HAVE HARD EVIDENCE FOR THINGS BILLIONS OF LIGHT YEARS AWAY. WE HAVE HARD EVIDENCE FOR THINGS SO SMALL, YOU CAN ONLY SEE THEM WITH AN ELECTRON MICROSCOPE. WE HAVE HARD EVIDENCE FOR THINGS THAT LIVED HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO. THE ONLY THINGS WE DON’T HAVE HARD EVIDENCE FOR, ARE ALL THE THINGS THAT YOU BELIEVE IN.**

 **since they are intangible in nature and possibly involve other dimensions we don’t fully understand yet (could also be the case with UFO’s). By this standard, we have no tangible evidence for stars, galaxies, black holes, or nebulas that are light years away either, although we can observe them.**

**WINSTON, THAT WAS JUST PLAIN STUPID. THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU SPEND TOO LITTLE TIME IN CLASS AND A LITTLE TOO MUCH TIME ON THE “PSYCHIC HOTLINE.”**

**(Skeptics could argue that they’re just holographic images on a giant movie projector.)**

**NO WINSTON, THAT WOULD BE YOUR POSITION, NOT THE SCIENTIFIC ONE.**

**In the same manner, although we can’t reach out and touch UFO’s, we have observed them hovering in the sky and outmaneuvering our best aircraft.**

**WINSTON, FORGET WHAT I SAID ABOUT THE PSYCHIC HOTLINE, YOU’RE SPENDING WAY TOO MUCH TIME WATCHING OLD SCI-FI MOVIES.**

**Even if all the photographs and video footage of UFO’s were hoaxed, there are still many cases of sightings that were observed by whole cities or towns, such as the Mexico City mass sighting of January 1995. This indicates that there’s "something" there causing these mass sightings. Of course, this "something" could be a whole range of things besides alien spacecraft, but at least it’s not zero evidence and not due purely to imagination. Though UFO’s show up far less frequently than the other astronomical phenomena mentioned above, infrequent doesn’t mean nonexistent. The possibility of winning the lottery is also very infrequent too, but not nonexistent. The same could also go for ghosts, Bigfoot, the Loch Ness Monster, apparitions of the Virgin Mary, etc.**

**WINSTON, AS I SAID LONG AGO: YOU ARE A SALESMAN’S DREAM!**

**If by hard evidence they mean things that we can test and measure with experiments, then this would be difficult to do with ghosts and UFO’s since they are out of our control,**

**WINSTON, BLACK HOLES ARE OUT OF OUR CONTROL, YET WE MEASURE THEM, AND WE PERFORM OTHER EXPERIEMENTS ON THEM TO DETERMINE THEIR CHEMICAL MAKEUP AND TRY TO DETERMINE HOW THEY FUNCTION.**

**but this has already been done and replicated for psychic phenomena like telepathy and telekinesis. We have the vastly replicated Ganzfeld and Autoganzfeld controlled telepathy experiments, the 20 year consistency of the Princeton Random Number Generator PK experiments, the controlled tests on psychics such as Uri Geller that he succeeded in, the recent tests on mediums by Dr. Gary Schwartz, and others.**

**WINSTON, EVEN TRUE BELIEVERS HAVE PRETTY MUCH ABANDONED URI GELLER. IF YOU STILL BELIEVE IN THAT FRAUD, YOU’VE MISSED TOO MANY TOUTUBE VIDEOS THAT CLEARLY SHOW HIM GETTING CAUGHT TRYING TO TRICK AUDIENCES. THE GANZFELD EXPERIEMENTS ONLY HELD SWAY UNTIL THEY WERE SUBJECTED TO RIGOROUS CONTROLS, AT WHICH TIME ALL THEIR SUPPOSED “RESULTS” DISAPPEARED.**

**Skeptics need to clearly define what they want as hard evidence, rather than being vague about it and then raising the bar when anything is presented.**

