**I am NEO**

**WELCOME into the skeptic arena!**

**As this is the “Debut Show”, it will be devoted to explaining the purpose and the rules of the Arena.**

**The primary purpose of this show is the development of critical thinking skills. By this I mean not only the development of the caller’s skills, but those of the host as well. We will learn from each other, striving to improve our ability to reason.**

**Unfortunately we live in a time when rational thinking is not the norm but the exception. If I were pressed to estimate the percentage of people who base their decisions and their beliefs on rational thinking, I would go no higher than 10%. I hope that I am wrong. Sadly, the percentage is probably a lot lower than that.**

**On this show we will get a better idea of the actual percentage as listeners call in with their opinions and are asked to support their positions with evidence.**

**Rationality**

**I want to take a minute to explain what I mean by ‘rational’.**

**A person thinks rationally when their opinion or belief is based on proof resulting from the application of reason and logic to evidence.**

**When I use the term ‘irrational’ to label a person, I understand that that person may hold many rational beliefs and be capable of thinking rationally in certain situations. Likewise, in some cases a rational person may lose control and allow their ego (pride) to take control of their reasoning mind and cause them to think irrationally. People exist at all points along a continuum; from completely gullible all the time to never accepting anything without ‘actual’ proof.**

**So when I use these labels, I use them for convenience to describe how a person is thinking in the given situation. I do not mean to imply that the person is a one-dimensional being who is either skeptical or irrational all the time.**

**I don’t think that you will ever meet anyone who will say that they are irrational. Everyone considers their beliefs rational, at least in their own mind.**

**But it doesn’t matter that they don’t admit their irrationality.**

**If they hold beliefs that are not supported by evidence then they are thinking irrationally.**

**An important point to note is that reasoning alone does not guarantee a true conclusion.**

**You can reason and still come up with the wrong conclusion. Reasoning, supported by evidence and proof, are what determine the validity of the conclusion.**

**People who hold irrational beliefs will use every technique and trick in the book to redefine the words ‘evidence’ and ‘proof’ so that their argument will ‘appear’ rational.**

**It’s up to you if you want to be one of them.**

**The upside is that you will be with the majority.**

**The downside is that the majority are delusional.**

**If you have a strong desire to improve your reasoning skills**

**and you are willing to study hard to obtain those skills,**

**then a good starting point would be to go to my website at**

**‘theskepticarena.com’**

**and click on the link ‘logical fallacies – wikipedia’.**

**Logic is crucial to thinking rationally. Once you learn to recognize logical fallacies you will be amazed how often they are used by others to justify irrational positions. Learning the logical fallacies not only teaches you how to recognize when another person’s argument is based on faulty logic, but more importantly, teaches you how to recognize when YOUR reasoning is based on faulty logic.**

**But even the most well-trained skeptic is going to occasionally commit a logical fallacy in their thinking or in their argument.**

**The road to skepticality, like science itself, is not a result but a process; one that never ends.**

**Skeptics are people who think rationally and accept as true only those things that have been proven to be true through some form of scientific inquiry, usually referred to as 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).**

**Skeptics never take anything on faith.**

**We have all been raised to believe that faith is a positive quality. It is not.**

**It is a terrible trait that leads gullible people to accept, without proof, whatever they are told to accept.**

**Why are you told to accept an idea on faith without proof?**

**Because they can’t prove it.**

**Why can’t they prove it?**

**If they could – they would.**

**The person making the claim will promise that proof is on the way.**

**It never is.**

**The person making the claim will try every technique at their disposal to convince you that if you look at the ‘evidence’ in just the right way (their way) then you will also accept it as proof.**

**So how do you learn to distinguish real actual proof from things that are presented as proof but do not really constitute actual proof?**

**You have to study and arm yourself with knowledge.**

**You have to learn the techniques that people use to trick you into believing that for which there is no proof.**

**The logical fallacies make an excellent starting point for training yourself to think skeptically and to give you the ability to protect yourself from the irrational arguments of others.**

**Because of the extreme importance of logic to rational thinking I think this would be a good time to briefly go over a few of the main logical fallacies.**

**In discussing the logical fallacies I prefer to avoid the use of the Latin words as I find that to be rather pompous.**

