

article series
Logical Fallacies

Straw-Man Fallacy

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The straw-man fallacy is when a person misrepresents his opponent's position and then proceeds to refute that misrepresentation (i.e., the "straw man") rather than what his opponent actually claims.¹

If you are participating in a boxing match, would you stand a better chance of victory fighting a straw man (some clothes stuffed with straw) or a real opponent? Anyone can knock down a straw man, since the straw man cannot fight back. That's the picture for this fallacy. If I modify my opponent's position, I can now easily show the modified position to be false, while ignoring the actual position of my opponent. Whether the misrepresentation is intentional or not, this is fallacious.

While the above paragraphs use the word "opponent," the person to whom you are ministering (whether a Christian or an unbeliever) is not your opponent. Show the love of Christ in your apologetic (your defense of the Christian faith).

Watch out for evolutionists misrepresenting the view of creationists. It is extremely common. Also, be careful not to misrepresent the position of evolutionists, which sadly, is also far too common. It is your responsibility to correctly know the position you are speaking against.

Evolutionists Committing the Straw-Man Fallacy

Creationists often claim that if we can't see a new species evolve during our lifetime, then speciation doesn't occur.²

¹ Jason Lisle, *Discerning Truth: Exposing Errors in Evolutionary Arguments* (Green Forest: Master Books, 2010), 59.

² Jerry A. Coyne, *Why Evolution is True*, (NY: Penguin Group, 2009), 183.

The preceding quote is from a best-selling book on evolution. I do not recall ever hearing a creationist make this particular claim about species, let alone hearing it made “often.” Using a rare claim as the standard of your opponent is fallacious, committing the straw-man fallacy.

Matchbooks resemble the kinds of creatures expected under a creationist explanation of life. In such a case, organisms would not have common ancestry, but would simply result from an instantaneous creation of forms designed de novo to fit their environments. Under this scenario, we wouldn't expect to see species falling into a nested hierarchy of forms that is recognized by all biologists.³

This quote is from that same best seller, written by an evolutionary biologist. Creationists today do not make these claims. The common creationist claim is that the Biblical kinds of creatures that exited Noah's Ark, diversified into many species. A “Forest of Life”⁴ or an “Orchard of Life”⁵ is what creationists use to picture species descending from common ancestors, all staying within their Biblical kind. Also, common characteristics between living creatures is evidence for creation by God, who used common design features.

Creationists believe that more than a hundred thousand pairs of animals were on Noah's Ark.

Again, this is not the standard creationist claim. Creationists claim two of every Biblical kind of bird and land animal were on the ark, plus a few others, per the details in Genesis. There are many species (a modern term) in most Biblical kinds. [One estimate is that 1,373 kinds were on the ark, 627 for animals alive today, 746 for extinct animals in the fossil record.⁶]

³ Coyne, 10.

⁴ Term used by: Mark Bergemann, “Evolution's Tree of Life,” *LSI Journal*, vol. 30 no. 1 (winter 2016), 28-29. www.LutheranScience.org/2016winter (accessed March 13, 2018)

⁵ Answers in Genesis often uses this term. For example, see (accessed March 13, 2018) <https://answersingenesis.org/theory-of-evolution/tree-orchard-life/>

⁶ Craig Froman, ed., *How Many Animals Were on The Ark?* (Green Forest: Master Books, 2016), 47.

*Creationists are antiscience, they deny scientific laws.
Creationists do not believe in science.*

These claims and so many similar ones do not represent the creationist position. The reverse is commonly true. Many creationists love science and spend their entire careers in scientific fields.

Creationists Committing the Straw-Man Fallacy

Evolution is a random process.

Evolutionists define evolution as being NOT random. They claim evolution is a “sieving” or “sorting” process and a multistage process that builds as it goes. See “Never Say ‘Evolution is a Random Process,’” on pages 30-31 at www.LutheranScience.org/2016summer (Summer 2016 *LSI Journal*).

Evolution theory goes against the laws of science.

This is similar to the evolutionist saying that creationists deny scientific laws. The Theory of Evolution is carefully constructed using the laws of science. It is the assumptions of evolutionists (such as “no creator,” “no Flood,” and “deep time”) that direct and constrain evolutionary science. Just because evolutionists have been unable to scientifically explain how nonliving chemicals self-assembled into the first life-form, does not mean evolution is unscientific or goes against the laws of science.

Humans descended from apes.

Evolutionists claim humans and apes each descended from a common ancestor, an apelike creature. While the difference may seem small to some creationists, it is a glaring error to the evolutionist, who now knows you do not know much about evolution. How can you speak against something with which you are unfamiliar?

Theories have no evidence.

This misrepresents the Theory of Evolution. All scientific theories have evidence, including evolution.

Conclusion

The next time you hear an evolutionist describing the creationist position, or a creationist describing the Theory of Evolution, see if you can detect the straw-man fallacy in those arguments.

More importantly, be careful when describing evolution, so you do not commit this fallacy. Make sure you have correctly learned the actual teachings of evolutionists, and not simply accepted straw-man versions of evolution unknowingly advanced by other creationists.

The article series listed below teaches major aspects of the Theory of Evolution. These articles, as well as other *LSI Journal* articles, serve as a good starting place to correctly learn the Theory of Evolution, and also to see that many parts of evolution are acceptable to the creationist. The parts of evolution that go against Scripture (common descent, billions of years, etc.) are false. We can be certain those parts are false, because by faith we know that the Bible is true.

“Know Evolution –Evolution is a Mixture of Reality and Fabrication”

This is a continuing article series in the *LSI Journal*. Articles to date are listed below.

“Evolution’s Tree of Life”: Pages 28-29 in the winter 2016 *LSI Journal*
www.LutheranScience.org/2016winter

“Dinosaurs: Feathers or Scales?”: Pages 27-31 in the spring 2016 *LSI Journal*
www.LutheranScience.org/2016spring

“Natural Selection”: Pages 25-31 in the fall 2016 *LSI Journal*
www.LutheranScience.org/2016fall

“Human or Ape, No In-Between”: Pages 28-31 in the winter 2017 *LSI Journal*
www.LutheranScience.org/2017winter

“Geologic Column”: Pages 20-31 in the winter 2018 *LSI Journal*
www.LutheranScience.org/2018winter