



The Foolish Brahmins

India

There were once four Brahmin friends who lived in a village. Three of them were men of great erudition, who competed to see who had gathered the most knowledge, and who had developed the best theories. The fourth was illiterate, although he lived many experiences great and small.

One day, the king sent letters across the realm, summoning all the scholars of the land to an important meeting. The three erudite scholars greatly desired to attend this meeting, even though it would be a long journey. However, one of them did not want their fourth friend to accompany them.

‘He is not a scholar,’ this Brahmin said. ‘He has not read anything, not even our scriptures. Yes, he has some practical knowledge, but that does not qualify him to give counsel to the King.’

One of the other learned Brahmins was upset by this.

‘Hey! He is also our friend! Are we going to leave him behind on an occasion like this, when the king may praise and reward our knowledge?’

His words were convincing enough that the other two agreed to invite the fourth Brahmin along on the journey.

So, the four friends departed on their journey. They had not gotten very far, when they came across some broken bones in the ditch, and decided to test their knowledge and theories.

The first Brahmin took the bones and recomposed them by the powers of a secret mantra. The second added blood, flesh, and skin to the skeleton through the powers of another mantra. The third Brahmin was just about to breathe new life into the animal through the powers of another magical mantra, when the fourth friend shouted:

‘Stop! What you have in front of you is a lion! Do not resuscitate it or it will devour us all!’

But the other three Brahmins laughed at him and told him not to worry, that they knew very well what they were doing and that they wanted nothing more than to test their sciences.

When the illiterate Brahmin realised that his friends were determined to bring the lion back to life, he walked away from them, found a tree and climbed into the highest branches he could reach.

The third Brahmin breathed new life into the lion and, as soon as the beast woke up, feeling hungry, it devoured the three foolish Brahmins.

Once the animal had left, the fourth Brahmin descended from the tree and returned, saddened, to his village. □

Adapted by Grian A. Cutanda (2019).

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Comments

This is a good story to illustrate the problems presented by the Newtonian-Cartesian scientific paradigm when it raises reason and the search for scientific truth above affective, ethical and aesthetic aspects. One of the consequences of this split was the development of the atomic bomb, something that, if the new complex-systems paradigm had been fully assumed, would not have happened. In this story, the foolish brahmins can be seen as a metaphor for the scientists who work in weapons developments, in developing genetic manipulation for dubious reasons, or in advancing technologies for the benefit of big capital

without taking into account the common good, the well-being of the people.

Sources

Dholakia, P. (2009). The lion and the foolish Brahmins. Growth Mirror. Recuperado de:
<http://www.growthmirror.com/Stories/The%20lion%20and%20the%20foolish%20Brahmins.pdf>.

Associated text of the Earth Charter

Principle 16d: Eliminate nuclear, biological, and toxic weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

Other passages that this story illustrates

Principle 6a: Take action to avoid the possibility of serious or irreversible environmental harm even when scientific knowledge is incomplete or inconclusive.

Principle 6b: Place the burden of proof on those who argue that a proposed activity will not cause significant harm, and make the responsible parties liable for environmental harm.

