

The Elephant

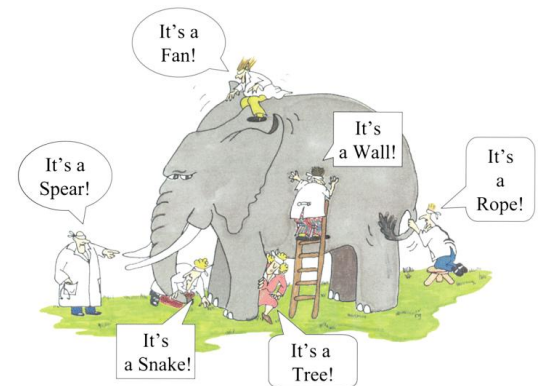
John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887)

It was six men of Indostan to learning much inclined
Who went to see the Elephant (though all of them were blind),
That each by observation might satisfy his mind.
The first approached the Elephant, and happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side, at once began to bawl:
"God bless me! but the Elephant is very like a wall!"
The second, feeling of the tusk, cried, "Ho! What have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp? To me 'tis mighty clear,
This wonder of an Elephant is very much a spear!"
The third approached the animal and happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant is very like a snake."
The fourth reached out an eager hand and felt about the knee,
"What most this wondrous beast is like is very like a tree,"
The fifth, who chanced to touch the ear said:
"E'n the blindest man can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant is very like a fan!"
The sixth no sooner had begun about the beast to grope,
The seizing on the swinging tail that fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant is very like a rope."
And so these men of Indostan disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right, and all were in the wrong.

Literature and the Scientific Method

1. How does this poem illustrate the importance of observation in the scientific method?

2. What is the moral of the tale?



3. Many scientific errors can occur because the researcher does not use good skills of observation. Imagine & describe a scenario where not being observant can result in an experiment going wrong.