

The Journal of Loose Ends

Research in the Post-Scientific Era

HELLO AND WELCOME TO YOU, THE LAST OF THE CURIOUS MINDS. THIS IS THE FIRST EDITION OF THE JOURNAL OF RECORD FOR THE SPECIES ARCHIVE. OUR PREVIOUS "JOURNAL OF JOURNALS" CEASED PUBLICATION 3.0 MYA. OUR EDITORIAL BOARD AT THE TIME DROPPED THE JOURNAL DUE TO POOR AND DECREASING CIRCULATION WITH HIGH AND ESCALATING PUBLICATION COSTS. WHEN THEY PUBLISHED THE FINAL VOLUME, THE AVERAGE LENGTH OF THE MONTHLY PUBLICATION CAME TO 800 PAGES OVER THE PRECEDING YEAR. NEVER MIND THE PRICE OF PAPER, THE SUBSCRIBER'S GUILT THAT CAME WITH ALL THOSE UNREAD PAGES WAS REASON ENOUGH TO END 'THE COMPENDIUM'

Circa 0.5 MYA we entered the post-scientific era. Transitions between historical time spans sharing a set of political, economic, cultural and demographic circumstances occur quite gradually. Having acknowledged the historical transition's gradual nature, the archive must keep a timeline as part of its essential duties. To meet that obligation effectively over a domain of tens of millions of years, our historians must avoid nebulous waypoints in favor of specific start and stop dates for each historical period. To compensate for their arbitrary choices, our historians try to pick dates of events representing the oncoming era's novel qualities.

For the post-scientific era's start date, they chose the day of Rivka Stenberg's walkout and renunciation. Of course, things were festering beneath the surface for centuries before the day Rivka finally had enough. Over the preceding few hundred years, entire departments in the so-called soft sciences burned through all of their vacation and sick days, packed up their offices, and quietly dispersed. University administrators had no public comment on the academic extinctions.

They sequestered themselves in their offices, balanced their budgets, trimmed down their excess ancillary services, and let the exodus happen with sincere goodbyes in private, no cake, and no questions. As the scientific era drew to a close, academic publications also suffered a mass extinction. The die-off left the Archive with resources to spare. The board unexpectedly had funds to revive this publications predecessor, The Compendium, but debilitating self-doubt prevented it. Rivka's Walkout epitomized the spiritual tide sweeping the scientific project into the glassy blue ocean of despair where The Compendium's second incarnation foundered.

She was a well-known, prize-winning experimental physicist. In the lead up to her most remarkable day, she spent several hundred years performing an experiment she called the Permatron Trial. She ran a cyclotron nonstop for the duration, racking up collisions beyond count. She stated her hypothesis as follows: If an infinity exists, all possible things, however improbable, will eventually come to be. If I keep watching and finally see such an unlikely occurrence an infinity must exist. On science's last day, she walked in to her office to find the Permatron offline and the detector's last readout recording a collision that produced a dark matter WIMP and a tachyon. She tossed her latte in the garbage can, picked up

her coat and walked away without a backward glance. She drove upstate to a lakeside cabin her family owned, renovated the building, and opened up a shop selling beer, bait, and barbecue.

The general population has always conflated science and technology. For example, they harbor the unshakable, mistaken belief that pure science gave them waterproof fabrics and pictures of distant galaxies. Researchers long since abandoned tentative oversimplifications aimed at bolstering public appreciation for basic scientific research. By unspoken consensus they opted to put up with grumbling about irrelevant esoterica emanating from research not even the most imaginative among us could ever see leaving the benchtop. Corrective lectures proved too painful. They had no way of putting things that did not leave the audience feeling offended and stupid at the end. They didn't have their grandfathers' technological punchlines to go out on either. Nobody left the venue anymore with a paper cup full of reconstituted imitation fruit juice or a simulated jet pack ride from the space program.

Scientists didn't need a cup of juice, but they did need a measure of success to keep them going. Over the years the dopamine hits came fewer and farther between. As they cut down to reality's fundamental levels and fleshed out their explanations, everything got weird, and the weirdness eventually bordered on unintelligible. The harder they worked, the dumber they felt. It finally became clear that they were barreling down the road to Nihilism. They gave up in droves rather than face humiliation before another entangled particle or singularity. As they abandoned ship, the experts shared the same psychological lifeboat with the laymen. Everybody wanted the classical era's promises to come true. They wanted a computer chip to store their consciousness so they could live forever, spaceships that traveled faster than light, and atoms like little solar systems. Instead, they got holographic principles, scary math, and paradoxes whose only unifying purpose was to tell them that the fun stuff was impossible. Scientific method's one great weakness was always its preoccupation with validity in pursuit of the truth. In the end, everyone began to confuse the two. Confusion left skepticism unsupervised in the institution with a grievance to drive it, and unsupervised skepticism did its job discrediting everything in reach.

