

THE AMAZING
DR. RANSOM'S
BESTIARY
OF ADORABLE
FALLACIES

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Dedicated to
Douglas Wilson and N.D. Wilson,
without whose magnificent labors
I could not have done a fraction of this work.

~The Amazing Dr. Ransom

THE AMAZING
DR. RANSOM'S
BESTIARY
OF ADORABLE
FALLACIES

A FIELD GUIDE FOR CLEAR THINKERS

by

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and

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proxies for

THE AMAZING DR. RANSOM

Illustrations by FORREST DICKISON

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Moscow, Idaho



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FOREWORD:
THE PERILS OF
INFORMAL FALLACIES

When it comes to understanding informal logical fallacies, the very first thing all-who-would-not-be-suckered must learn is that these fallacies are adorable. This deadly adorability helps explain why people have so much trouble keeping their hands to themselves and just leaving the little beasties be. We all tend to think with the discernment of eight-year-old girls faced with pink-ribboned boxes brimming with fluffy kittens. Our first and only impulse is to take them home for snuggles (followed by inevitable servitude).

Do not ever underestimate the poisonous potency of these adorable fallacies. These fluffy fallacies cannot be domesticated. Their stink glands cannot be removed. Their fleas and ticks are immortal

and overflowing with disease. They are mutants, wild and untameable, and the only thing that keeps them from killing you by force—much like the kittens, actually—is that they lack the requisite size and muscle strength. And so they stick to traps and tricks. And if one takes any of these informal fallacies home in hopes of making pets of them, giving them tidy roosts and appropriate newspaper potty spots in your brain, the mayhem will soon commence. You will soon find your mental furniture shredded, dead birds in your frontal lobe, wriggling worms in your moral outrage, and what can only be excrement in your aesthetic sense. And worst of all, you—like a hoarding cat lady—might be too far gone to even notice, because the culprits will be busily holding your loving gaze with wide glistening eyes. You might even find yourself voting for politicians because they promise to build us all a bridge to the future. As though someone was going to build one to somewhere else?

The danger these creatures represent is considerable. The economic devastation they have caused has run up into the trillions, and that is just under the current administration.* Families are under strain because Mom persists in saying “just because.” Climate change activists keep reminding us that weather is not climate, unless it is. Food enthusiasts keep extracting sunbeams and alleged holiness out of organic kale.

In hopes of doing something about this epidemic of kind-hearted people adopting foul critters as fluffy and fallacious as they are fully alliterative, we have assembled this, a sort of field guide for clear

* And this will be true for whatever administration you happen to buy this book under.

thinkers—*The Amazing Dr. Ransom's Bestiary of Adorable Fallacies*. Go forth. Survive. And do not let these adorable beasties rot your thought. If you touch them at all, may it be with whistling pellets fired from your mental twelve gauge. Or with the glistening spurs of an unbeatable western buckaroo. Or with the syllogistic sword of a samurai. Or with Louisville's legendary Slugger.

You get the drift.



DR. RANSOM'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I was born in 1837, the year our good Queen Victoria ascended to the throne. Thanks to a spider milk lotion I had the good fortune to develop while on a trip to the Upper Falls of the great Zambweezi River, I have not yet died, even though this is, at the time of writing, the spring of 2015. I may have lost a step or two, but am active and spry enough for all that. Straddling three centuries in this way has given me something of a unique perspective, especially with regard to all those kittens on Facebook.

As I have traveled the globe, I have discovered that certain things are universal to man. A smile always indicates happiness. The

pentatonic scale indicates folk music. But one of the destructive universals is the propensity that all tribes have to adopt adorable fallacies—which, by the by, live in every part of the habitable world and Canada—in the mistaken belief that “nothing can go wrong.” I have seen the *Ipse Dixit* fallacy in the mouths of pasty beat poets and thick-ankled housewives, greasy politicians and sturdy hunting guides in the Congo. I have seen the fallacy of Composition in the Court of St. James and the fallacy of Division in the Pope’s private poker game. Needless to say, in my commitment to clarity of thought, I have stood firm for truth in all such settings.