**WINSTON, YOU SEEM TO BE THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN’T FIGURE OUT WHAT EVIDENCE IS. THERE IS A REASON FOR THAT: YOU DO KNOW WHAT CONSTITUTES EVIDENCE, BUT LIKE ANY IRRATIONAL THINKER, YOU WILL DISMISS ANY AND ALL EVIDENCE THAT CONTRADICTS WHAT YOU WANT TO BELIEVE.**

**“RAISING THE BAR” IS A TACTIC ONLY USED BY IRRATIONALS, NOT SKEPTICS.**

**Argument # 6: The memory malleability argument to dismiss anecdotal evidence.**

**Typical Usage: "Memory is malleable and unreliable. People can remember a highly edited version of what occurred, making anecdotal evidence unreliable."**

**A common skeptical sub-tactic to try to further discredit anecdotal evidence is to attack the reliability of people’s memory. Skeptics argue that since memory is malleable, then the memory of paranormal experiencers is unreliable and therefore not to be trusted as valid evidence. This is related to the concept of False Memory Syndrome. Skeptics also try to justify it by using Occam’s Razor, claiming that inaccurate memory is a more probable and simpler explanation than any paranormal one. However, two significant problems with this argument reveal that it is not only weak, but inapplicable as well, making it one of the least convincing of the skeptical arguments.**

**problem 1) The main problem with this is that although memory isn’t perfect and doesn’t work like a tape recorder, the majority of what sane people remember IS reliable and can be checked out and verified. This is easily demonstrable. I could make a long list of things I did yesterday, last week, or even last year. And I could also make a long list of events that happened from yesterday to years ago. The vast majority of these things (I would bet over 95 percent of them) could easily be verified by other people, records/receipts, news articles of the events, etc. No one of course remembers every detail of every second of their life, but what we DO remember tends to be accurate and can be verified. This simple fact is severely damaging to the false memory dogma of this argument.**

**WINSTON, EVEN YOU ADMIT THAT MEMORIES ARE FALLIBLE. FALSE MEMORIES ARE NOT A SKEPTICAL CONCOCTION, THEY ARE A REAL PHENOMENA THAT HAS BEEN STUDIED BY BRAIN RESEARCHERS FOR MANY YEARS NOW. AT FIRST I FOUND IT ODD THAT SOMEONE LIKE YOU, WHO WILL BELIEVE JUST ABOUT ANYTHING (EXCEPT SCIENCE) WOULD DOUBT THE STUDIES OF FALSE MEMORIES. THEN I REALIZED THAT YOU NEED TO DISMISS THEM IN ORDER TO HOLD ONTO YOUR OTHER UNSUPPORTED BELIEFS.**

**problem 2) Where memory tends to be unreliable the most is in the area involving details that the brain considers too insignificant to remember (which is the category that most things go into such as the colors of the cars you saw on the way to work this morning, number of steps on a staircase, etc.). Thousands of details we perceive everyday which our minds consider useless and insignificant are discarded. Unfortunately for skeptics and debunkers, paranormal experiences don’t fit into this category because they tend to be significant, shocking, and revealing. As we all know, significant life-altering events in our lives make the biggest impression in our memory and tend to be remembered immediately with clarity, not years afterward. Since paranormal/psychic experiences belong in this category, this further damages this already weak argument even more.**

**WINSTON, THOSE MEMORIES MAY BE ACCURATE, BUT THAT DOESN’T MEAN THAT THE PERSON EXPERIENCING THE MEMORY INTERPRETED IT CORRECTLY. FOR EXAMPLE, THEY MAY REMEMBER SEEING A UFO LAST NIGHT, NOT REALIZING THAT IT WAS REALLY THE PLANET VENUS.**

**BY THE WAY, THAT IS NOW THE CONSENSUS OF WHAT OCCURRED WHEN EX-PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER SAW A UFO. CARTER SWEARS IT WASN’T VENUS, BUT RECREATING THE POSITION OF VENUS ON THAT VERY NIGHT INDICATES THAT IT WAS EXACTLY WHERE CARTER SAW HIS UFO.**

