

## Re: The Psychology of Responding to Crackpots

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**From:** Acme Diagnostics (*LFinezapthis\_at\_partpostmark.net*)

**Date:** 06/30/04

Date: 30 Jun 2004 10:27:08 -0500

daryl@atc-nycorp.com (Daryl McCullough) wrote:

>Acme Diagnostics says...

>

>>*I've only found one way to test this. Posters who can and are willing  
>>to explain, are responsive to criticism, and are capable of  
>>cooperative, good faith, dialog. Another way of saying it: posters who  
>>attempt privileged positions, as it sounds like you are promoting v.  
>>posters who don't, like the person you are replying to.*

>

>*I think that in mathematics and logic, there really \*is\* a privileged  
>position, and that position is the side that has the mathematically  
>rigorous argument.*

That's not a privileged position. A privileged position would be: "I'm a better mathematician, so there is no need for argument – I'm right and you're wrong. And 100 variations implying same, such as "If you would go read ABC book you would understand that I'm right."

>*That doesn't mean that there are any privileged  
>\*people\*. Being a math PhD carries no weight if you don't have a sound  
>mathematical argument. And it doesn't matter if you are a nobody  
>without a degree proving your competence---if you \*do\* have a  
>sound mathematical argument, then you deserve to be taken seriously.*

Yes, that's what I meant by privileged position. We agree here.

>*It's like chess in that regard---there is no subjectivity involved  
>in whether you have won a chess game or not.*

But you are required to play the game. You are forced to make a move each time your opponent makes one, and you are forced to be directly responsive to your opponent's move. No "snipping" that move as we see all the time on Usenet. Even when you \*know\* you have a won game, as I hear claimed incessantly on Usenet, you cannot announce you have one, nor call your opponent a moron, or a crank, or anything else. Until your opponent extends his hand, you sit and you play. And once in a while, it is \*you\* who turns out to extend the hand even to the

less competent player.

You don't win a chess game by announcing, "I'm obviously a more competent player than you, so I win." That would be a privileged position.

But nobody forces you to play. You have that choice.

In logical argumentation that is uncooperative or in bad faith, i.e. a debate of some kind, i.e. playing to win, there is a list of signals for "extending your hand" that relieves arguers of eating humble pie. If you encounter one, you are justified in claiming a win. But since almost nobody is a qualified logician in this respect on Usenet, you have to cure them as you go along (charity) if you want an exchange to last more than one post. The most astute logical arguer I've encountered in sci.logic is George Dance. You will never see him assert a privileged position. The thought is ludicrous.

>

>*By the way, I'm \*not\* a mathematician---I'm an amateur. I have no degree in mathematics, nor logic, nor computer science.*

Well the smartest and most knowledgeable person I know has no degree in anything. The apparently smartest Usenet poster I've encountered claims no degrees AFAIK. I would listen to one of these two before anyone here regardless of degrees. OTOH I often see Usenet posters with degrees, including advanced degrees, saying incredibly stupid or patently untrue things in areas with which I have a lot of experience. Of course everyone agrees that experience is the test. Formal education is just supposed to give you the leg up on that. There are exceptions to everything. Minsky posts once in a while, but then you really don't think about his degrees but rather his accomplishments. This preoccupation with degrees on Usenet seems to correspond mostly with age. People in their teens and twenties attach great significance. People in their 50's and 60's tend to ignore them completely, including their own degrees. That would include me.

On Usenet, all that matters regarding qualifications is that paragraph at the top, at least to most old farts like myself. I think you are one of the better posters. Didn't you post those logic paradoxes a few days ago? I lifted them and posted them in talk.philosophy.misc yesterday. Very entertaining. Thanks.

I don't know anything for sure and appreciate being corrected.

Larry