

Cambridge Elements

Elements in the Philosophy of Science
edited by
Robert Northcott
Birkbeck, University of London
Jacob Stegenga
University of Cambridge

SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND THE DEEP PAST

History Matters

Adrian Currie
University of Exeter



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-73055-6 — Scientific Knowledge and the Deep Past
Adrian Currie
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108730556

DOI: 10.1017/9781108582490

© Adrian Currie 2019

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2019

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-108-73055-6 Paperback

ISSN: 2517-7273 (online)

ISSN: 2517-7265 (print)

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Scientific Knowledge and the Deep Past

History Matters

Elements in the Philosophy of Science

DOI: 10.1017/9781108582490
First published online: August 2019

Adrian Currie
University of Exeter

Author for correspondence: Adrian Currie A.Currie@exeter.ac.uk

Abstract: Historical sciences such as paleontology and archaeology have uncovered unimagined, remarkable and mysterious worlds from the deep past. How should we understand the success of these sciences? What is the relationship between knowledge and history? In *Scientific Knowledge & the Deep Past: History Matters*, Adrian Currie examines recent paleontological work on the great changes that occurred during the Cretaceous period – the emergence of flowering plants, the splitting of the mega-continent Gondwana, and the eventual fall of the dinosaurs – to analyse the knowledge of historical scientists, and to reflect upon the nature of history. He argues that distinctively historical processes are ‘peculiar’: they have the capacity to generate their own highly specific dynamics and rules. This peculiarity, Currie argues, also explains the historian’s interest in narratives and stories: the contingency, complexity and peculiarity of the past demands a narrative treatment. Overall, Currie argues that history matters for knowledge.

Keywords: Paleontology, Archaeology, Narrative, Explanation, Evidence

© Adrian Currie 2019

ISBNs: 9781108730556 (PB), 9781108582490 (OC)
ISSNs: 2517-7273 (online), 2517-7265 (print)

Contents

Introduction	1
1 History and Evidence	2
2 The Nature of the Deep Past	24
3 Historical Explanation	43
Concluding Discussion: What Are Sciences of the Deep Past About?	59
Bibliography	65