

Correcting Common Errors

We have a new item in our sidebar: **Error Correction**. These are useful resources, but not directly for you, O Wise and Rational Readers of **The World**. They are for your friends and acquaintances. They are for those jaw-dropping moments when, for instance, you think you are having a deep discussion about some subtle geopolitical issue with someone whom you have not previously observed to deviate from sanity, when they suddenly come up with

- *"Well, there are people who could locate Saddam with their psychic powers. It's at least worth trying, isn't it? After all, the police use psychics to solve murders, and even the CIA..."*

Don't panic. Just refer them to the James Randi web site, where they will find **this** and be cured. More generally, don't engage with any argument about any supernatural claims that have not won Randi's million dollar prize. (None has ever got past the first stage, a prima facie demonstration of the claimed effect.)

If they tell you about an email message they have just received from **Bill Gates guaranteeing them a thousand dollars** if they forward it to ten people ... or if they remark

- *"Did you know that during the Nazi occupation of Denmark in World War 2 the **Danish king wore a yellow star** in solidarity with his Jewish subjects",*

Refer them to Snopes (which everyone should read thoroughly, by the way, and then regularly check out their **Recent Additions** page).

- *"Such diseases as anorexia, bulimia, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, **schoolphobia**, homosexuality..."*

Refer them to Thomas Szasz.

- *"Studies have shown that **watching TV makes teenagers more violent...**"*

Refer them to junkscience.com.

- *"Well, in some ways the Israelis and the Palestinians are as bad as each other. They should both..."*

Refer them to Myths and Facts. And you might also try

HonestReporting.com.

We should stress that to endorse these sites as excellent antidotes to common errors is not to claim that they themselves are error free. On the contrary, only **one web site** is error free. And in particular, we have reservations about some of the content of each of those sites.

Mon, 04/28/2003 - 02:08 | [permalink](#)

Not So Easy

The World writes: *Don't panic. Just refer them to the James Randi web site, where they will find this and be cured.*

As lovely as this sounds, it's not very accurate. Yes, Randi offers true refutations of psychics, and these other sites also offer true refutations of various other crap. But come on. You're all familiar with TCS, and its total lack of popularity. Despite lots of TCSers explaining it over and over on numerous forums, with highly varied approaches. Truth alone isn't enough to win many converts.

by **Elliot Temple** on Mon, 04/28/2003 - 02:48 | [reply](#)

Correction

Quote:

*On the contrary, **only one web site** is error free.*

Excepting of course the Readers' Comments (particularly this one).

by a reader on Mon, 04/28/2003 - 03:16 | [reply](#)

For those who missed the irony...

If ever you see on this site any of the following –

- (1) grandiosity
 - (2) anything that appears to imply that solving problems is a piece of cake requiring no creativity but a mere act of will
 - (3) optimistic-sounding claims that anyone in the grip of thoroughly bad ideas will surely change his mind when the truth is presented to him
 - (4) anything that sounds as though we think that the truth is manifest, and/or that
 - (5) we think ourselves infallible knowledge-generating systems
- ... and so on... –

look for the irony. If we appear to say such things, you can be pretty sure that it is not *entirely* serious.

On the other hand, we* are quite serious about switching to the Mac.

Sarah

* Kevin Schodel wishes to disassociate himself from this comment,

as he is a compiler writer pure unix type who does not seem entirely satisfied with what they have done with System X.

by **Sarah Fitz-Claridge** on Mon, 04/28/2003 - 14:39 | [reply](#)
