

# Emergent Cosmopolis

## Targeted Inquiry: Epistemology

### Day 4, May 2, 2018: The Final Third of the video

#### Today's Core Insights

1. **Cognitive Operations: RR+ (Harris, et al) operate from an empiricist epistemology; in effect, this confines their horizon to verifiable statements of "truth" involving experiencing, understanding, and judging. Peterson operates more at the moral level of deciding, in which the key question is not truth but value.**
2. **Collecting Evidence: what is considered evidence, how that evidence is weighted, and how a judgment is made depends on the insight being judged. Judgments of fact are quite different from judgments of value.**
3. **Differentiated Mind: Both empirical research and common sense intelligence are specialized forms of inquiry with different objectives. Empiricists are interested in verifiable truths that are "out there" irrespective of human concerns, while common sense seeks not truth but parables and proverbs, fables or myths, that are used to complete one's understanding of the situation at hand. RR+ constrain themselves to the first; JR accepts the theoretical but also uses theoretical models as tools in the common sense task of psychological therapy.**

Rationality Rules, (YouTube Channel)  
February 26, 2018

Jordan Peterson's Truth—Debunked  
(16:51), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwXAB6cICG0&index=29&list=PLo1Jq23H\\_s5XVxAseMKY-JA4aH3cOI07si&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AwXAB6cICG0&index=29&list=PLo1Jq23H_s5XVxAseMKY-JA4aH3cOI07si&t=0s)

#### Analysis (10:23-16:00)

1. **Claims (10:23).** Harris, RR's spoke person, bases his argument on JP's failure to differentiate between two "claims": the cheating wife, and that the husband killed himself because his wife cheated on him. From an empiricist point of view, the claim that the wife was cheating is relatively easy to *verify* through photos or direct encounter, but the claim the husband killed himself because of this is not. He may have committed suicide because of the radical upset in his life; but equally likely are other possibilities. Harris uses this to claim JP is "out to lunch" in conflating the two.  
It may be that RR+ (Harris) is focused on the three cognitive levels essential for truth, those of experiencing, understanding, and judging (though criteria for the latter are strictly empirical), while JP is making his points from the fourth level of deciding, where morality, ethics, values, shoulds, and oughts are the dominate feature of human "truth." *The result is that they are talking in cross-purposes, each operating at different cognitive levels without having a higher perspective that would allow them to understand what is going on.* (CF. 10:50)
2. **Sound of a tree falling (11:47).** Does a tree falling in the woods with no one at hand make a sound? From an empiricist epistemology, the falling tree does make a sound, or at least it does emit a vibration as it falls. So "objectively", a "tree" does make a sound. To a naive realist, the tree doesn't make a sound because there's no one to point to the falling tree; it does not exist. To a critical realist, the "fact" that a tree does make a sound when it falls can be affirmed, but notes that both the concepts of sound (common sense) and vibration (scientific) (not to mention "tree") are intentional terms that already mediate between the individual and the sensate world.
3. **OR/D&E,S&C (11:14).** RR+ is only interested in verifiable facts (the truth), while moral and ethical considerations range much deeper. For example, practical intervention requires three distinct operations that must take place in proper sequence. The first in orientation (OR), which in psychotherapy means the therapist must be aware of his or her own orientation in the world (horizon, intentions, concepts, etc.) as well as the orientation of the client (his or her world view).  
Evaluation and the subsequent diagnosis (D&E) apply a reasoned stance to clarifying that a problem actually exists before seeking the roots causes of these dysfunctional symptoms. A flawed evaluation is to miss the point by focusing on an unreality; a flawed diagnosis leads to courses of action that also miss the point, wasting resources that could have been used in more fruitful ways.  
Estimating scope and constraints on rational action (S&C) involves both a prognosis and multiple possible outcomes depending on the remedial action being taken.  
*The point is that all this is very familiar to JP as part of his professional practice as a therapist, but not to RR+. It is the difference between professional practice and being a philosophy professor.*
4. **Evidence.** (Back to the cheating wife) From Harris' perspective, the husband's suicide does not necessarily imply that the cause was due to the cheating wife. He does drop into the ethical realm by saying that

it would have been better if he (the husband) had not known, but for him (Harris) there's no logical connection.

JP horizon is dominated by the drama of human living, in which a husband's encounter with the fact his wife has been cheating on him does imply a massive emotional upheaval that can well result in the decision to kill oneself. He then goes into a number of things that would have been better, ranging from a choice in partners to taking better care of the relationship.

Note that in both cases the difference in insights (scientific vs therapeutic) leads to a difference in determining what evidence to collect, how to weight that evidence, and the criteria used for making a judgment (true or not true).

5. **The role of theory.** For RR & Harris, "truth" is what can be verified through the empirical heuristic structure. Such "truths" are considered out there real, in the sense that they have an objective, not subjective, reality. Such truths relate things to other things, i.e., electrical flows to magnetism, or visible light to the electro-magnetic spectrum.

*While JP does have a strong theoretical background that comes out in his knowledge of psychological research, he also has a foot in the realm of common sense intelligence through his therapeutic practice.* Now common sense is a specialized form of intelligence that not only relates the world to human interests but seeks not universal truths but only those generalizations that serve to clarify an otherwise confusions time-and-space-specific situation.

What common sense draws upon is a body of proverbs and parables, fables and myths, that are not in any way to be considered a coherent body of knowledge but only as points that one might want to keep in mind when moving into strange territory.

When JP talks about theories as tools, about myths as being real, he is drawing upon a body of common sense knowledge some of which is embodied in the variety of psychological theories often used in therapy. So it is entirely logical for him to use Jungian psychology for people who share characteristics of being open and creative, and perhaps Adler or Erickson for those clients who rank high in industriousness and conscientiousness.

Myths are stories we tell ourselves to make sense of ourselves and the world around us. In that sense, they are as real as any empirical scientific truth. *A non-differentiated mind cannot grasp that the two realms of meaning, empirical and common sense, are not only distinct in terms of results sought but complementary to one another.*

6. **Religion (14:57).** This difference really comes out when JP is asked if he believes in the actual resurrection of Christ. To an empiricist, Christ existence and death can be verified but the "resurrection" can not be considered "real." JP can consider himself to be a Christian, for the "myth" of Christ's birth, death, and resurrection are powerful narratives. Yet at the same time, he cannot accept, as a theoretician, that the resurrection is verifiable in the way that any scientific truth is verifiable. So he is both "Christian" and "Non-Christian."