

ARTICLE · CULTURA & SAÚDE

How a Paradigm Is Born

The parable of the five monkeys as a metaphor for the origin of customs

Cultura & Saúde Editorial

Received for publication in April 2004 · Section: Article · Language: English

ABSTRACT

The text reproduces the well-known parable of the five monkeys to illustrate, allegorically, how paradigms and customs arise and perpetuate themselves. In the narrative, scientists condition monkeys with jets of cold water to prevent any of them from climbing a ladder to reach bananas; over time, the animals begin to attack anyone who tries to climb. As every member is gradually replaced by new monkeys, the punishing behavior persists even though none of them ever received the original cold shower, so that the rule endures merely because 'things have always been done this way.' The author uses the story to question automatic behaviors and inherited prejudices, urging the correct transmission of knowledge between generations. The text closes with the phrase attributed to Einstein that it is easier to split an atom than a prejudice.

KEYWORDS: *paradigm; prejudice; behavior; customs; parable; knowledge*

A *uthor unknown*

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A group of scientists placed five monkeys in a cage, at the center of which they put a ladder and, on top of it, a bunch of bananas. Whenever a monkey climbed the ladder to reach the bananas, the scientists sprayed a jet of cold water on those on the ground.

After a while, whenever a monkey started to climb the ladder, the others would beat it up.

After some more time, no monkey would climb the ladder anymore, despite the temptation of the bananas.

Then the scientists replaced one of the five monkeys.

The first thing the new one did was climb the ladder, from which it was quickly pulled down by the others, who beat it.

After a few beatings, the new member of the group would no longer climb the ladder.

A second one was replaced, and the same happened, with the first replacement enthusiastically taking part in beating the newcomer.

A third one was swapped, and the fact repeated itself.

A fourth and, finally, the last of the veterans was replaced.

The scientists were then left with a group of five monkeys that, even though none had ever taken a cold shower, kept beating any one that tried to reach the bananas.

If it were possible to ask any of them why they beat those who tried to climb the ladder, the answer would surely be:

"I don't know, things have always been done this way around here..."

Don't miss the chance to pass this story on to your friends, so that, every now and then, they may ask themselves why they are "beating"...

And to remind the old ones that they must pass their knowledge and correct information on to the coming generations; otherwise we will keep on "monkeying around"...

"IT IS EASIER TO SPLIT AN ATOM THAN A PREJUDICE." *Albert Einstein*