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(SORT)

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For past issues, bibliography, links to other skeptics, and more, check out the SORT Website:

www.quiknet.com/~kitray/index1.html

For more about the co-founders of SORT, see

www.spangenburgandmoser.com

August
SORT Meeting
Wednesday,
August 25, 2004
7:30 P.M.

La Sierra Community Center
Room 800, 5325 Engle Road
Carmichael, CA
(See driving directions, p. 3)

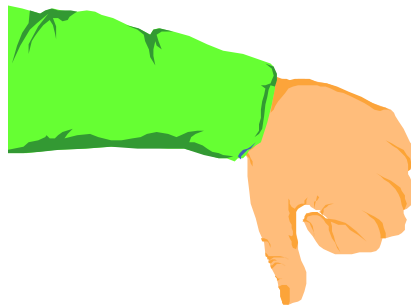
The SORTified NEWS

“Doubt is the beginning of wisdom.”

—Clarence Darrow

August 25 SORT Meeting SO, WHAT DO YOU SAY? Talking to Nonskeptics: Another Look

It might be just a mild suggestion: “You should really go to my acupuncturist. He can help you with your allergies.” Or, “My sister has this wonderful therapist who does 'past-life therapy.'” Or the comment might have more serious potential consequences: “I'm going to take my son to this place that does something called 'facilitated communication.' I've heard that they do wonders with autistic children.” Or, “I'm going to go to Mexico next weekend. I've heard of a great place down there that has a new method for curing cancer but our government won't let it be used here.”



How do you discuss beliefs you don't share—without being negative or, possibly, offensive?

Sometimes the remark may take the form of a question: “There are a lot of things that science doesn't know. Why couldn't some people

have special powers that allow them to read minds?” Or: “We can't see gravity either—how do you know that we don't have special energy points in our body?” And sometimes it's a frustrating challenge. “You're just trapped in western thinking.” Or: “They've been doing this for thousands of years in Asia, so how can you say it doesn't work?”

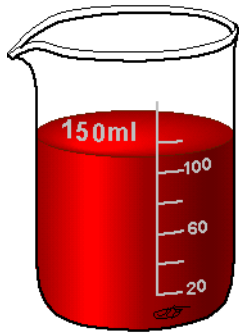


Conversation: A battlefield? Or an opportunity? Or a lost cause?

We've all run up against situations where we find ourselves being asked to respond to these and similar statements. Sometimes we meet them with grace, but more often than not—not. Often discussion appears to be a hopeless endeavor. There isn't always time to go into logical or scientific arguments.

And too often those arguments don't work, being put down as “outdated western thinking,” “narrowmindedness,” or “chauvinistic male claptrap.” Perhaps,

though, there is time to talk and a reasonable listener. If we have this opportunity, what can we say then to someone unfamiliar with scientific method or unable to shake off the years of indoctrination in mystical thinking promoted by religion and the media?



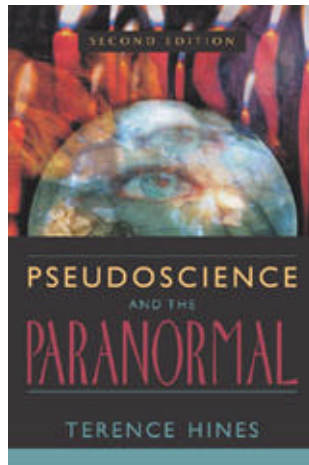
How do you explain the importance of the scientific method in a few brief words?

Given the ever-increasing number of people who either reject or don't understand science or the scientific method, it's more important than ever to be able to communicate with nonscientific friends and acquaintances, no matter what the time or situation. Join us at the August 2004 SORT open roundtable as we take a look at, and try to find some answers for, this important question. As usual free coffee (decaf and regular), soft drinks, cookies and other treats will be available. Like to talk with intelligent people? Bring yourself, bring a friend. The art of good conversation is still alive at SORT.

FROM THE BOOKSHELVES

A couple of interesting books for this month. First is a revised and updated edition of Terence Hines's classic *Pseudoscience and the Paranormal*. Always one of the favorites on the skeptic's

bookshelf, this new edition adds two new chapters: one on alternative medicine that replaces the earlier edition's "Health and Nutrition" section and one called "Pseudopsychology," which replaces one previously titled, "Psychoanalysis," which, according to the publishers "has been renamed to reflect the fact that psychoanalysis is far from the only quack psychology out there." Bringing many of the other chapters up to date, Hines keeps the readability and wit of the earlier edition intact.



Speaking of readability, anyone who has ever read a book by a conspiracist or a book about conspiracists knows what their tangled webs can do to readability. In contrast, Michael Barkun's *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* is a sheer delight in readability as it traces the complicated, often-incestuous trails of modern American conspiracy theory. Barkun navigates the treacherous domain of American conspiracists—including everything from the Knights Templar to UFOs and from the Illuminati to the Rockefellers—all with grace and good humor. If you can't get a handle on what the

The Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking (SORT) . . .

- Is dedicated to the promotion of rational thinking in all areas of life.
- Upholds the superiority of science over the mystical.
- Promotes and supports all efforts of intelligent communication that provide a counterpoint to the strong waves of anti-rationalism, irrationalism, and mysticism sweeping the world today.

Toward these ends we . . .

