

UNITED WISDOM

What the scientific method can do—and which questions it leaves open

World and Consciousness

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

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@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

What the scientific method can do—and which questions it leaves open

Epigraph

> *As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain;*

Einstein, Geometry and Experience, opening answer about mathematics and reality. Exact first clause from historical English Gutenberg 7333 rendering, translator unidentified there. Terminal semicolon retained; the following formal/applied distinction remains in the article.

What this article is about

“Science has proved it” can end a conversation before its question is named. “Science cannot answer everything” may do the same from another direction. Work remains between them: understand what was investigated, how a result was obtained, which explanation it supports, and which decision still needs to be made. This article compares limited passages by Bacon, Peirce, Einstein, Darwin, and Russell. Their historical programmes differ; they form no timeless recipe for every discipline. An imagined page-search example lets us consider observation, inconvenient instances, formal models, provenance, and questions of value. The aim is to use an investigable answer within its actual scope while leaving room for another question. The closing reflection concerns reading one assertion carefully, not conducting professional research independently or judging someone else’s convictions.

I. Begin by naming the question

An imagined group prepares gatherings and notices that finding a particular page takes considerable time. Someone proposes larger headings. Another says people simply need greater attention. A third regards the inconvenience as part of the familiar arrangement. These are different suggestions, not an explanation already obtained. A more definite question might ask which materials and conditions let participants find a page faster. Faster itself needs a basis for comparison. This small example distinguishes a question, evidence, and a decision. It represents no completed study and promises no benefit from changing type size. Our inquiry begins before an answer, by asking what could actually support it.

Scientific method here does not name one sequence every discipline must follow identically. We examine several requirements for an investigable claim: make the question intelligible,

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

connect an explanation with accessible evidence, describe how a result was obtained, and retain room for correction. Particular work may need observation, comparison, mathematical reasoning, or another approach appropriate to its subject. This working orientation cannot replace education in a science. It helps a reader avoid treating an attractive formulation as an established conclusion. When discussing people, attention cannot silently replace time spent searching. When discussing usability, a single number cannot exhaust it without argument. Naming the question determines what the result can actually mean.

A useful question allows an answer the proposer dislikes. Larger headings might make no difference, help only some participants, or obstruct another task. Their effect might remain inseparable from familiarity with the material. Each possibility differs from declaring the proposal universally bad. Precision matters: what was compared, what emerged, and what remains unknown? This preserves the usefulness of a limited finding. It does not require every participant to investigate the entire world independently. Work by others can be consulted and its grounds understood to the extent possible. The boundary of one's competence belongs to careful reading; it need not end inquiry or turn all expert knowledge into an inaccessible form of power.

II. Bacon: evidence that disturbs a favoured account

In Novum Organum I.46, Bacon describes an understanding that supports an accepted proposition while neglecting contrary instances. I.95 distinguishes merely accumulating material from reasoning spun out of oneself, proposing a transformed combination. This is an early seventeenth-century programme, not a complete present research standard. Our question needs only the distinction between collecting and thinking, alongside attention to inconvenient evidence. We read a historical English translation edited by Joseph Devey; its translator is unidentified. The materials example is this article's own analogy, not a claim that Bacon's bee encompasses every science. Novum Organum, I.46, I.95.

In our example, the designer may remember only successful searches. An unsuccessful attempt seems accidental, an inconvenient participant exceptional, and familiar material sufficient confirmation. A useful question concerns the rule by which a case was included or excluded. If that rule changes after every outcome, the explanation gains protection against any objection. Yet one unsuccessful search need not destroy every hypothesis either. It needs examination: were the conditions comparable, or did another question arise? This editorial frame proposes balanced attention to support and difficulty. It specifies no statistical threshold and replaces no professional assessment of data. First, it prevents declaring a result intelligible before explaining the grounds for selecting the evidence.

