



# DISCERNING TRUTH





# DISCERNING TRUTH

Exposing Errors in  
Evolutionary Arguments



Dr. Jason Lisle

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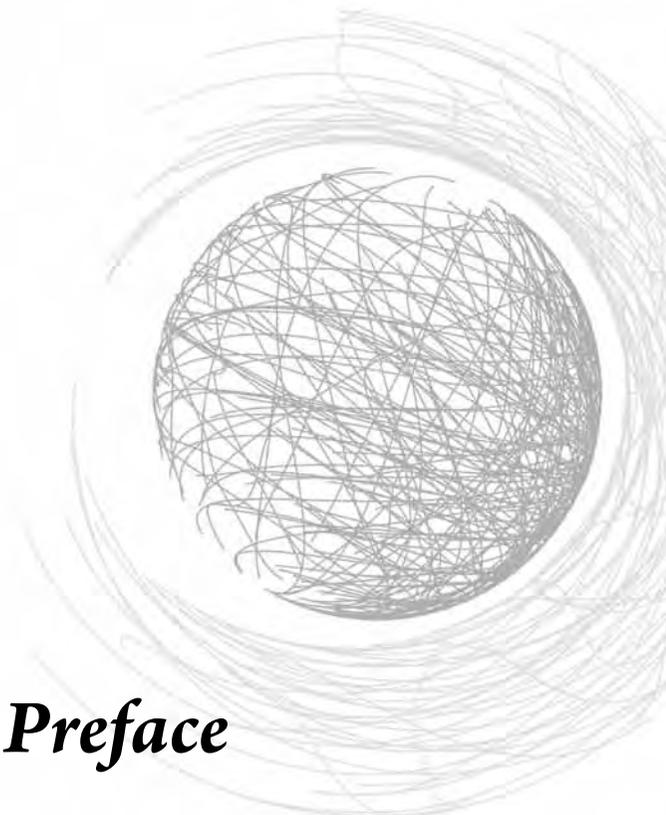


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## *Preface*

**I**n my previous book, *The Ultimate Proof of Creation*, I included two chapters that gave brief summaries of the nature of logic and examples of common logical fallacies as they occur in debates on origins. Initially, I was somewhat reluctant to include these chapters because I was concerned that they might read a bit like stale dictionary entries and possibly break the flow of thought that permeated the rest of the book. But ultimately, I decided that knowledge of logical fallacies is simply too important to be left out of a book on defending the Christian faith. Shortly after the book was published, I was astounded at the number of people who wrote to me or told me in person how much they appreciated the book — how it had changed their entire approach to apologetics (defending the faith) and had given them a new boldness to share their faith. In particular, I was surprised by the number of people who told me how much they appreciated the chapters on logic.

Encouraged by this initial feedback, as well as positive responses from talks I had given on logical fallacies and evolution, I decided that a more thorough treatment of the subject was in order. But I didn't want to write just another "textbook" on logic; there are plenty of those in print already. Nor did I want to simply repeat the short summaries that I had already written for *The Ultimate Proof*. Rather, I wanted to produce a resource on logic in apologetics, written in a way that is engaging and memorable, perhaps using anecdotes from my own experiences in apologetics. Moreover, I wanted to spend a considerable amount of space on each fallacy (at least for the more common ones), so that the reader thoroughly understands each example before moving on to the next.

This led me to write a short series of articles on logical fallacies that we posted on the Answers in Genesis website ([answersingenesis.org](http://answersingenesis.org)). Each article addresses one fallacy (or perhaps two at most). This format allows the reader to absorb the information in a very readable and (hopefully) entertaining way, with illustrations and examples from my own experiences. The series concentrated on fallacies that are commonly committed by evolutionists as they attempt to defend their position. I am convinced that evolution is without any intellectual merit whatsoever, and that all arguments for evolution are either logically fallacious, or based on a false premise. So I was curious to see how the evolutionists would respond to the web series since it revealed the fallacious nature of some of their most cherished arguments.

And respond they did! Internet blogs and forums exploded with angry evolutionists attempting to rebut, ridicule, or simply dismiss the fallacy series. Ironically, most of their responses contained the very fallacies that had already been refuted in the series. Such responses indicate that we have struck a nerve. After all, without logical fallacies, how would evolutionists defend their position? But don't take my word for it. In chapter 14 of this book, we have numerous examples of fallacies directly from evolutionary literature, along with references that you may check for yourself.

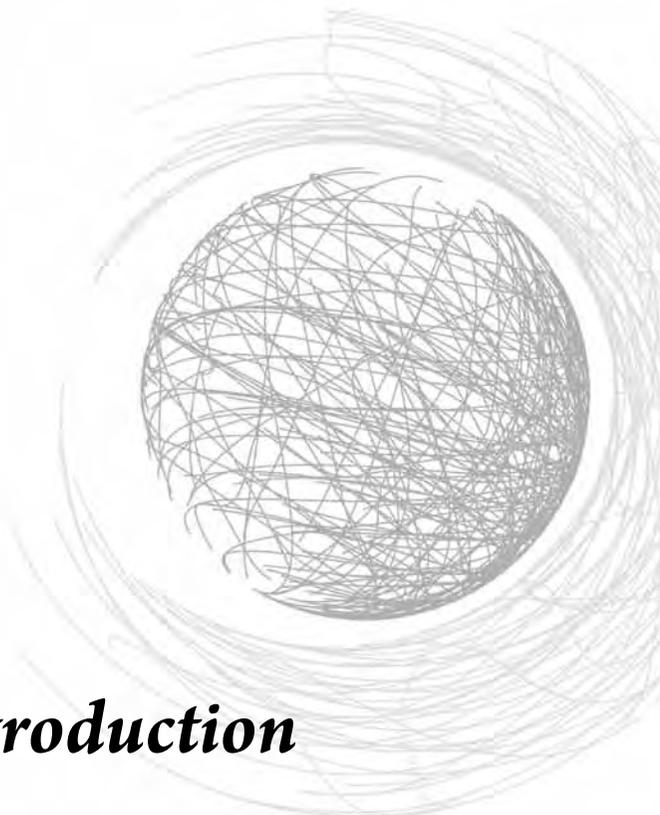
This book is based on that web series. However, I have added additional material in a number of places. First of all, I have added five

brand-new chapters. I have also made minor changes and additions to the previously published chapters, which I believe will close most of the loopholes, and clarify some ambiguity that may have appeared in the web versions. Since the web series included only the most common fallacies, I have added a new chapter to this book that covers almost all the other fallacies that occur in origins debates. Since these are less common, I felt that they warranted less space, and so only a brief description and example for each is given.

The most exciting new additions to this book (in my view at least) are chapters 12–15. Chapter 12 includes assorted examples of fallacies from all the types included in this book. This allows the reader to test his or her fallacy-detection skills. An answer key is provided in chapter 13. Chapter 14 has another list of assorted examples of evolutionist fallacies quoted directly from evolutionist literature — along with references. Since these are “real world” examples, they may be more difficult to classify than the hypothetical, chemically pure examples provided in chapter 12. An answer key is also provided in chapter 15, which includes an explanation of why each fallacy is classified as such. Sometimes fallacies are called by their Latin name, or have an alternative English name. Therefore, I have included appendix A, which gives alternate names used for logical fallacies.

This book is not meant to be a replacement for a textbook on logic. Many fine textbooks (such as Copi and Cohen’s *Introduction to Logic*) are available. Rather, this book is designed to supplement other such material. It focuses almost exclusively on how to spot and refute fallacies that occur in evolutionists’ arguments. This is an important aspect of apologetics. But it is not the only aspect. Defending the faith requires knowledge of the faith and how to critique alternative worldviews. Books such as *The Ultimate Proof of Creation* and *The New Answers Book* series are designed to give a more encompassing picture of how to defend the Christian faith, particularly in Genesis. However, I am convinced that knowing logic and learning to spot logical fallacies in order to defend the faith better is one of the most valuable time investments that a person can make.





# *Introduction*

**W**henever 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

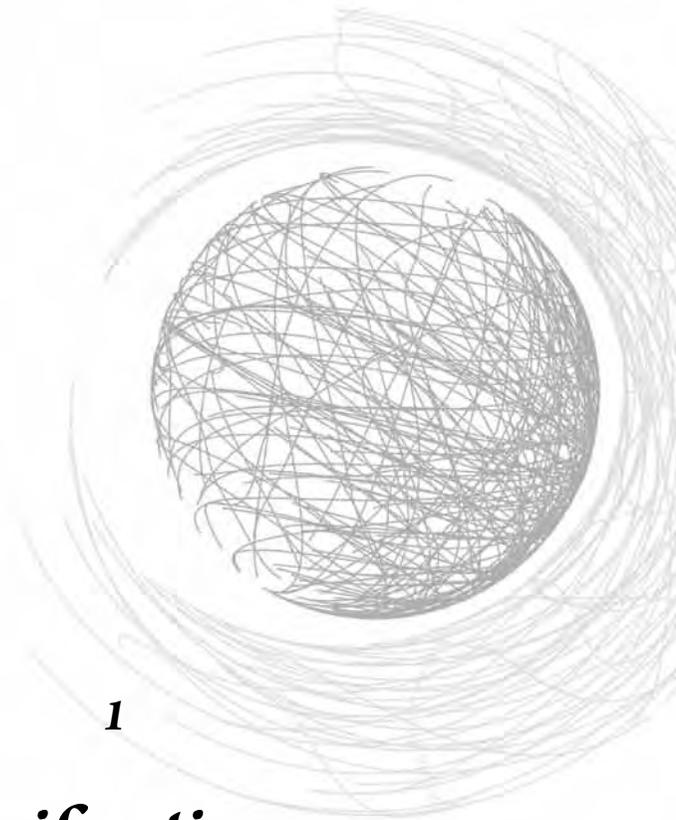
## INTRODUCTION

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.





1

## *Reification*

**R**eification<sup>1</sup> 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.”