**Also I think that simple English is the most efficient way of conveying the ideas that I am trying to communicate.**

**PERSONAL ATTACK**

**Probably the most common logical fallacy that people will use to attack your argument will be that of ‘personal attack’.**

**When you make an argument supported by strong evidence,**

**and the irrational cannot defend against your position,**

**they will often attempt to rebut your argument with a personal attack against you.**

**The purpose of the personal attack (like most logical fallacies) is to distract you from the fact that they have no answer.**

**They trick you into defending yourself so that it goes unnoticed that they have escaped answering your argument.**

**This technique is amazingly successful because most people are untrained in how to defend against it.**

**Don’t let them do this to you.**

**As soon as you recognize what they are up to, have the courage to challenge them on it and make them stick to the argument. They will try to continue the personal attack if they can, if not, then they will have to resort to another trick in their bag (which usually means another logical fallacy).**

**THE STRAW MAN**

**Probably the second most common technique used by the irrational thinker is to try to combat your argument with the logical fallacy known as the ‘Straw Man’ argument.**

**Let’s say you present a strong argument to which the irrational has no counter. They simply reach into their bag of irrational tricks and come up with ‘The Straw Man’.**

**They create an analogy which they claim represents your argument.**

**They then demolish this analogy and then claim that by defeating this analogy they have defeated your argument.**

**Don’t fall for it!**

**The key to making this trick work on you is to get you to accept that their analogy is an accurate representation of your argument. The truth is, that it never is.**

**If they could have destroyed your argument they would have.**

**The reason they had to build the Straw Man was so that they could create an argument that they could destroy.**

**Then all they had to do was to get you to accept that your argument was essentially the same as the Straw Man.**

**Their goal is to get you to try to defend the Straw Man**

**(which you might do thinking that you have to,**

**in order to defend your original position).**

**If they can trick you into doing this then they have a good chance to defeat you because the Straw Man was designed to be easy to knock down.**

**Don’t let yourself be tricked into defending the Straw Man.**

**Again, have the courage to challenge the irrational by demanding that they address YOUR argument, not the phony one that they created.**

**APPEAL TO MAJORITY**

**Next is the argument from “Appeal to Majority’.**

**In this argument, the irrational will base their argument on the fact that their position is the one that is held by the majority and therefore it must be true.**

**That is false.**

**If it were true then the majority was right and Galileo was wrong and the sun orbits the Earth.**

**Despite the fact that polls show that about 20% of the irrationals actually believe that; it is false.**

**The sun does not orbit the Earth.**

**Galileo was right and everybody else was wrong.**

**It may give you comfort to know that your beliefs are in the mainstream.**

**But skeptics do not seek comfort;**

**they seek the truth whether it is comforting or not.**

**MOVING THE GOAL POSTS**

**Another type of logical fallacy that you can expect to hear on this show is the fallacy called “Moving the Goalposts.”**

**Picture a football game in which your team scores a field goal but the referees call the play back and make them kick it over;**

**only this time, the goal posts are moved back 10 yards.**

**Every time your team kicks it through the posts, the refs blow their whistles, move the posts back another 10 yards and make them kick it again.**

**Eventually the posts are outside the stadium – but they still make the field goal.**

**So they simply call the play back and move them out-of-state!**

**Their goal is to get you to keep kicking the ball until you miss, then guess what?**

**The play will be declared good, and...you lose!**

**You may find yourself trapped in this situation with an irrational thinker.**

**Usually the posts have been moved out of the stadium by the time you’ve figured out what is going on.**

**As soon as you do realize what is happening,**

**you must have the courage to challenge them on it immediately; don’t let them keep moving the posts on you.**

**If you are asked to provide proof and you do so,**

**it is legitimate for the other person to question your proof;**

**but they better have a valid explanation as to why they think your proof is insufficient.**

**If they can’t refute your proof and they continue to dismiss your proof without any valid reason as to why,**

**then you know that they are moving the posts on you.**

**It doesn’t matter how much proof you offer, they are never going to accept it.**

**APPEAL TO AUTHORITY**

**One of the logical fallacies that I am sure we are often going to encounter on this show is the ‘Argument from Authority’.**

**In this type of logical fallacy, the irrational assumes the conclusion to be true because it is supported by some authoritative person.**

