THE AMAZING DR. RANSOM'S BESTIARY OF ADORABLE FALLACIES

A FIELD GUIDE FOR CLEAR THINKERS

by

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proxies for

THE AMAZING DR. RANSOM

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FOREWORD: THE PERILS OF INFORMAL FALLACIES

hen 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

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.

FALLACIES OF

DISTRACTION



FALLACY NO. I:

AD HOMINEM

his 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



FALLACY NO. 2:

TU QUOQUE

any fallacies believe that the best defense is a good offense. If you have begun to catch on to their erroneous ways, and have decided for some reason to point one of them out, you will frequently find yourself counterattacked (as with the Pit Spitter).

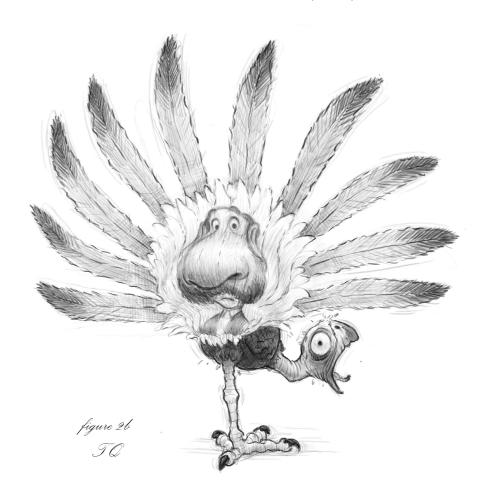
The TQ is a feathery monopod with large eyes, a stubby blunt beak, and a long fan of tail feathers. The bird attempts to escape notice by posing as a motionless cluster of ferns, drooping pitifully in the undergrowth. But when the TQ is discovered, it becomes highly agitated, pointing its hindquarters at those fearless enough to approach and hoisting up its tail feathers to reveal a glistening mirrored backside like something from a carnival funhouse. Only the boldest can

stand to watch one's own distorted reflection wobbling on the featherless haunches of the TQ.

The bird now has thousands of human disciples who attempt to defend themselves with similar counteroffensives. Let us say that you have reproached someone who is constantly borrowing fifty cents, and also constantly never paying it back. Quite apart from whether you ought to be loaning out money in the first place, if you mention to this person that he sure borrows fifty cents a lot, he will be sure to point out the time when, five years ago, you borrowed fifty cents from him. You paid it back the next day, and the reason you borrowed it was to save someone's life, you forget how exactly, while he borrows fifty cents to get himself a soda every day. These radical differences do not keep him from pretending that the circumstances are exactly alike, and so he rebuffs you nicely. *Tu quoque* is a fancy Latin name for this move, which simply means "you also!" This adorable creature is found in its thoroughbred form when one is accused of doing the exact same thing.

A variation on it (which closely resembles the Pit Spitter's *Ad Hominem* in practice, though *Tu Quoque's* target is always said to be hypocrisy) can be found when you are simply accused of doing something bad, anything bad, whether it resembles the point of your critique or not. You asked this person about borrowing fifty cents all the dang time, and he accuses you of having been mean to his sister twenty years ago.

When encountering a fully enraged TQ, the most intrepid explorers can defeat and frustrate the bird with laughter and a jovial celebration of their own caricatures. Shamed, the TQ reverts to its fern impersonation and is easily captured.



TU QUOQUE

Description: a fallacy of distraction that attempts
to discredit an opponent's conclusion by irrelevantly appealing
to supposed hypocrisy between
argument and actions

Common Names: Appeal to Hypocrisy, TQ



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Answer the following big-picture questions.

- A. Compare and contrast: Jill accuses Peggy of the "sin" of drinking a glass of tawny port with dinner, and Peggy snarkily retorts that Jill herself drinks a bitter India pale ale in place of lunch. Has Peggy got a TQ distorting her arguments?
- B. Discuss: Your dear mother tells you it's a sin for you to get angry. You reply she has sure gotten angry at you before, and why can't she leave you alone? *Tu Quoque* or not?
- 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. Chet: "Biff, ya goob, stop getting drunk." Biff: "Oh yeah? *You* stop smoking pot!"

^{*} Exercises from now on may contain one previously learned fallacy for review, so be alert.