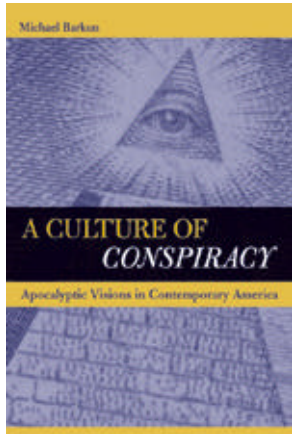
- Host a monthly discussion group.
- Publish a monthly newsletter.
- Host special events, talks, and presentations.
- Host a web page.

While SORT began with and still continues to be concerned with the promotion of critical thinking in areas dealing with the pseudo-scientific, the paranormal, the mystical, and the fraudulent, we strongly promote critical thinking in *all* areas of human thought and endeavor.

The core of SORT activities is our discussion group. The art of intelligent conversation is not dead. We at SORT believe that rational conversation--the meeting of minds, the free exchange of ideas and the provocative stimulation of critical questions-- is one of the most civilized and enlightening of all human activities.

SORT discussion topics have ranged from UFOs to the Holocaust, from "alternative medicine" to the problems in communicating science to the public, from classic and recent cons and scams to the teaching of critical thinking. Our discussions are hosted by one of the SORT founders, and participants are by no means limited to experts (although they may include experts) but are made up of intelligent and questioning people concerned with the topic of the evening.

crackpots are always talking about on shows like Art Bell's (hey, what about those black helicopters?), Barkun can unravel it all for you.

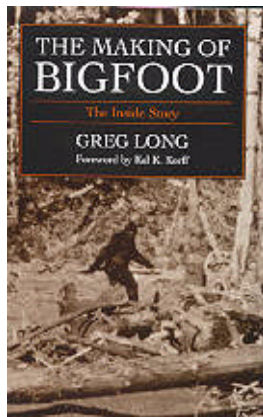


Also exploring some quirky paths is *Crazy Therapies: What Are They? Do They Work?* by Margaret Thaler Singer and Janja Lalich. If you were intrigued by Terence Hines's chapter on pseudopsychology in *Pseudoscience and the Paranormal* you can delve deeper into the absurd and often unbelievable world of quack psychotherapy here with Singer and Lalich. It's an often bizarre tour that will have you laughing at incredible stupidity one moment and quivering with anger at some of its mental and physical dangers the next.

Finally, on a lighter note you might want to take a look at Greg Long's *The Making of Bigfoot: The Inside Story*. Taking his story as seriously as an investigative journalist tracking down a major political scandal, Long unearths every track, trail, and twist of his self-assignment. His investigation centers on the strongest piece of evidence offered by believers, the short sixty-second piece of film usually called the "Patterson film,"

which, it's claimed, is documented proof of Bigfoot's existence. But who was Patterson and if the film is a fake, as most skeptics believe, how and why did he pull off the stunt? The story that Long uncovers is the stuff that movies are made of. It's everything you ever wanted to know about the Bigfoot hoax, and then some, and a damn good read besides.

Hines's book is published by Prometheus, as is Long's. *Crazy Therapies* is published by Jossey-Bass Publishers in San Francisco and Barkun's book by the University of California Press. You can order all four from Amazon and we also found *The Culture of Conspiracy* at Borders Books on Fair Oaks Blvd.



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Psychologist

Robert Sheaffer
UFO Specialist, Author

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About the Founding Members:

Ray Spangenburg and Kit Moser are a husband-and-wife writing team specializing in science and technology. They are co-authors of 52 books and over 100 articles, including publication in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, and they are former co-editors of the *Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet (BASIS)*.

For more information, contact:

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GETTING TO LA SIERRA COMMUNITY CENTER

From Highway 50: Take the Watt Avenue exit and head north. Turn right on Marconi, by the Raley's store. Travel east on Marconi to Walnut and turn left. Travel north on Walnut to Engle and turn right. Turn left at La Sierra Community Center. Follow the road past the main parking lot and along the east side of the building. The new meeting room is in the second building on the left. Park, look for the SORT sign, and come on in!

From I-80: Take the Madison exit and head east. Turn right on Garfield and head south. Turn right on Gibbons and left at La Sierra Community Center. Follow the road along the east side of the building. The new meeting room is the last building before the open, grassy area. Park, look for the SORT sign, and come on in!

RATIONAL COMMUNITY CALENDAR

August 25: *SORT Meeting*

Topic: “So, What Do You Say? Talking with Nonskeptics: Another Look”

Time: Wednesday, 7:30–9:00 p.m. (social period until 9:30)

Place: La Sierra Community Center, Room 800, 5325 Engle Road, Carmichael.

Everyone is welcome and all meetings are free.

September 10: *Sacramento Skeptics*

Dinner followed by meeting.

Topic, Time, and Place: To be announced.

For details, contact Liam McDaid, McDaidW@scc.losrios.edu

September 12: *AOF Meeting*

Speaker: “A Secular Religion for Humanity”

Lou Matz, associate professor at University of the Pacific in Stockton, will present on the philosophy of John Stuart Mill. The presentation is followed by Q&A and light refreshments.

Time: Sunday, 2:30–5:30 p.m.

Place: Sierra 2 Community Center, 2791 24th Street, Room 10. (South of Broadway).

Visitors welcome. *Cost:* Free



*Educating Ourselves
and Educating Others*

**Sacramento Organization
for Rational Thinking
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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED