

'Presumption [as a form of reasoning]' (pub. 02.01.13-15:57). Quote in M. Bergman & S. Paavola (Eds.), *The Commens Dictionary: Peirce's Terms in His Own Words. New Edition*. Retrieved from <http://www.commens.org/dictionary/entry/quote-reasoning>.

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**Term:** Presumption [as a form of reasoning]

**Quote:** *Presumption*, or, more precisely, *abduction* (which the present writer believes to have been what Aristotle's twenty-fifth chapter of the second *Prior Analytics* imperfectly described under the name of {απαγωγή}, until Apellicon substituted a single wrong word and thus disturbed the sense of the whole), furnishes the reasoner with the problematic theory which induction verifies. Upon finding himself confronted with a phenomenon unlike what he would have expected under the circumstances, he looks over its features and notices some remarkable character or relation among them, which he at once recognizes as being characteristic of some conception with which his mind is already stored, so that a theory is suggested which would *explain* (that is, render necessary) that which is surprising in the phenomena.

He therefore accepts that theory so far as to give it a high place in the list of theories of those phenomena which call for further examination. If this is all his conclusion amounts to, it may be asked: What need of reasoning was there? Is he not free to examine what theories he likes? The answer is that it is a question of economy. If he examines all the foolish theories he might imagine, he never will (short of a miracle) light upon the true one. Indeed, even with the most rational procedure, he never would do so, were there not an affinity between his ideas and nature's ways. However, if there be any attainable truth, as he hopes, it is plain that the only way in which it is to be attained is by trying the hypotheses which seem reasonable and which lead to such consequences as are observed.

Presumption is the only kind of reasoning which supplies new ideas, the only kind which is, in this sense, synthetic. Induction is justified as a method which must in the long run lead up to the truth, and that, by gradual modification of the actual conclusion. There is no such warrant for presumption. The hypothesis which it problematically concludes is frequently utterly wrong itself, and even the method need not ever lead to the truth; for it may be that the features of the phenomena which it aims to explain have no rational explanation at all. Its only justification is that its method is the only way in which there can be any hope of attaining a rational explanation.

**Source:** Peirce, C. S. (1902). Reasoning. In J. M. Baldwin (Ed.), *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology, Vol. II* (pp. 426-428). London: Macmillan and Co.

**References:** CP 2.776

**Date of** 1902

**Quote:**

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