Selection cannot simply disappear: any limited investigation has a subject. Meaningful scope differs from rescuing a favoured account. If the question concerns a newcomer finding a page,

an experienced facilitator does not answer the same question. If a printed copy matters, a screen version needs separate attention. A limit becomes more honest when stated beforehand and explained in relation to the task. Readers can then understand whom the conclusion concerns and whom it promises nothing yet. Transparency does not mean access to every participant's personal information. Methods and boundaries can be described while retaining privacy. Respect for people and clarity of inquiry require their own agreement; interest in proof cannot automatically authorize any observation or publication.

III. An explanation must meet its subject

In The Fixation of Belief, Peirce relates the scientific method to reality independent of individual opinion and capable of affecting different investigators. This is his philosophical hypothesis about reality and eventual agreement, not a report that every present dispute is settled. The limited distinction matters here: personal certainty cannot replace grounds others can examine. Peirce also discusses his starting hypothesis; calling an approach science does not remove its assumptions. We take the question of publicly examinable grounds while leaving his realism a distinct philosophical position. This does not authorize declaring an inner experience false simply because a group could not share it. Peirce, The Fixation of Belief, VI.

An explanation of the redesigned material should connect with its subject. Someone might propose that larger headings are more noticeable and therefore shorten a search. This is an intelligible suggested relationship, not a finding already obtained. How noticeability was defined, how time was established, and which conditions could alter the answer need separate attention. If participants already know page locations, measured time may concern memory rather than headings. That possibility establishes no alternative cause; it identifies an open question. In this imagined case, an explanatory scheme needs to remain distinct from evidence of its applicability. The scheme directs attention toward its subject, but cannot announce beforehand that the subject must conform to it.

An intelligible description lets another person raise a concrete objection. Rather than arguing over who is more attentive, people can ask whether materials matched or instructions were clear. This does not mean every untrained reader can repeat every scientific investigation. Instruments, skills, or information unavailable in an ordinary room may be needed. It then matters especially where one's own check ends and justified trust in another's begins. The method can be assessed within one's competence without personally claiming to confirm the rest. Authority becomes more meaningful when connected with particular expertise and work. It need not promise that everything the same person says about every subject has equally strong grounds.

IV. Einstein: a precise inference and its application

In Geometry and Experience, Einstein distinguishes axiomatic geometry from geometry coordinated with practically rigid bodies. In the latter case, claims about the world depend on experience. The epigraph belongs to this opening argument; it declares neither mathematics useless nor all knowledge arbitrary. We read the opening through the distinction between practical and axiomatic geometry in the historical English Gutenberg 7333 text; no translator name was found there. Our Russian excerpt follows that rendering without German collation. The limited distinction asks what connects a formal scheme with its subject, without assessing relativity or its present experimental confirmation. Einstein, Geometry and Experience, opening.

Imagine our group makes a table: every heading design receives a code and every search a recorded time. Calculating a difference may be entirely correct. Its meaning still depends on how the numbers were obtained and what they represent. Correct operations on symbols cannot repair an unsuitable measurement. Conversely, doubts about applicability do not make an arithmetic inference incorrect. These questions require different answers. Calculations can be checked separately from how well the table represents the task. This distinction respects precision without enlarging its claims. A number becomes more useful when the observation behind it, the uncertainty remaining, and the reason for choosing this comparison over another available description are intelligible.

A model may intentionally leave circumstances out. That need not be a defect if they fall outside the question or the boundary is explicit. Readers still need to recognize a limited representation. Search time does not automatically tell us whether people enjoy the material, can read it without further assistance, or find the gathering worthwhile. These questions can be investigated separately using appropriate evidence. Numbers need not oppose human experience in general. One result simply should not replace everything else we want to know. When a measure's meaning is explained, it can inform a decision alongside other information. It need not become the only language in which a group may discuss its actual undertaking.

