DISCERNING TRUTH

Exposing Errors in
Evolutionary 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 very valuable tool, particularly for the Christian who wants to defend his or her 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 Pet. 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*). For example:

> All dogs are mammals. And 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*.

Over the next chapters, 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 (Eph. 5:1; Isa. 55:7–8). I pray that this book will be God-honoring and will tremendously improve your defense of the faith.
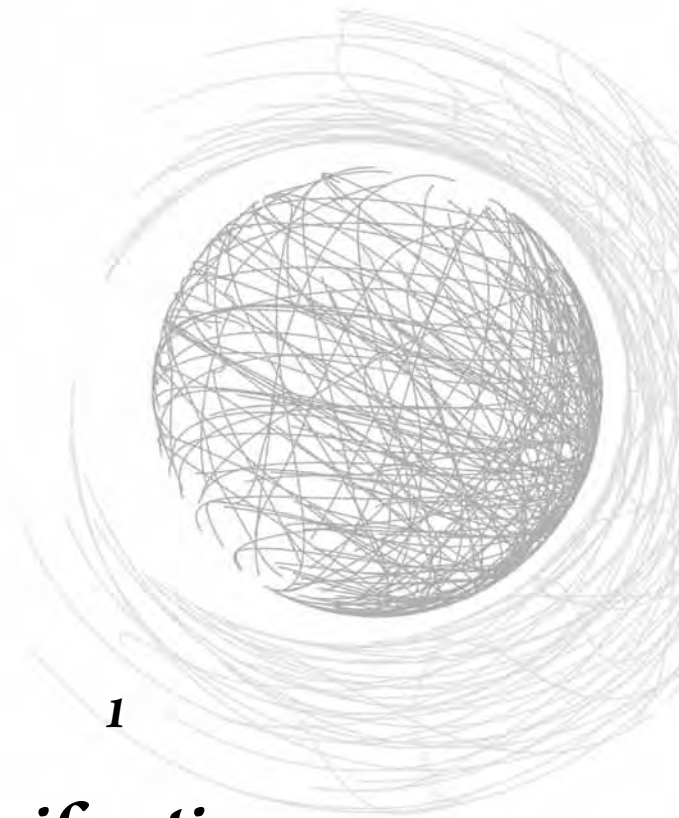
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Reification

R eification[1] 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.

> *Reification*
>
> *—*
>
> *attributing a concrete characteristic to something abstract*

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 supernatural being. 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 *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 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, a statement always considered correct, 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.

Often the concept being reified is given personal characteristics: the ability to think, to have an opinion, and so on. When concepts are personified in this way in an argument, it is sometimes called the "pathetic fallacy." The term is not pejorative; rather, it comes from the word *empathy*, because we are attributing thoughts and feelings to something that cannot possess them. So the pathetic fallacy is a type of reification. Virtually all of the examples above could also be classified as the pathetic fallacy. Usually, the personification of non-conceptual objects is also classified as the pathetic fallacy (if it occurs within an argument). The statement "Cars really want to be driven" would be considered the pathetic fallacy if it occurred in an argument, even though cars are not conceptual but physical.

Examples of Reification

"Nature has found a way."

"Life invaded the dry land."

"Natural selection guided the development of this species."

"Science says that we must limit explanations to the natural world."

"Follow the evidence where it leads."

"Evolution tells us much about the way the world works."

Endnotes
  1. Reification is also commonly called "hypostatization."