**In fact, people describing shocking or traumatic events from long ago tend to say, "It was years ago, but I can still see it as if it were happening right now." These memories are often the same way years later as they were the day they occurred. This means that the memory is consistent and reliable.**

**WINSTON, CONSISTENT AND RELIABLE STILL DOESN’T MEAN THAT IT WAS CORRECT. CARTER’S MEMORY WAS CONSISTENT AND RELIABLE. UNFORTUNATELY, IT WAS INCORRECT.**

**It’s not like I just thought of an event from years ago that made no impression on me back then and suddenly realize upon reflection that it was paranormal!**

**WINSTON, THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO HAVE HAD FALSE MEMORIES IMPLANTED BY TRAINED MENTAL PROFESSIONALS. THIS IS NO LONGER IN QUESTION.**

**THE MCMARTIN PRESCHOOL FIASCO IN THE 1990’s IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE. THE CHILD PSYCHOLOGIST WHO WAS IMPLANTING FALSE MEMORIES IN THOSE CHILDREN IS NOW IN PRISON. NOT FOR THE MCMARTIN CASE, BUT FOR DOING THE SAME THING IN A LATER CASE.**

**Therefore memories of paranormal events are not likely to be created by memory malleability. Such was demonstrated in my own case when a psychic who sensed from my "vibrations" that there was a tragic period in my life when I was 9 years old.**

**WINSTON, LET ME GUESS: YOU WET THE BED AT CAMP.**

**When a skeptic challenged the reliability of my memory of it, which only occurred a year and a half ago, I easily met his challenge by showing him a post I wrote up about it the day after it occurred, which contained the SAME details that I remember now. (it’s ironic these days when science and technology helps us prove skeptics wrong!)**

**WINSTON, THAT ASSUMES YOU GOT IT RIGHT WHEN YOU POSTED IT THE FOLLOWING DAY.**

**AS FOR USING SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY TO DISPROVE SKEPTICS, WINSTON, YOU DON’T USE SCIENCE - YOU HATE SCIENCE BECAUSE IT IS ALWAYS GETTING IN THE WAY OF WHAT YOU WANT TO BELIEVE. AND THAT TECHNOLOGY THAT YOU MENTIONED WAS BROUGHT TO YOU, NOT BY RELIGION OR PSYCHICS, BUT BY SCIENCE.**

**WHILE YOU ARE ENJOYING THE BENEFITS OF ALL THE TECHNOLOGY BROUGHT TO YOU BY SCIENCE, YOU GET SWINDLED OUT OF YOUR MONEY BY RELIGION AND BY PSYCHICS WHO REMIND YOU OF A BED-WETTING INCIDENT.**

**Therefore, based on the two points above, the memory malleability argument is not only too weak to use to dismiss significant paranormal claims but also inadequate and inapplicable as well.**

**IF YOU SAY SO WINSTON.**

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**THE SCIENCE SEGMENT**

**age Earth is ~4.54 billion years old.**

**distances Formula for determining the distance to the horizon (at sea level) is**

 **1.23 x (square root of the #feet above sea level)**

 **Example: If you are 6' above sea level, you can see 3 miles.**

 **Formula for determining the area you can see (at sea) is**

 **1.5 x #feet above sea level x PI.**

 **Example: If you are 6' above sea level, you can see 28 square miles.**

**escape velocity**

**from Earth: 17,000 mph.**

**Geosynchronus orbit**

**22,300 miles above a given spot on Earth**

**river Mississippi river flows uphill since the equator is further from**

 **the Earth's core than the poles.**

**air ends ~385,000'**

**spin began with a 14-hour day. loses 0.005 sec / yr.**

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**THE ARENA GOES ABROAD**

**India / Kerala: Sweeping out Pandora’s box**

**The southern Indian state of Kerala is busy cleaning up. Target of the ongoing rigorous sweep is a new brand of godmen and astrologers, who managed to build up flourishing business during recent years without coming to public attention. In fact, most Keralites had not been aware that there was any 'living god’ in their state – except the hugging 'world star’ Mata Amrithanandamayi. But suddenly Pandora’s box sprang open.