V. Darwin: a research story cannot replace its grounds

At the beginning of Origin of Species, Darwin recounts gathering facts, reflecting, and developing his project. He then acknowledges the limitations of his published abstract and the need to present facts and references in detail. We read the introduction’s opening through the discussion of comparing evidence on both sides, not the whole book or a contemporary biological assessment of every proposition. The relevant boundary separates a research history from grounds offered for its conclusion. Lengthy work merits attention, but duration cannot establish each result. That is our editorial question about evidence, not a verdict against Darwin or a requirement to reduce every historical inquiry to recreating its events in a room. Darwin, Origin of Species, introduction.

A story about redesigned materials may likewise emphasize months of work, care for readers, and the author's experience. These describe the proposal's provenance. They illuminate motivation and effort without answering the search-time question instead of a comparison. The distinction need not diminish the work. Name what it contributes: prepared materials, a more definite hypothesis, recorded observations, or the opportunity for another check. An author then need not defend the worth of the entire project through every successful case. Readers need not choose between respect for a person and a concrete question about a conclusion. Preparation can be appreciated while declining to confirm an effect not yet sufficiently shown for the question being asked.

Inquiry into the past especially recalls that access to checking need not mean repeating the event itself. A journey, historical change, or completed page search cannot literally recur under every original condition. Surviving records can nevertheless be examined, explanations compared, and provenance clarified. Sometimes a new check concerns similar conditions rather than the identical event. These differences should be explicit. An incomplete record is not automatically completed by an attractive narrative. A missing source calls for retained uncertainty rather than invented confirmation. The practical question concerns what remains available for reasonable examination and how strongly it supports a particular inference. Impossible recovery of the past is unnecessary, while every recollection cannot therefore become sufficient proof.

VI. Unknowns differ from one another

After a limited observation, several kinds of open question can be distinguished. One concerns insufficient information: too few comparable searches are available. Another concerns method: the effect of design cannot yet be separated from familiarity. A third concerns meaning: participants understand usability differently. These distinctions are editorial help for a reader, not an exhaustive classification in philosophy of science. They need different next steps. More records might help the first question without repairing an undefined concept. Discussing the concept may clarify a task without providing a missing result. Acknowledging uncertainty is useful when its subject is specified. Otherwise complicated may conceal an opportunity for clarification, while proved closes a question that has not even received a shared formulation.

An open question today differs from an established impossibility of ever knowing. Hope for future inquiry is likewise not a present answer. State what is accessible now, what is missing, and why expectation has grounds or remains a suggestion. This promises neither inevitable progress nor permanent limits. Everyday conversation especially needs to distinguish confidence in a direction of inquiry from confidence in a result obtained. Someone may reasonably support an attempt without confirming its conclusions. This leaves room for work without portraying success beforehand. It also permits ending expectations of a particular project where conditions change or no responsible way to continue remains accessible. Inquiry can be worth attempting without becoming a promise that every attempt must deliver what was originally hoped.

Uncertainty does not make all accounts equal. One may rely on described observations while another merely pleases its proposer; incomplete certainty cannot erase that difference. Grounds can be compared, using wording appropriate to the material: observed, suggested, not yet separated, or not checked. This is no universal scale of proof. It avoids reporting more than actually occurred. Limited information may suffice for a reversible household decision without establishing a claim about everybody. Even a small action may affect another person's agreement and need separate discussion. Confidence in knowledge and permission to act are connected but distinct questions. Neither can be silently settled by naming the other, and reasonable uncertainty should remain visible rather than disappear when a decision becomes convenient.

VII. A question of value survives measurement

Suppose an imagined comparison shows that redesigned materials shorten search time under stated conditions. That answers a limited question. Should every gathering now use them? The answer also concerns aims, costs, access, and the preferences of those affected. Some consequences and participants' views can be investigated. The number alone still cannot establish which consequence should take priority or which price people should accept. This is the article's own reasoning. Values are not declared inaccessible to every investigation; information about consequences is distinguished from grounds for choosing among them. An investigable question can inform a decision without making one convenient measure appear to have already delivered that decision on everybody's behalf.

