**Submission for “Sciences of the Origin Online Conference”**

**University of Belgrade**

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**“Induction, Meta-induction, Naturalism, and Origins”**

**Abstract:**

At least into the 19th century, students of origins faced the question of how texts and traces. Increasingly it was held (*e.g*., Buffon) that textual evidence was either redundant or unreliable, making material traces sufficient. Trusting induction, scientists inferred a vastly longer past. The resulting sciences, including cosmology, are successful.

Induction now functions roughly as a demarcation criterion. Thus the justification of induction of considerable interest. As Colin Howson pointed out, Hume’s problem of induction remained unsolved in 2000, while its potentially devastating consequences were ignored.

The Feigl-Reichenbach-Salmon pragmatic justification of induction held that no predictive method is guaranteed or even likely to work, but if anything does, induction does, so induction is optimal. This was perhaps the best of the justifications of induction offered during the serious effort through the 1970s, when exhaustion occurred. The short run problem---that science would work, but maybe not any time soon---was largely resolved recently by Gerhard Schurz. Schurz emphasizes Reichenbach’s theme that induction is employed at the meta-level of predictive methods in light of their track records. One entertains *a priori* even esoteric prediction methods (*e.g*., prophecy), and is said to arrive *a posteriori* at the conclusion, based on the actual past, that object-level induction (science, the uniformity of nature) is optimal for predictions. Thus one is justified in consulting doctors over witch doctors to get healed, and satellites and d rocks over scrolls to learn about origins.

. An apparently novel difficulty is noted for Schurz’s argument, related to short-run worries but based on disagreement about the past. Usually the meta-inductive justification assumes the past to be infallibly and uncontroversially remembered. But induction-relevant debates in intellectual history involve (contested) testimony to isolated events. Any serious predictive method will agree with induction most of the time; fortune tellers, prophets, *etc*., predict only rarely and do not guide, *e.g*., the design of airplanes. But there exists testimonial evidence for isolated non-uniformities of nature (*e.g*., miracles, such as someone’s being alive after being quite dead). With induction in dispute, such evidence cannot be discarded automatically in the usual rationalist way, as C. D. Broad noted. For those inclined to accept such testimony, meta-induction might support a partly non-inductive/non-uniform method. Reichenbach briefly noted that in principle, clairvoyance might be justified meta-inductively. Schurz takes meta-induction to resolve worldview conflicts between prophecy and science in favor of science. But the dispute about the past implies that meta-induction fails to yield an objective answer to disputes about reported isolated miracles. More seriously, meta-induction might vindicate occasional prophecies as well as (most of) science, depending on one’s beliefs about the past. This novel or hypothetical worry is in fact real and ancient: the Stoics defended divination in this fashion.

If meta-induction could justify science-qualified-by-miracles-and-prophecy rather than straight science (given what some take to be the track record), then the basis for investing deep history purely using material traces may have a lacuna. Some possible responses are sketched.