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UJ Philosophy/ACEPS Colloquium

Thursday, 10 October 2024, 14:30-16:00
Humanities Common Room, University of Johannesburg, APK
(C-Ring 319)

A New Pessimistic Induction over the History of Science

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Greg Frost-Arnold is professor of philosophy at Hobart & William Smith Colleges in New York, US. He received a Ph.D. in History and Philosophy of Science from the University of Pittsburgh. He is the author of *Free Logic: A Generalization*, and *Carnap, Tarski, and Quine at Harvard*. Greg co-edited volume 7 of *The Collected Works of Rudolf Carnap* with Steve Awodey. He has published articles in *Philosophy of Science*, *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, and *The Journal of Philosophical Logic*, among other journals.

Abstract



The Pessimistic Induction over the history of science is the argument that, because most past scientific theories (even those that made very accurate predictions) turned out to be wrong, most current scientific theories will probably turn out to be wrong in the future too. This talk presents a new defense of the Pessimistic Induction, designed to overcome the best objections to the argument. First, I offer a new explanation for why past scientific theories failed, when they failed (which I call the Problem of Misleading Evidence). Second, I present a new argument for the premise of the Pessimistic Induction, by performing a simple statistical analysis on the set of all theories appearing in a general history of science reference work, instead of picking a few examples from the historical record chosen specifically to support the anti-realist's case.

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