In Problems of Philosophy XV, Russell considers questions of purpose, good, evil, and humanity's place, alongside philosophical questioning without established answers. We read the chapter’s opening and argument about answers not yet established, not the whole book, and claim no final agreement with his evaluation. This supplies an example of another task: examining concepts and grounds without turning uncertainty into a ready doctrine. Our group's decision cannot follow from Russell's authority; it needs its own discussion. A philosophical question still requires reasons when the measure used for page-search time cannot answer it. Russell, Problems of Philosophy, XV.

Two reasonable decisions may follow the same limited information. One group chooses faster searching because its gathering is brief and participants accept the new form. Another retains an earlier format for a particular reading where another feature matters. This does not establish that facts are irrelevant. If a design is unsuitable for some people, both groups need to consider that circumstance. Aims and conditions may differ, while an observed record cannot change at the decision-maker's pleasure. Name where disagreement occurs: in information, its interpretation, or evaluation of a consequence. Disagreement over choice then need not masquerade as rejection of science, and a preference gains no false status as a discovered law of nature.

VIII. A method’s boundary supplies no answer beyond it

A boundary sometimes prompts a quick inference: if one approach did not resolve meaning, every spiritual account must already be confirmed. That transition also needs grounds. One inquiry's missing answer proves no alternative assertion. A religious tradition may examine meaning through its concepts, revelation, practice, or interpretation; a philosophical position through argument. Their grounds belong explicitly in the relevant conversation. This article assesses neither every such path nor a universal equality of evidence between them. Its limited task is to prevent a missing empirical explanation from appearing as a completed answer. Freedom of conviction remains possible without portraying each conviction as the result of an investigation that never concerned that question.

The reverse substitution is possible too: because one claim about page searching was checked, every other question is declared settled by that method. The number cannot say what deserves a life or why participants should adopt an aim. Yet parts of a discussion about meaning may concern investigable consequences. A promised particular effect can be examined separately from an entire worldview. Personal significance does not show that every participant can read the material in time. Difficulty with one reading likewise does not refute the whole human significance of meeting. Separating claims permits discussing their parts without demanding that everything be accepted or rejected together. It promises no complete agreement but preserves a definite subject on which an honest answer remains possible.

Questions of method need not become humiliation. Grounds can be requested without calling someone primitive, and limits acknowledged without portraying precision as spiritual poverty. Courtesy requires no agreement with unsupported claims; disagreement removes no respect for a person. Conversation may appropriately stop at what concerns the common task. Nobody must disclose their convictions to discuss useful materials, and every gathering need not debate ultimate truth. This is a boundary of contemporary voluntary interaction, not a scientific theory. It lets people choose the depth of conversation without making interest in knowledge a right to demand acknowledgment, confession, or demonstration of inner experience as the price of ordinary cooperation. The freedom to ask still includes another person's freedom to decline that particular conversation.

IX. What remains for an attentive reader

The historical texts offer different distinctions. Bacon considers inquiry and inconvenient instances; Peirce grounds beyond personal preference; Einstein formal schemes and experience; Darwin presentation of research material; Russell open philosophical questions. They form neither one eternal algorithm nor a consensus of every scientist. Comparison assembles questions for a particular assertion. Answers must then concern actual work, not merely a historical author's name. A source can clarify a concept without replacing information about how a present finding was obtained. Respect for a primary text therefore includes limiting what we try to establish through it. Reading the argument carefully matters more than using a famous name as a final word whenever a contemporary claim becomes difficult to explain.

A reader need not choose between total credulity and endless personal rechecking. The claim's subject, provenance, explained method, and significant boundary can be understood. Where assessment exceeds one's competence, that can be stated directly. Such acknowledgment need not reject trust; it makes trust definite: this work, this question, these limits. Understanding can change after new evidence without turning earlier good faith into deception. A source may also turn out not to answer the proposed question at all. Attractive presentation need not hold a reader inside another person's inference when its relationship to the offered material remains obscure or shifts with every concrete request for clarification. An unanswered question can remain unanswered while the conversation still treats its participants respectfully.

