

# Fulcrum, Movie View: Downton, The Fallacy Fallacy



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*"Finding the Challenges" is an original column appearing every other Wednesday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by Verbal Vol. Verbal is a software engineer, college professor, corporate information officer, life long student, farmer, libertarian, literarian, student of computer science and self-ordering phenomena. Archived columns can be found [here](#). FTC-only RSS feed available [here](#).*

If I am asked to characterize the joining theme of this edition of "Finding the Challenges," I would say the trio of topics is about the universal human struggle to separate fiction and fact, good and bad, right and wrong, wheat and chaff.

## The Fulcrum

All rational debates must extend from a fulcrum that is agreed upon by all debaters (actually, there should be only two debaters, since the odds are prohibitively against rational conclusions with three or more proponents). A debate that assumes facts or concepts not in evidence, is a vehicle with 4 flat tires. Here is a classic: "If God wanted us to fly, he would have given us wings." The proclaimer here wants us to assume several things before we engage on whether we should fly or not. First, there is a God; then, "he" is a sole God, and we had the idea that he is masculine sneaked through a back door. Next, we are expected to believe that he cares whether we fly or not, and very covertly in the background we are led to believe that there are supporting reasons for whatever is "wanted," through the imprecise use of "wanted." Then we are constrained to choose only "true" or "false" as to what may be God's behavior if she does consider the question. I could continue to dissect the cliché, but I would rather pursue the idea of the fulcrum. The fulcrum is the point in the discussion where there is an agreement of what has been settled and what is to be settled.

Ayn Rand used to caution, "Check your premises." If all of the premises of a rational discussion are correct, then the fulcrum is correct. From that standpoint, debaters can proceed to determine results, conclusions, or consequences. In the study of argumentation logic, the fulcrum is also called the stasis point, from the Greek *stasis*, "a standing still, a standing; the posture of standing; a position, a point of the compass; position, state, or condition of anything;" Implied here is a lack of tension, where no contradictions are

pushing or pulling — contradiction, on the other hand, is a sign that one or more of the premises are out of kilter.

It is critical that we become able to identify a true stasis point, a fulcrum. To what is it critical? A debate that is deformed contorts the expression of voluntarism by any of the debaters. It should be fundamental that in debating any point for which there is a mutual intent of voluntary agreement that communication of volition be crystal clear.

### **Downton Abbey, Voluntarist Movie View #7**

In the old days, when my great uncle owned the movie palace in Liberty, KY, there was shown every week an episode of a serial. These episodes were short movies with cliff hangers at the end, with the promise of more adventures to come in future weeks. I indulge in this little bit of cinematic history to explain why I consider *Downton Abbey* to be a movie. All stored visual content is in the category of movies, thus all serial, episodic, reproducible presentations are movies.

Lin and I have been binge watching *Downton Abbey* since early Autumn. We have seen all episodes from all five seasons. We are now enduring withdrawal stresses.

Just recently I have read some critical reviews of *Downton*, but the main thought I draw from them is that everyone has an opinion. *Downton* is like Microsoft — they have decisively won the marketplace. *Downton* is the most successful television production of its type in history. This is a voluntarist's dream. Television is a voluntarist's dream, compliments of the on-off button.

But why do I like *Downton* so much? *Downton* shows people in motion from darkness toward light. It supports R. Buckminster Fuller's view of human progress. I have to paraphrase Fuller here, because I cannot find a specific citation. One of his ideas, that I have held closely for a long time, was that progress is reflected in the object of human service. We once served the King, in Western civilization, but now we serve the middle class. Eventually humans will approach service to undifferentiated humankind, and then that service will become more and more individualistic. We go from authoritarian leaders/followers to individualists.

On *Downton* we can see the breaking of the wave. At the start, it is very clear that all parties are stuck in a fictional web of social compulsion. In this case, I mean fictions of social convention, that it can be argued were attributes of everyday real life in England in the early Twentieth Century. I am not referring to the carrier signal (the fictional presentation of the drama). It is hard to tell whom are the greater prisoners, the estate-holders or the servants. Each class has an incredibly absurd but highly detailed set of rules to observe. But rewards and penalties are very difficult to see in prospect. Purpose is obscured. There are sub-classes in each of the classes, and nobody fights harder to

preserve the classes than those who are pigeonholed therein. Then over the course of the seasons and episodes, character after character must leave his or her cocoon because of unforeseen consequences.

It is in vain that we seek comfort in social fictions. We are not in control of the variables. We cannot live in the past. We cannot see the future. *Downton* does a wonderful job of showing the consequences of our attempts to go against these verities. Each of the principle characters are confronted with choices. All of the choices involve an either/or proposition which will engender an unknown number of unforeseen consequences, which will in turn present choices to the initial chooser as well as to one or more others. In my view, Julian Fellowes, the founding creative force of *Downton Abbey*, portrays the evolution of choice with great fidelity to reality.

### **Logic Fallacy #24 — The Fallacy Fallacy**

Just because a matter is discussed illogically is not a sufficient condition to declare the matter itself false. If the next time you try to discuss the climate of the planet upon which we live, you are called an idiot, you are a victim of the *ad hominem* fallacy — the other has resorted to personal attack to distract from a rational treatment of the argument. The other has tried to change the fulcrum of the argument to an inquiry into your intellect, which truth be told has nothing to do with climate.

But you do not get to claim the higher ground on the facts of climate thereby, because, again, the existence of the *ad hominem* has no connection to the topic of climate. Calling out another for using a fallacy is process related only. It doesn't change the destination, it only may serve to correct the route. As happens all too often, the use of a fallacy kills the debate without rational determination. Sometimes one advocate is fooled by the fallacy, and the other just claims victory (one of the greatest errors is to consider debate as spectator sport where winners and losers must be named). In other cases, one party is so offended by a fallacy that she or he will not continue to participate.

If there has been no rational conclusion to a debate, then there has been no debate. By the way, it is not an irrational conclusion when the parties agree that they have only incomplete information — they need to pursue the objective by discovering more reality.

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So we may, voluntarily, see that our lives are complicated by fictions. But fictions may or may not be close to that which is true. Once we can determine what is false, we are still left with the responsibility to discover what is true. In each moment of the present, we must stand in the place where the knowns are clear, at a fulcrum, and we must proceed to discover, and clarify, the unknowns.

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