**For example, they may invoke Einstein as someone who believed as they do that some fact is true.**

**It is irrelevant whether Einstein believed it or not.**

**That is an Appeal to Authority and it is a logical fallacy to claim that your argument is proven simply because someone important also believes it.**

**The only thing that does matter are the facts themselves.**

**Stay with the facts and you won’t go wrong.**

**SLIPPERY SLOPE**

**The logical fallacy known as the ‘Slippery Slope’ applies to reasoning that if something is allowed, then other things will necessarily follow.**

**The purpose is to get you to accept that the two things are connected, when in fact, they may or may not be connected.**

**Do not blindly accept that they are connected without examining all of the evidence.**

**If it turns out that they are connected then it MAY be that the slippery slope argument is valid, but not until there is evidence to prove that not only are the two things connected but that the first thing causes the second.**

**For example: “If we allow prostitution then all hell will break loose and our crime rate will skyrocket.”**

**This is a slippery slope argument that may or may not be true.**

**If you could find a place that didn’t have prostitution and then introduce it, you could then measure the effects.**

**But you would still have the burden of proving that the prostitution was the cause of the increase in crime and not some other factor.**

**CAUSATION**

**This leads us to our next logical fallacy which is ‘Causation’.**

**It states that if A is followed by B, then A must have caused B**

**(as in the prostitution example just given).**

**It may, in fact, be true that A caused B;**

**but without corroborating evidence it would be a logical fallacy to assume so, simply because B followed A.**

**ARGUMENT FROM INCREDULITY**

**The next logical fallacy “Argument from Incredulity” is the argument that irrationals make when they can’t believe that something is possible, therefore it must be false.**

**For example: “I can’t believe that atomic particles can be in two places at the same time so it can’t be true.”**

**The fact that someone doesn’t have the education or knowledge about how science works doesn’t prove that science is wrong.**

**It may be wrong, but to dismiss something that you don’t understand simply because YOU don’t understand it, is a logical fallacy.**

**ARGUMENT FROM IGNORANCE**

**The next logical fallacy “Argument from Ignorance” is one of the most successful of all the tricks in the irrational bag.**

**It goes something like this:**

**Someone makes a supernatural claim such as having the ability to float up to the ceiling.**

**You ask them to prove it.**

**They say: “You prove I can’t do it.”**

**You cannot prove that they can’t float up to the ceiling so you feel obligated to back down and say “I can’t disprove your claim so maybe you can do it.”**

**But the key here is that you don’t have to prove anything.**

**The burden of proof isn’t on you – it is on the person making the claim.**

**Don’t be tricked into thinking that you have to disprove someone’s claim, and if you can’t, then you must accept it.**

**You don’t have to prove anything.**

**They are the ones who are making the claim.**

**They are the ones who have the burden to prove that they can do what they claim they can do.**

**There is a reason why these people can never prove their claims.**

**It’s because they can’t do what they claim they can do.**

**If they could, they would prove it gladly, in a second.**

**In an attempt to provide proof for their claims, irrationals resort to many tricks, which unfortunately, often succeed against untrained minds.**

**One common trick is to say that their claim is something that cannot be tested.**

**Well isn’t that convenient – that just also happens to be true of claims that are false.**

**But more often than not they will try to produce some type of proof which they say supports their claim.**

**At that point you must evaluate their evidence.**

**In order to evaluate this evidence properly you must possess or have access to knowledge that can assist you in your evaluation.**

**The links that I have provided at ‘theskepticarena.com’ can give you access to a wealth of information that can help you analyze claims and enable you to separate real science from pseudoscience.**

**I also included a link to the Darwin Awards.**

**The Darwin Awards are given to those people who have contributed the most to the human race by removing themselves from our gene pool.**

**This is usually accomplished by killing themselves in the most amazingly stupid ways.**

**Sometimes seeing the opposite example of critical thinking can be just as informative as learning critical thinking skills.**

**A final thought on ‘Argument from Ignorance’:**

**Magicians perform all over the world and everyone knows they are only doing tricks and illusions. That is because they are honest enough to tell us that up front.**

**I don’t know how they do their tricks, but just because I can’t explain how the trick is done does not mean that I believe they are doing real magic.**