Scientific method in this limited frame helps turn some questions into investigable work and disciplines explanation's relationship with evidence. Alone, it need not appoint goals, set an acceptable price for a decision, or conclude every conversation about meaning. Those boundaries do not diminish an intelligible finding. They help use it precisely and continue another question appropriately. Ordinary life may need a modest action: avoid calling a hypothesis fact, concealing a contradiction, asking too much of a number, or filling uncertainty with a convenient legend. The answer remains human and limited. It leaves room for skilled inquiry, argument, agreement, and freedom to stop where today's material cannot honestly support anything further. Knowing a limit can make the available answer more useful rather than less.

What this means in practice

If you wish, choose one ordinary assertion in something you have read. Avoid urgent decisions, health, safety, or another person’s private experience. This voluntary reading reflection is no rationality test or substitute for expertise. Restate the assertion without strengthening it: who or what is considered, which condition is named, and what result is reported?

Note provenance separately: a personal impression, described observation, another person’s account, or an accessible study. Where research is cited, read the available description of its question, method, and limits. Do not portray inaccessible work as personally checked. This part was not assessed is a legitimate statement. Distinguish a measured result, an explanation, and a proposal for action; they may appear together while requiring different grounds.

Name one circumstance that could clarify or alter the inference. Inventing an objection to win is unnecessary. Retain the question where information is missing. Then ask which decision remains even if the limited result is correct: purpose, price, consent, or access? Do not settle these for absent people. The record can end without an action or a general verdict about the world.

Close at your actual scale: what you understood, what you trust on stated grounds, and what you do not yet confirm. This guarantees no correct next decision. It helps distinguish the source’s work from what you have not personally checked and preserves room to continue the question in another appropriate way.

Key quotation

> *the negative instance is the most powerful.*

Bacon, Novum Organum, I.46, exact clipped conclusion concerning establishment of an axiom. Historical English edited by Joseph Devey, 1902; translator unknown. Not a rule that one objection automatically refutes every investigation.

Connections between traditions

Approach	Distinction illuminated	Boundary retained
Bacon, I.46/95	Material, interpretation, and inconvenient instances	Historical programme does not replace present disciplines
Peirce, VI	Personal certainty and publicly examinable grounds	Realism and eventual convergence remain his philosophical position
Einstein, address opening	Formal geometry and application to objects	Precise inference retains the question of correspondence with experience
Darwin, introduction opening	Research history and offered evidence	This passage is no present assessment of all biology
Russell, XV	Established answers and philosophical questions	Uncertainty becomes no ready doctrine
UW editorial frame	Results, explanations, and choices	Imagined example and reflection establish no universal algorithm or efficacy

Primary sources

1. Einstein, Geometry and Experience, opening of 27 January 1921 address. Historical English Gutenberg 7333 rendering; no translator name established from displayed text. Opening through practical/axiomatic geometry read. Russian excerpt is our translation via this version, not German.

2. Bacon, Novum Organum, I.46 and I.95. Collier, 1902, editor Joseph Devey; translator listed unknown. Both aphorisms and adjoining context read. The clause concerns establishing an axiom, not a current statistical rule.

3. Peirce, The Fixation of Belief, VI, 1877. English original transcription. External grounds and the real-things hypothesis read, not the entire series. Realism/eventual convergence are not described as every present investigation's achieved result.

4. Darwin, Origin of Species, introduction opening. Historical English Gutenberg 1228 text. Collection through abstract limits and balancing arguments read; precise edition-version not independently collated. No contemporary biological assessment.

5. Russell, Problems of Philosophy, XV, 1912. English original. Chapter opening and argument about unestablished answers/uncertainty read, not whole book. Philosophical evaluation supplies no efficacy study of our reflection.

Tags

scientific method, science, knowledge, question, evidence, observation, explanation, hypothesis, model, mathematics, geometry, experience, checking, revision, unknowns, uncertainty, limits, source, provenance, trust, competence, value, purpose, choice, consent, philosophy, Bacon, Peirce, Einstein, Darwin, Russell, argument

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue, and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.