Every thinking species has a time in its lifecycle when science is the only thing that can help it. When people think that the nasty smell from the swamp causes illness rather than microorganisms transmitted by the biting insects living there, the people need scientific method to rescue them from basic misunderstanding. A time comes in every civilization's evolution, however, when things are not going to get much better than they are. In that phase, the sentient beings don't need research telling them that they live in a hologram, or that the entire universe will someday degrade into a cold bowl of incredibly thin soup. They know it's all pointless already. They are nature's puppets in this marionette show until they die. They get it. What they need are distractions to take their minds off of the inevitable, and personal, validating answers relevant in the wading pool reality where they live. Those are the post-scientific era's goal posts: distraction in the course of personal validation.

The new department heads running the old University offices propose a systematic change whose structure addresses the needs of sentient beings and provides a person-focused explanation. Since the new method addresses the scientific method's weaknesses, the two share a structure.

Scientific inquiry begins with a hypothesis. The post-scientific researcher starts with a belief. Beliefs have a hierarchy. The most effective belief is one held despite contradictory evidence. Such beliefs demand complete commitment. They also have an enemy to supplant, so they have permission to change the world in their image.

Next in potency is the unjustified belief. This type of belief also requires a high level of commitment, but merely mentioning belief and justification in the same breath implies a connection and so weakens the belief. Least powerful is justified belief. Someone who holds a justified belief is persuadable on justification, and therefore undependable.

The post-scientific method relies on anecdotes in place of evidence. The best proofs utilize single supporting anecdotes. An anecdote's strength derives from its fecundity, volume, and durability. A fecund anecdote yields subsidiary branches. For example, I tell my coworkers that I got the flu from

my last flu shot, therefore, despite contrary evidence, I believe that vaccines actually cause the diseases they claim to prevent. Loose ends form a fringe around my anecdote. All the vaccine manufacturers have had instances of malfeasance and poor-quality control. Politicians routinely lie to me. The government consists of politicians, and the government funds vaccine research. Therefore, the vaccine research results are also a lie – to what end? Given an adequate fringe, a natural cocoon grows around the anecdote and the belief it supports. In the scientific era, loose ends were weaknesses to pull on; in the post-scientific era, loose ends provide the threads to weave a firm encasement for beliefs.

Volume is the next quality recommending an anecdote. If a justifying story requires an exclamation point, it satisfies better than stories permitting neutral punctuation, e.g., There is a reason that these vaccine scams target our children!

An anecdote's most auspicious property is its durability. A durable anecdote weathers its strawmen, ad hominem's, et tu quoque, ad populums, alternative narratives, and evidence.

A durable anecdote does not accomplish these feats by winning arguments.

At birth, it already caricatures the world around it, attacks its enemies, contains at least one normative appeal, and discredits contravening statistics. Anecdotal durability correlates well with an anecdote's capacity to support open-ended rhetorical questions.

For example, how do we know what these shots actually do? Do we have any idea how vaccines will affect the recipients 30 years down the line? What harm could we be doing to future generations? Who stands to gain from weakening the population's natural immune response? Why don't I know anyone who has participated in a vaccine study, if the information supporting the shots is so conclusive? How can you simply take the word of self-interested parties like the vaccine researchers, politicians, and pharmaceutical executives that vaccines are safe and effective? I can continue in this fashion indefinitely. My anecdote seems simplistic, but it is loose enough and contrarian enough to support unlimited elaboration and resist unsupervised skepticism. My anecdote is therefore highly durable.

The last feature of post-scientific inquiry is ad hoc method. Ideally, the method is so narrowly focused that it holds for only one case and is unrepeatable. This notion - unique and unrepeatable methods as self-validating, effective tools - was kicking around at the end of the scientific era. Most observers blame or credit experimental philosophy with getting the ball rolling, but the Permatron Trial was the fully developed program's prime example. It started out with a hypothesis that was really just a belief. The appeal isn't directly to some property of infinities. The hypothesis appeals to an intuition regarding what constitutes a ridiculously improbable observation. The result doesn't add to a body of evidence or suggest a new hypothesis. It tells the observer there's more where this came from and it's not too late for a pretty nice life at the bait shop barbecue.

Our journal aims to bring readers the latest and most useful results of post-scientific inquiry and to present those results in a readable format. In each issue, we will evaluate at least one result and examine the motivating belief, supporting anecdotes with special attention to those anecdotes' potential fecundity, volume, and durability. Finally, we will assess the inquiry's method to establish its uniqueness and non-repeatability along with the outcome's implication for the motivating belief's utility. At least for now, the editorial board decided to keep the scientific publication's traditional structure for this journal.

Next, in our inaugural issue: ***The Psychology of Gravity***