

A Fable about System's Integrity

“The Belly and Other Members”

An Aesop's Fable, adapted by L.Booth Sweeney

It is said that in olden times, the parts of the human body did not get along as well as they do now. On one occasion, the other body parts began to be critical of the belly for being lazy while they had to spend all their time working to support the wants and needs of the belly.

The parts of the body went so far as to decide to cut off the belly's supplies for the future. The hands were no longer to carry food to the mouth, nor the mouth to receive, nor the teeth to chew it.

But, lo and behold, it was only a short time after they had agreed upon this course of starving the belly into obedience when they all began, one by one, to fail and flop and the whole body to waste away. In the end, the parts of the body became convinced that the belly also, cumbersome and useless as it seemed, had an important function of its own, and that they could no more exist without it than it could do without them.

Moral: As in the body, so in the community, each member in his place must work for the common good.

A Fable About Reinforcing Feedback, and more...

“Pallas and Hercules”

Aesop

Hercules, once journeying along a narrow roadway, came across a strange-looking animal that reared its head and threatened him. Never daunted, the hero gave him a few lusty blows with his club, and thought to have gone on his way. The monster, however, much to the astonishment of Hercules, was now three times as big as it was before, and of a still more threatening aspect. He thereupon redoubled his blows and laid about him fast and furiously; but the harder and quicker the strokes of the club, the bigger and more frightful grew the monster, and now completely filled up the road. Pallas then appeared upon the scene. "Stop, Hercules," said she. "Cease your blows. The monster's name is Strife. Let it alone, and it will soon become as little as it was at first."

"Strife feeds on conflict."

“Little brooks make great rivers.”

French proverb

A Fable About Perspective

“Looking for Keys Under the Lamp”

A Persian folktale, adapted by L. Booth Sweeney

Nasreddin frantically searches for something under the light of a lamp post in the dusty street outside his home. A kind neighbor comes by and asks, "Mulla, what have you lost?" Nasreddin replies, "I have lost my keys." The neighbor, being the good person he is, gets down on his hands and knees and begins to search with Nasreddin through the dust. After a long time, the neighbor says to Nasreddin, "Mulla, are you certain you lost your keys here in the street?" "Oh no!" says Nasreddin, "I lost them in the house." "If you lost them in the house," says the neighbor, "then why are we looking for them under this lamp post?"

"The light is better here," Nasreddin replies.

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“You can’t see the whole sky through a bamboo tube.”

Japanese proverb

A Fable About Interconnections, nonlinearities and more...

“A Kingdom Lost for a Drop of Honey” -- Burmese

One day the king and his chief advisor stood by the open palace window, looking out onto the street below. They were having such a good time. They laughed and talked as they snacked on rice and honey. At one point, the King chuckled so hard he spilled a drop of honey on the windowsill. “Allow me to wipe that up for you, your Majesty,” said the chief advisor. “Don’t bother,” said the king. “It’s just a drop of honey. We have servants to take care of such things. Spilling need not concern *us*.”

So they continued to talk and eat and laugh. They didn’t notice that the drop of honey fell onto the street below. Soon a fly landed on the honey and began a feast of its own. And before long, a lizard spied the fly, pounced, and swallowed the fly, whole. The lizard didn’t notice a cat slinking along in the shadows of the palace. Suddenly, she leaped forward and swallowed the lizard. Then when the cat sat down to digest her dinner in the sun, a dog suddenly sprang out and attacked her.

All of this made a great deal of noise. “Sire, should we send someone to stop this fight?” “Don’t bother,” said the king. “It doesn’t concern *us*.” So they kept on eating and talking. Meanwhile, the owner of the cat arrived on the scene. He picked up a stick and began to beat the dog. But just at that instant, the owner of the dog appeared. He grabbed a stick and began to beat the cat. It wasn’t long before the two men started hitting each other instead of the animals. “Sire, now there are two men fighting down there on the street. Shall we order some guards to put an end to it?”

The king stopped eating and looked down at the commotion in the street. “Don’t bother. It doesn’t concern *us*.” The fight gathered onlookers. Some people sided with the cat owner, others with the dog owner. Soon the two groups attacked each other. “Sire, I fear things are getting worse,” cried the chief advisor. “Now large groups of people are fighting. Shouldn’t we try to stop it?” The king just took another bite of rice and honey and said, “Don’t bother. It doesn’t concern *us*.” Soldiers soon arrived to put an end to the fighting. But when they heard the cause of the fight, they took sides as well. Once the soldiers got involved, it turned into a full-blown civil war! Houses were burned down, and many people were injured. It wasn’t long before the flames spread to the palace and it, too, burned to the ground. The king looked at the ruins of his palace and admitted, “I guess I was wrong. That drop of honey *did* concern *us*.”

A Fable About *The Commons*, and more...

“Why the Sky is Far Away”

Nigerian

In the beginning, the sky was very close to the earth. In those days men did not have to till the ground, because whenever they felt hungry they simply cut off a piece of the sky and ate it. But the sky grew angry, because often they cut off more than they could eat, and through the left-over's on the rubbish heap. The sky did not want to be thrown on the rubbish heap, and so he warned men that if they were not more careful in the future, he would move far away.

For a while everyone paid attention to his warning. But one day a greedy woman cut off an enormous piece of the sky. She ate as much as she could, but was unable to finish it. Frightened, she called her husband, but he too could not finish it. They called the entire village to help, but they could not finish it. In the end, they had to throw the remainder on the rubbish heap. Then the sky became very angry indeed, and rose up high above the earth, far beyond the reach of men. And from the on men have had to work for their living.

"The frog does not drink up the pond in which he lives"

Native American proverb

Sources

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