Psychologists Doing Empirical Research—Selection at Work!

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The Blind Men and the Elephant
By 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,
"It's 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 like 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 mighty plain," quoth he:
"Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"

Of Elephants and Blind Men
By John R. Nesselroade

Recall those men of Indostan
To learning so inclined,
Who went to see an elephant
Though all of them were blind?
How each an observation made,
Then spake his piece of mind?

Cried one, "Tis nothing but a wall!"
Two others did decree
"It's like a fan!" and "It's a snake!"
The fourth said, "Ah, a tree!"
The fifth avowed, "I feel a spear!"
The last? "A rope!" quoth he.

But each was narrow in the range
Of where he did explore,
Thus, limiting his data base
And closing off the door.
Thus boldly up and spake:
The way to Nature's core.

The tasks that I would set for you?
Beware how bias lurks!
Weigh well the options that are yours
Pursuing Nature's quirks.

And always take some reckoning
Of how selection works.
For elephants are not the same.
Each varies day by day.
And where you place your hand on one,
Does not the whole betray.
So measure well just how your choice
Constrains what you can say.

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The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en 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,
Than, 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!

Moral:
So oft in theologic wars,
The disputants, I ween,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean,
And prate about an Elephant
Not one of them has seen!

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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