Just a word about the nickname “Amazing” in the use of “the Amazing Dr. Ransom” to refer to the present writer. ’Twould be a false modesty to pretend that this might not be taken ill by some, so I will just mention that the sobriquet was given to me by my dear departed wife, Bess, on the occasion when I snatched a virgin from the lip of a blazing volcano. Come to think of it, that unfortunate affair had also been caused by another of these infernal adorable fallacies—the reptilian *Post Hoc* Propter Bird, in this case—which had persuaded the villagers that the poor girl’s demise would have a salutary effect on the maize crop. Perfect nonsense, of course. Although the virgin was so convinced by the fallacy herself that she flung herself into the lava completely under her own steam after I had gone to the trouble of saving her. The maize crop was, coincidentally, fabulous that year, and that particular *Post Hoc* continues to destroy native girls to this day.

KINGDOM I:
FALLACIES OF
DISTRACTION



figure 1a

FALLACY NO. I:
AD HOMINEM

This little fallacy, known widely as the *Ad Hominem*, is known to a few explorers as the Pit Spitter. This comes as a surprise to many because most of the time the Pit Spitter is a cute little fur ball. Until its will is crossed, that is. When provoked, it springs into action and up it goes onto its hind legs, back arched, forepaws raised behind its head, whereupon it then spews and spits two streams of foul and vile vapor upon the offending party from swollen glands of distilled resentment kept hidden and festering in its armpits. Once the offending party has been sufficiently bathed in stink, the little Pit Spitter quickly reverts to its previous posture, cocks a deceptively innocent and judgmental eye, and leaves the surrounding world to blame its victim for the overpowering stink. Whatever

topic may have been under discussion prior to the Pit Spitter's obscene display is readily forgotten.

Some people have successfully domesticated this animal, or rather, they think have, because they have managed to never cross its will, or they simply keep it spitting at others most of the time.

This fallacy is at work whenever a person is attacked in a way that is intended to distract from the argument at hand. One time I was standing at a junction of crossing paths in the jungle of the Amazon, and it was imperative that we go to the right, as I well knew. My companion on that trip was named Barnabas, though I forget his last name for the present. I laid out my arguments for going to the right, and these arguments, I need scarcely say, were cogent, well-reasoned, and in accord with both map and compass. When I was done, he said he still wanted to go left. When I inquired, reasonably enough, as to the reasons why, he said that he didn't want to go to the right because I had eaten most of the stew the previous night. As though our base camp was going to change locations on the basis of how much stew I had eaten! Which I hadn't really done, by the way. On a long trek like ours, seconds are perfectly natural.

Long-term damage caused by this fallacy can include (but is not limited to) oversensitivity around personal attacks. Once one has been bathed in full vaporous *Ad Hominem*, it is easy to suspect personal blows universally. But the personal attack is only imitative of the Pit Spitter when it is either false or a distraction. For example, if one were to look one of these little beasties in the eye and accuse it of being fallacious, it could not then whimper and pretend to have

fallen victim to an *Ad Hominem*. These things are emphatically fallacious, and pointing out their fallaciousness is essential in dealing with them.



figure 16
Pit Spitter

AD HOMINEM

Description: a fallacy of distraction that attacks an opponent's character when character is irrelevant to the argument

Common Names: Poisoning the Well, Pit Spitting



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*Answer the following big-picture questions.**

- A. If a senator committed adultery, and his opponent said he was no longer fit for office, would the senator be correct to accuse his opponent of *Ad Hominem*? Why or why not?
- B. Is the truth of a proposition affected by the character of the speaker? Discuss.
- C. Compose your own plausible example of the fallacy, or find a real cute one somewhere in the wild (in a book, movie, song, etc.).



EXERCISES

*Identify the adorable fallacy present, or declare the reasoning fallacy-free.**

- 1. Neighbor: “No, you can’t borrow my truck. You broke my lawnmower pursuing those gophers.”
- 2. Neighbor: “You’re wrong: Fi\$tPump the Obscene Rapper is one of the greats. You’re just a smarmy goody-two-shoes.”

* Brief answers to the discussion questions and exercises can be found in the Answer Key at the back of the book.