**Yet when any of these unscrupulous showmen claim to be doing real magic, many people believe them!**

**They fall prey to the “Argument from Ignorance.”**

**OTHER TECHNIQUES**

**Let’s discuss a few other techniques found in the ‘irrational’ bag of tricks.**

**Moving the Spotlight**

**The first one is called ‘Moving the Spotlight’.**

**This is another one of the most common tricks used by irrationals.**

**It goes like this: you are arguing with someone and you challenge their position.**

**Rather than responding to your question they immediately come back at you by attacking your position.**

**What they have done is to distract you from your argument by moving the spotlight so that it is now shining on you.**

**If you start defending your position then you have allowed them to succeed in evading your question.**

**Once again, when they try to change the subject - challenge them. Don’t let them move the spotlight.**

**Demand they answer the question, and if they refuse,**

**don’t allow that to pressure you into answering their question.**

**If they won’t answer your question, why should you answer theirs?**

**Tell them you will answer their question when they answer the one that you asked first .**

**The get-out-of-jail-free-card**

**Next, let’s discuss “the-get-out-of-jail-free-card.”**

**When you are debating an irrational and they have exhausted their bag of tricks, don’t count on them admitting defeat; that will only happen when you are debating another rational person.**

**Remember the prime directive of the irrational mind “Never, Ever, under ANY circumstances, admit that you are wrong.”**

**When they can no longer defend their position, the irrational will often resort to “the-get-out-of-jail-free-card.”**

**This is a reply to your argument that effectively ends all discussion.**

**Here is an example:**

**“Well that is god’s plan and who are you to question god?”**

**The get-out-of-jail-free-card is designed so that you cannot effectively reply to it.**

**It’s unimportant that irrationals delude themselves into believing that they have escaped your argument.**

**What IS important is that YOU realize that when you force them to resort to playing “the-get-out-of-jail-free-card”, that is an admission of total defeat.**

**The Chess Game**

**Another technique they use reminds me of a chess game.**

**Most of you know the rules of chess.**

**One of the rules states that when your king is in check,**

**you must escape check by either moving your king out of check or by blocking or taking the piece that is checking your king; otherwise you lose.**

**So you move your chess piece and put the irrational in check.**

**You both see that checkmate is inevitable within a few moves.**

**You sit back waiting for them to congratulate you on your victory.**

**But to your surprise, you watch in wild-eyed astonishment as they proceed to move one of their pieces into a position where they then announce “check!”**

**You protest that that was an illegal move.**

**They reply, no it wasn’t. You are in check.**

**Untrained in how to handle this violation of the rules you begin to frantically move your king out of danger, not realizing that you have been tricked into playing by ‘their’ rules; irrational rules.**

**When you are in an argument with an irrational,**

**you are playing by the rules of logic; they are not.**

**They are playing by a different set of rules:**

**irrational rules that allow them to do anything they want to in order to avoid defeat.**

**Do not become discouraged.**

**You will never get an admission of defeat.**

**In fact, there never was a chance that you were going to get an admission of defeat because that would violate the prime directive of the irrational mind.**

**But, you do not NEED their admission of defeat.**

**Your argument totally destroyed their position.**

**Their admission of that fact is unnecessary.**

**Their refusal to admit that fact is irrelevant.**

**What it does do is show how tiny the irrational mind can be, by not being able to admit defeat when one’s argument has been totally destroyed.**

**Your victory lies not in their admission but in the destruction of their argument.**

**Lawyer Syndrome**

**Another technique is one I like to call the ‘Lawyer Syndrome’.**

**As we all know, a lawyer can never admit his client is guilty no matter what evidence is presented: DNA, videotape, dozens of eye witnesses; nothing matters except to defend the client to the best of the attorney’s ability.**

**(but in fairness to attorneys, that IS their job).**

**In today’s society, so many people seem to be infected with ‘Lawyer Syndrome’.**

**They argue as if they are attorneys defending a client.**

**Listen to the radio talk shows and you can hear this for yourselves.**

**LANGUAGE**

**Now a word about ‘language’.**

**The English language (or any language for that matter) is full of ambiguities and connotations.**

**Look up any word in the dictionary and you are likely to find a host of different meanings for that word.**

**Find another dictionary and you can find even more meanings for that same word.**

**Unfortunately, there is no ‘official’ dictionary despite what the book may claim on its cover.**

**Like mathematics, logic plays by a set of rules.**

**Unlike mathematics and logic, language can be twisted, spun, mangled and in general, made to say almost anything you want it to.**

