# Logic & Faith

Discerning truth in logical arguments

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# Introduction

Whenever I hear people debating some issue (abortion, gun control, origins, religion, politics, etc.), I often spot a number of mistakes in their arguments. Mistakes in reasoning are called "logical fallacies," and they abound in origins debates. I have often thought it would be fun to carry a little buzzer that I could push when someone makes a fundamental mistake in reasoning. Of course, that would be impolite. However, we should all become familiar with logical fallacies so that our mental buzzer goes off whenever we hear a mistake in reasoning.

Logic (the study of correct and incorrect reasoning) has become a lost skill in our culture. And that is a shame. It is a valuable tool, particularly for Christians who want to defend their faith better. Evolutionists often commit logical fallacies, and it is important that creationists learn to identify and refute such faulty reasoning. Sadly, I often see creationists committing logical fallacies as well. There is hardly anything more embarrassing than someone who advocates your position but does so using bad reasoning.

Logic involves the use of arguments. When some people think of "arguments," they think of an emotionally heated exchange—a "yelling match." But that is not what is meant here. An argument is a chain of statements (called "propositions") in which the truth of one is asserted on the basis of the other(s). Biblically, we are supposed to argue in this way; we are to provide a reasoned defense (an argument) for the Christian faith (1 Peter 3:15) with gentleness and respect. An argument takes certain information as accepted (this is called a "premise") and then proceeds to demonstrate that another claim must also be true (called the "conclusion").

Here is an example: Dr. Lisle is not in the office today. So he is probably working at home.

In this argument, the first sentence is the premise: "Dr. Lisle is not in the office today." The arguer has assumed that we all agree to this premise and then draws the conclusion that "he is probably working at home." This is a reasonable argument; the conclusion does seem likely given the premise. So, this is called a "cogent" argument. This type of argument is classified as an inductive argument because the conclusion is likely but not proved from the premise. (After all, Dr. Lisle could be on vacation.) If the conclusion were not very likely given the premise, then the argument would be considered "weak" rather than "cogent."

The other type of argument is called a *deductive* argument. With this type of argument, it is asserted that the conclusion *definitely* follows from the premises (not just *probably*). Here is an example: All dogs are mammals. All mammals have hair. Therefore, all dogs have hair.

The conclusion of this argument definitely follows from the premises. That is, if the premises are true, then the conclusion has to be true as well. So, this is a *valid* argument. If the conclusion did not follow for a deductive argument, then the argument would be *invalid*.

In this pocket guide, we will explore the most common logical fallacies. It is very helpful to know these fallacies so that we can spot them when evolutionists commit them—and so that we do not commit them as well. In the Christian worldview, to be logical is to think in a way that is consistent with God's thinking. God is logical.

As Christians, we have a moral obligation to think and act rationally—to line up our thinking with God's truth (Ephesians 5:1; Isaiah 55:7–8). We pray that this pocket guide will be God-honoring and will tremendously improve your defense of the faith.

**Darwin used the Galápagos finches to demonstrate natural selection. But nature cannot "select" anything.**

Photo by Derek Braithwaite on Unsplash

# The Fallacy of Reification

## by Dr. Jason Lisle

Reification is attributing a concrete characteristic to something that is abstract. Perhaps you have heard the old saying, "It's not nice to fool Mother Nature." This is an example of reification because "nature" is an abstraction; it is simply the name we give to the chain of events in the universe. Nature is not a person and cannot literally be fooled since nature does not have a mind. So, this expression would not make sense if taken literally.

Of course, not all language should be taken literally. There is nothing wrong with reification as a figure of speech. It is perfectly acceptable in poetry. Even the Bible uses reification at times in its poetic sections. For example, Proverbs 8 personifies the concept of wisdom. This is a perfectly acceptable (and poetically beautiful) use of reification.

However, when reification is used as part of a *logical argument*, it is a fallacy. The reason for this is that using such a poetic expression is often ambiguous and can obscure important points in a debate. It is very common for evolutionists to commit this fallacy. Let's look at some examples of the fallacy of reification as they are commonly used in evolutionary arguments.

Sometimes in an argument, an evolutionist will say something like this: "Nature has designed some amazing creatures." This sentence commits the fallacy of reification because nature does not have a mind and cannot literally design anything. By using the fallacy of reification, the evolutionist obscures the fact that the evolution worldview

really cannot account for the design of living creatures. (Keep in mind that he may be doing this unintentionally.) God can design creatures because God is a person. Nature is a concept and cannot design anything.

"Creationists say the world was created supernaturally, but science says otherwise." Here the person has attributed personal, concrete attributes to the concept of science. In doing so, he or she overlooks the important fact that the scientists draw conclusions about the evidence and verbalize such conclusions—not "science." Science is a conceptual tool that can be used properly or improperly. It says nothing. It does not take a position on issues. So, this common example of reification is logically fallacious.

