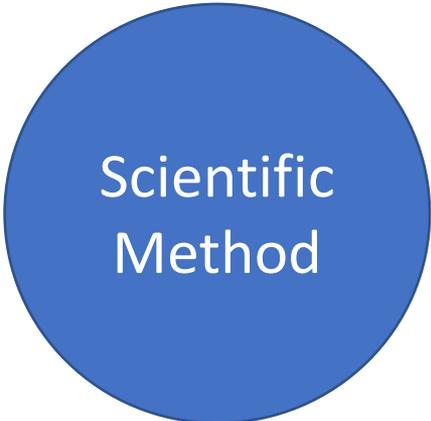


SCIENTIFIC METHOD, DIVERSITY, AND BAHA'I CONSULTATION



Scientific
Method



Science
as a
Social
Process



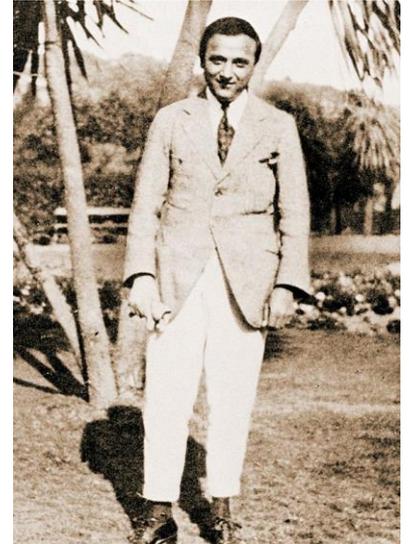
Diversity
as
Enhancing
Objectivity



Consult-
ation

In 1933, Shoghi Effendi wrote to the British High Commissioner for Palestine, saying that

“The Revelation proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, His followers believe, **is** divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, **scientific in its method,** humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts ...



What does it mean for the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh to be “scientific in its method”?

What does philosophy, history, and the sociology of science say? What about consultation and learning in action in Bahá'í communities?

THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

Here is what we have found:

The scientific method was once pictured as a step-by-step textbook process of taking data, using it for developing a thesis by induction, deducing what experiments should say and doing experiments, and then adjusting the thesis. This is no longer believed.

Naomi Oreskes, the noted Harvard historian of science, says:

There is now broad agreement among historians, philosophers, sociologists, and anthropologists of science that there is no (singular) scientific method, and that scientific practice consists of communities of people, making decisions for reasons that are both empirical and social, using diverse methods.



Scientific
Method

Not Just One Scientific Method

Susan Haack: Critical Common Sense

Science works through ways common to other forms of inquiry. But it differs "in the degree to which it requires broad and detailed background knowledge and a familiarity with a technical vocabulary that only specialists may possess."

There is "no uniquely rational mode of inference or procedure of inquiry used by all" rather, "many and various scientific methods, constantly evolving."

Paul Hoyningen-Heune: Rules of Procedure and Systematicity

Paul Hoyningen-Heune argues that the special status of science is not due to a unique scientific method (or even scientific methods) but rules of procedure.

"Scientific knowledge differs from other kinds of knowledge, especially from everyday knowledge, by its higher degree of systematicity."

"The whole of science is nothing more than a systematization of everyday thinking."

Bill Hatcher

This modern understanding of science show strong affinities with the descriptions of science given by Dr. William Hatcher – a Bahá’í mathematician and Platonist philosopher – writing 50 years ago.



William Hatcher

THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD IS SYSTEMATIC, ORGANIZED, DIRECTED, AND CONSCIOUS:

“Scientific method is the systematic, organized, directed, and conscious use of our various mental faculties in an effort to arrive at a coherent model of whatever phenomenon is being investigated.”

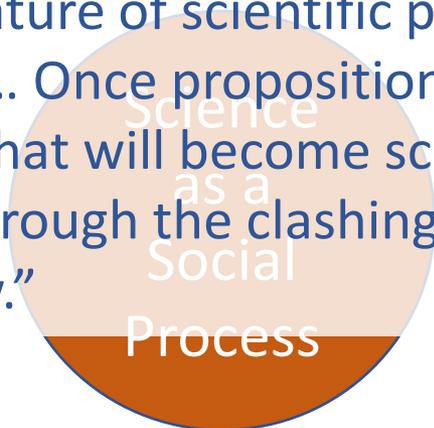
Although “we may refine and elaborate our description of the application of scientific method in some particular domain such as mathematics, logic, or physics, this description remains essentially an attempt on our part to bring to ourselves a fuller consciousness of exactly how we apply our mental faculties in the course of the epistemological act ...”

SCIENCE AS A SOCIAL PROCESS

Modern thinkers about science often focus on its social nature. The philosopher of science Helen Longino in *Science as Social Knowledge*, argues that:

“The development of knowledge is a necessarily social rather than individual activity, and it is the social character of scientific knowledge that both protects it from and renders it vulnerable to social and political interests and values.”

“The social nature of scientific practice, then, is produced by a community. ... Once propositions, theses, and hypotheses are developed, what will become scientific knowledge is produced collectively through the clashing and meshing of a variety of points of view.”



DIVERSITY AS ENHANCING OBJECTIVITY

One of the most significant findings in the philosophy of science is the extraordinary importance of diversity in arriving at valid objective scientific knowledge. It is from the feminist philosophy of science.

Feminist thinkers have highlighted how people have different biases and perspectives depending on their backgrounds and worldviews.

Scientific objectivity is only arrived at when shortsighted and narrow perspectives for judging data and their implications are balanced away, something that is best done by women and men from a variety of differing backgrounds with different points of view.



Diversity
as
Enhancing
Objectivity

CONSULTATION AS SCIENCE FOR ALL

Science, according to developments we have described, is the result of considered systematic efforts by scientific communities. What about for non-specialists?

When we look at consultation and learning in action – an activity embraced by individuals, communities, and institutions and encouraged by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh – we see a democratic form of science that applies widely. All can and should engage in them.



Consultation

In 1933, Shoghi Effendi wrote to the British High Commissioner for Palestine, saying that

What does it mean for the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh to be “scientific in its method”?

Our conclusion is that Shoghi Effendi's description of Baha'u'llah's Revelation as *scientific in its method* is a statement that is both wide and powerful:

It urges on us a systematic engagement with scientific progress and understanding *AND* an understanding that science – suitably understood as a method for everybody to use in consultation and in learning in action as well as by scientific communities – is a part of the Revelation of God and a power further imbued into science by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