3. Councilman Hays says not to re-elect Councilwoman Spelt because she supports big businesses, which schmooze politicians to line their own cavernous, well-tailored pockets.
4. We probably shouldn't have Ernst lead our small group Bible study. After all, he prefers Wagner to Handel, and his wife kind of looks like an Odin-worshipping Valkyrie.
5. Activist: "You Christians won't bake your tasty éclairs for homosexual weddings because you're too bigoted and smug and self-satisfied to help people who are different than you."
6. Girl: "No, I won't dance with you. You smell like a raccoon wearing aftershave."
7. Nietzsche's poisonous dismissal of weakness and advocacy for the "Superman" are refuted by his own pitiable existence and death. And by his twerpy mustache.

A basic answer key to the Discussion Questions and Exercises is below. Especially for the Discussion Questions, answers will vary. Feel free to take the principles of this guide far afield in your exploration and application. You'll make Dr. Ransom proud.

KINGDOM I: FALLACIES OF DISTRACTION

Fallacy #1: *Ad Hominem*

- A. No, it's not *Ad Hominem*. The ability to keep an oath (like a marriage vow) is relevant to being a senator, as senators take vows (being "sworn into office") to uphold our laws.
- B. Absolute truth is rooted in God's character and does not change. (The contrary is the great "argument" of postmodernism.) But a speaker or authority's character (two forms of argument from *ethos*) can make an audience more or less likely to *believe* something is true.
- C. Answers will vary.
 - 1. none
 - 2. *Ad Hominem*
 - 3. none
 - 4. *Ad Hominem*
 - 5. *Ad Hominem*

6. none

7. none (even the mustache part)

Fallacy #2: *Tu Quoque*

- A. No, Peggy has a legitimate point. If the thing under discussion is not a sin, then "but *you're* doing the same thing" is quite reasonable, although it is logically distinct from the arguments against drinking wine.
- B. Yes; stop looking at the TQ. Your mom's human nature doesn't free you from the obligation to obey God. Plus, she probably had a good reason to be angry with you.
- C. Answers will vary.
 - 1. *Tu Quoque* (but, if Biff is right, Chet should stop as well)
 - 2. *Tu Quoque* (unless the kid is actually confused)
 - 3. *Tu Quoque*
 - 4. none, if used to show he doesn't actually care about minorities (it's *Tu Quoque* if you tried to discount *pro-*

SCHEDULE OPTION A: ONE SEMESTER

This schedule will allow you to cover the contents of *The Amazing Dr. Ransom's Bestiary of Adorable Fallacies* meeting daily over the course of a sixteen-week semester, either as a supplement to a logic or rhetoric class or as an informal fallacies class on its own. Adjust daily or weekly assignments as needed. Download quizzes and tests for free at www.canonpress.com/fallacies.

	DAY	READING	ASSIGNMENT
WEEK 1	Mon	Introduction & Autobiography	
	Tues	Fallacy 1	Discussion & Exercises
	Wed	Fallacy 2	Discussion & Exercises
	Thur	Fallacy 3	Discussion & Exercises
	Fri	Fallacy 4	Discussion & Exercises
WEEK 2	Mon	Fallacy 5	Discussion & Exercises
	Tues	Fallacy 6	Discussion & Exercises
	Wed	Fallacy 7	Discussion & Exercises
	Thur		Flashcards* & Review for Quiz
	Fri		Quiz 1
WEEK 3	Mon	Fallacy 8	Discussion & Exercises
	Tues	Fallacy 9	Discussion & Exercises
	Wed	Fallacy 10	Discussion & Exercises
	Thur	Fallacy 11	Discussion & Exercises
	Fri		Catch up or find fallacies in real life
WEEK 4	Mon	Fallacy 12	Discussion & Exercises
	Tues	Fallacy 13	Discussion & Exercises
	Wed	Fallacy 14	Discussion & Exercises
	Thur		Flashcards & Review for Quiz
	Fri		Quiz 2
WEEK 5	Mon	Fallacy 15	Discussion & Exercises
	Tues	Fallacy 16	Discussion & Exercises
	Wed	Fallacy 17	Discussion & Exercises
	Thur		Flashcards & Review for Test
	Fri		Test 1: Fallacies of Distraction

* Illustrated flashcards of all fifty fallacies with definitions are available for purchase in two sizes (regular or classroom size) at www.canonpress.com/fallacies.