"The evidence speaks for itself." This expression is quite common, but when used as part of an argument, it is the fallacy of reification. Evidence does not speak at all. Evidence is a concept, the name we give to a body of facts that we believe to be consistent with a particular point of view. People draw conclusions about evidence and verbalize their thoughts. But evidence itself does not have thoughts to verbalize.


"Evolution figured out a way around these problems." I have a heard a number of evolutionists say something along these lines when attempting to explain some intricately designed biological system. But

of course evolution is a concept. It has no mind and cannot figure out anything. So this example again obscures the difficulty in accounting for design in the universe without appealing to a mind. It is a fallacious use of reification.

Even the phrase *natural selection* is an example of reification and could be considered a fallacy if used in an argument. Nature cannot literally select. This phrase is so commonly used that we might not call it a fallacy providing the meaning is understood by all. We do believe in the concept called natural selection. Yes, organisms that are well-suited to an environment are more likely to survive than those that are not well-suited. (This is tautologically true and is something that both creationists and evolutionists believe.)

But suppose we asked, "Why is it that animals are well-suited to their environment?" If an evolutionist answered "natural selection," this would be the fallacy of reification. It poetically obscures the true reason that animals are designed to survive—God.

If you think about it, natural selection does not actually explain why we find organisms suited to their environment. It only explains why we do *not* find organisms that are *unsuited* to their environment (i.e., because they die). It is God—not "nature"—who has given living beings the abilities they need to survive.

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**Just like the old shell game, evolutionists use sleight of hand to change the meaning of the word *evolution* in mid-sentence.**

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# The Fallacy of Equivocation

## by Dr. Jason Lisle

When debating any topic, it is important that we pay close attention to the meaning of words and how they are being used in the debate. Most words have more than one meaning, but only one of these meanings will properly fit the given context. When someone shifts from one meaning of a word to another within an argument, he or she has committed the fallacy of equivocation.

Here is a facetious example: "Doctors know a lot about medicine, and Dr. Lisle is a doctor. So he must know a lot about medicine." This short argument shifts from one meaning of the word *doctor* (medical doctor) to another (PhD), making the argument fallacious. This use of equivocation is sometimes called a "bait and switch" fallacy because the listener is baited on one meaning of a word, and then the meaning is switched to draw a faulty conclusion.


Evolutionists often commit the fallacy of equivocation on the word *evolution*. This word has a number of meanings. *Evolution* can

mean "change" in a general sense, but it can also refer to the idea that organisms share a common ancestor. Either meaning is perfectly legitimate, but the two meanings should not be conflated within an argument. Many evolutionists seem to think that by demonstrating evolution in the sense of "change" they prove evolution in the sense of "common descent."

You might hear them say something like, "Creationists are wrong because we can see evolution happening all the time. Organisms are constantly changing and adapting to their environment." But of course the fact that animals change does not demonstrate that they share a common ancestor.

I cannot overstate how common this fallacy is in evolutionary arguments. Bacteria becoming resistant to antibiotics, speciation events, changes in the size and shape of finch beaks, the development of new breeds of dog, and changes in allele frequency are all examples of change, but none of them demonstrate that the basic kinds of organisms share a common ancestor. When you hear evolutionists cite these as examples of "evolution in action," you need to politely point out that they have committed the fallacy of equivocation.

You might notice that at Answers in Genesis, we often use phrases like "particles-to-people evolution." This may seem overly cumbersome, but we do this precisely to avoid equivocation.

Another word on which people sometimes equivocate is the word *science*. Science commonly refers to the procedures by which we explore the consistent and predictable behavior of the universe today—the scientific method. This is operational science. But science can also refer to a body of knowledge (e.g., the science of genetics). Furthermore, science can also refer to models regarding past

events; this is origins science. Or it can refer to a specific model. When any of these meanings are switched within an argument, it is an instance of the fallacy of equivocation.

"Science has given us computers, medicine, the space program, and so much more. Why then do you deny the science of evolution?" This argument conflates operational science with one particular model of origins science. Origins science lacks the testable/repeatable aspects of operational science because the past can never be tested directly or repeated. Computers, medicine, and so on are all an outworking of operational science (the study of how the universe operates today).

By conflating operational science with evolution, the arguer hopes to give evolution a credibility that it does not truly deserve. Yes, we do believe in operational science, and we have some respect for origins science as well. However, this does not mean that we should believe in evolution, which is only one particular model of origins science.

Old-earth creationists often commit this fallacy with the word *interpretation*. They may say, "We must always compare our interpretation of Scripture with our interpretation of nature." Interpretation of the Scripture means to understand the meaning of the propositional statements—to grasp the author's intention. However, nature does not have intentions. When we interpret nature, we are *creating* propositional statements about nature. This is very different from understanding propositional statements that someone else has already created. By conflating these two meanings of *interpretation*, the old-earth creationist places scientist's statements about nature on the same level as Scripture.

**Dr. Jason Lisle** **(see page 11)**

**The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) program is based on the fallacy of begging the question since researchers assume that humans evolved on earth and so other intelligent life must have evolved somewhere in the universe.**

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