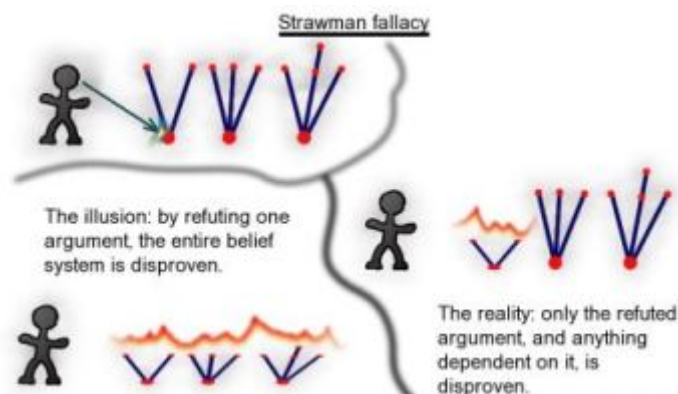


The Straw Man Fallacy

In a wonderful book, **"You are not so smart"**, the author, David McRaney, writes on the Straw Man Fallacy.

"THE MISCONCEPTION: When you argue, you try to stick to the facts.

THE TRUTH: In any argument, anger will tempt you to reframe your opponent's position.



When you are losing an argument, you often use a variety of deceptive techniques to bolster your opinion. You aren't trying to be sneaky, but the human mind tends to follow predictable patterns when you get angry with other people and do battle with words.

One of the most reliable and sturdy logical fallacies is the straw man, and even though its probability of appearing is high, you often don't notice when you are using it or being beat over the head with it.

It works like this: When you get into an argument about either something personal or something more public and abstract, you sometimes resort to constructing a character who you find easier to refute, argue, and disagree with, or you create a position the other person isn't even suggesting or defending. This is a straw man.

It happens so often, professional debaters and science advocates are trained to look for the straw man fallacy both in themselves and opponents when asserting their opinions or shooting down the claims of others. The straw man fallacy takes the facts and assertions of your opponent and replaces them with an artificial argument you feel more comfortable dealing with.

The straw man fallacy follows a familiar pattern. You first build the straw man, then you attack it, then you point out how easy it was to defeat it, and then you come to a conclusion.

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Within any debate over a controversial topic, you will see straw men tossed out by both sides. Sometimes people morph the straw man into a warning about a slippery slope where allowing one side to win would put humanity on a course of destruction. Any time someone begins an attack with "So you're saying we should all just ... " or "Everyone knows ... ," you can bet a straw man is coming. When you start or someone else starts to imagine a future hellscape thanks to the ideas of the opposition becoming reality, there is a straw man in the room. Straw men can also be born out of ignorance. If someone says, "Scientists tell us we all come from monkeys, and that's why I prefer home tutoring," this person is using a straw man, because science doesn't say we all come from monkeys.

Pay attention the next time you disagree with someone, and see if you start or the other person starts to construct a man out of straw. Keep in mind whoever does it is using a logical fallacy, and mind that person succeeds, he or she didn't really win."