It started with a media report in a prominent Malayalam weekly 'Kerala Sabdam' in the first week of May about a red corner notice, issued by Interpol in the United Arab Emirates about a Keralite with the name Santhosh Madhavan. Investigation by the local media turned the spotlight on godman Amrutha Chaitanya and his palatial ashram in the port city Kochin, where he received local politicians, film stars, businessmen and senior police officers. Chaitanya alias Madhavan was identified as the man, who had duped a rich businesswoman in the UAE. The Kerala police – under pressure  – arrested the godman and raided his ashram and flat. Besides various illegal-possession-items like sandalwood, ganja, a tiger skin and a police uniform, they found a collection of porn CDs that recorded his raping of  minor girls living in a charitable protectory run by him. Nine minor girls complained that they had been raped by him. Investigations of Madhavan’s financial circumstances brought to light that he was operating a dubious real estate business worth many million dollars, in which he acted as a front man for some so far unknown prominent personalities.**

 **Santhosh Madhavan had been a school dropout and small time temple priest. In the late 90s, he familiarized himself with astrology, grew an impressive beard, and started a lucrative career as a godman. In a short span, he managed to cultivate a celebrity clientele and to secure political patronage. He enjoyed quasi immunity, till the furious public pressed for his arrest.

After Madhavan, rationalists and media exposed more under-cover godmen and astrologers with high connections and persumed criminal background. For one month now, the media is reporting godmen scandals nearly every day. Meantime some 60 people have come under the scanner. Some of them absconded. It is reported that they meet their clients now abroad.**

**After rationalists and progressive media set the trend, youth organizations of the political parties jumped on the bandwagon and started to hunt enthusiastically for godmen – preferably for those close to their competitors. The Hindu-conservative BJP saw to it that Muslim godmen and Christian faith-healers were not spared either. As a result, the spiritual morass has been drained considerably. The great survivor - so far - is the hugging 'goddess'. However, Amrithanandamayi too has decided to play safe and left Kerala for an extensive trip abroad.**

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**FAMOUS QUOTES**

**CHARLES DARWIN (12 February 1809 – 19 April 1882) 73 years**

**He was an English naturalist, eminent as a collector and geologist, who proposed and provided scientific evidence that all species of life have evolved over time from common ancestors through the process he called natural selection. The fact that evolution occurs became accepted by the scientific community in his lifetime, while his theory of natural selection came to be widely seen as the primary explanation of the process of evolution in the 1930s, and now forms the basis of modern evolutionary theory. In modified form, Darwin’s scientific discovery remains the foundation of biology, as it provides a unifying logical explanation for the diversity of life.**

**Darwin developed his interest in natural history while studying first medicine at Edinburgh University, then theology at Cambridge. His five-year voyage on the Beagle established him as a geologist whose observations and theories supported Charles Lyell’s uniformitarian ideas, and publication of his journal of the voyage made him famous as a popular author. Puzzled by the geographical distribution of wildlife and fossils he collected on the voyage, Darwin investigated the transmutation of species and conceived his theory of natural selection in 1838. Although he discussed his ideas with several naturalists, he needed time for extensive research and his geological work had priority. He was writing up his theory in 1858 when Alfred Russel Wallace sent him an essay which described a similar theory, prompting immediate joint publication of both of their theories.**

**His 1859 book On the Origin of Species established evolution by common descent as the dominant scientific explanation of diversification in nature. His research on plants was published in a series of books, and in his final book, he examined earthworms and their effect on soil.**

**In recognition of Darwin’s pre-eminence, he was granted a state funeral (one of only five 19th century UK non-royal personages to be so honoured) and buried in Westminster Abbey, close to John Herschel and Isaac Newton.**

**DARWIN’S QUOTE:**

**"I cannot see so plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do,**

**evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us.**

**There seems to me too much misery in the world.**

**I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God**

**would have designedly created the ichneumonidae**

**with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars."**