**Irrationals use the weaknesses of our language to twist logic and reason so that they can hold onto their beliefs.**

**They become experts at manipulating words and will change the meanings to be whatever they need them to be.**

**They have to do this because they have no evidence to support their positions and therefore must rely upon intellectual dishonesty.**

**Obviously, they haven’t the least interest in the truth.**

**Their ONLY interest lies in protecting their beliefs by redefining words and playing word-games to hide their lack of proof.**

**Once you know what tricks are in their bag, you will be better able to protect yourself from their faulty reasoning.**

**IRRATIONALS**

**I think it is necessary, at this point, that I make a statement regarding irrational thinkers.**

**I have been pretty hard on them up until now.**

**But just because people think irrationally doesn’t mean that they are bad people.**

**In fact, they can be quite wonderful people with great morals and they can also be very well-educated.**

**I am not putting them in the same class as, say, people who engage in criminal behavior.**

**The result of their mindset is that they are extremely gullible and believe in impossible things.**

**However, they are not totally harmless either.**

**Their beliefs can affect the way they do their jobs which then may affect many other people.**

**For example, consider a hypothetical first lady who has influence over her husband and is able to get him to make decisions that affect a nation;**

**decisions based, say, on astrology (scary).**

**Irrational people can be quite rational in some situations.**

**When they are at work and their boss says something with which they strongly disagree, they have enough presence of mind to know when to be rational. It’s call survival instinct. They will only reveal their irrational thoughts to those who pose no threat to them.**

**A famous television personality said “When you encounter irrational people – run – run as fast as you can away from them.”**

**While I admire many things about this man,**

**I think he was way off base on this one.**

**In the world we live in, his advice is simply impractical.**

**You can’t get away from them because there are way too many of them.**

**Besides, as I stated earlier, many of these people are terrific people and have much to offer.**

**Many are even much nicer to be around than some skeptics.**

**Being irrational doesn’t make you a bad person.**

**It only means that your ego (pride) controls your mind instead of the other way around; resulting in a severely-reduced ability to make rational decisions.**

**SKEPTICS**

**Now a word about skeptics.**

**Skeptics don’t recruit.**

**They have learned that true-believers don’t live in the real world of science but in a dream-world of make-believe where invisible imaginary friends abound and reality is anything you want it to be.**

**However, debating irrationals is useful in the respect that you will be exposed to every logical fallacy that you can find in Wikipedia and maybe even a few you can’t find.**

**It is a great way to train your mind because, unlike reading about critical thinking, it is a lot different when you are arguing with an irrational and trying to keep your emotions under control.**

**But you MUST control your emotions because when you allow emotions to take control from your mind then there is nothing left to separate you from them.**

**In other words, then YOU are also thinking irrationally.**

**So if skeptics don’t recruit why are there groups springing up all over the web?**

**Skeptics aren’t interested in attracting true believers.**

**There is nothing we can do for them.**

**It’s not that we haven’t tried or that we don’t care,**

**it’s just that experience has taught us that it is hopeless.**

**Skeptics make themselves known so that other rational thinkers who are out there feeling terribly alone will be able to find us.**

**I know because I was one of them.**

**I went through life wondering why people delude themselves into believing things that can’t possibly be true.**

**Things for which there is no shred of evidence.**

**The world told me that it was I who was in need of help if I thought that everyone else was wrong.**

**Well, It wasn’t I that needed help and if you are of a skeptical,**

**rational mind you need to know that you don’t have to go it alone.**

**There are skeptical organizations out there that will welcome you.**

**People who think like you do.**

**People who can enjoy fantasy and science fiction just as much as any irrational – but know the difference between fantasy and reality.**

**Final Thought**

**My final word to all is that everyone is welcome to this show; both skeptics and true believers alike.**

**It takes all of us to make the world go round and it will take all of us to make this a really stimulating and satisfying show.**

**Hope to see you all next week when the topic will be:**

**The logical fallacy of ‘personal attack.’**