

Discussion tree for 2019-12-11 critical rationalism debate between TheRat and jordancurve  
Tree version: #2 (2020-01-22)  
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Forum: FI Discord: <https://curi.us/discord>  
Transcript: <https://pastebin.com/0iWvLv97>

Rectangles represent participants' statements and questions.  
Some statements have been lightly edited for typos and clarity;  
see transcript for exact wording.

Ovals represent my editorial comments.

Colors: TheRat, jordancurve, curi

The debate can be divided into three phases:

1. Is "falsification" a good term for Popper's philosophy?  
TheRat: yes; jordancurve: no.
2. Did TheRat describe an asymmetry in Popper's philosophy?  
TheRat: yes; jordancurve: no.
3. TheRat accuses jordancurve of misrepresenting him,  
but refuses to provide a quote.  
jordancurve regards this as an impasse and ends the discussion.

## is "falsificationism" a good term for Popper's philosophy?

(1.1) TheRat: Feels weird saying Popper agrees with falsificationism, like saying Einstein agrees with the theory of relativity.

(1.2) jordancurve: <http://mail.curi.us/1547-educational-research-in-practice-2>  
> Falsificationism is a bad description of Popper's philosophy because it has been  
> repeatedly misunderstood as meaning to justify theories by how well they withstand  
> criticism and their rivals don't. It's also bad because it is taken to mean  
> empirical falsification to be used only in science -- which it often is used to  
> mean -- but most criticism is not empirical even in science (as David Deutsch has  
> pointed out in his books, e.g. with the example of the idea that eating grass  
> cures the common cold, which we reject without testing)... And, finally,  
> "falsificationism" a bad description because Popper himself explicitly rejected it  
> in print! In Realism and the Aim of Science, p xxxi, Popper says, "... my views  
> on science (sometimes, but not by me, called 'falsificationism') ..."

(1.3) TheRat: Yes bad description, but non naive falsificationism was an important part of Popper's philosophy.

(1.4) curi: no, some thing X was an important part of Popper's philosophy which you think should be called "non naive falsificationism" but Popper and I don't

(1.5) TheRat: but when people refer to falsificationism

(1.6) curi: it's a pretty clear sign they don't know much about CR and are straw manning it. in general, IME, when ppl use that term, the thing they have in mind is incorrect

(1.7) TheRat: sure but the point is, falsificationism has not been refuted

(1.8) curi: you'd have to define falsificationism before evaluating it

As the next section shows, TheRat's use of "falsificationism" is consistent with curi's experience.

It's unclear whether "sure" is a concession by TheRat. For one thing, TheRat said "but", which indicates that what follows is somehow contrary to what went before. Another thing is that TheRat continued using the term "falsificationism".

## TheRat tries to describe an asymmetry in Popper's philosophy

(2.1) TheRat: [Falsificationism is] the asymmetry that a theory can never be "proven" but it can be falsified.

(2.2) jordancurve: A theory can't be guaranteed falsified. The proposed falsification might itself be refuted.

(2.3) curi: that's ambiguous

(2.3.1) most ways ppl mean that are false

(2.4) TheRat: well nothing is guaranteed so I agree there

(2.5) jordancurve: So then where's your asymmetry?

(2.5.1) curi: so what's the asymmetry then?

(2.6) TheRat: having "evidence for" doesn't make a theory true or more likely to be true, having evidence that falsifies it can disprove a theory.

(2.7) curi: that sounds infallibilist again

(2.7.1) curi: that's ambiguous again

(2.8) TheRat: [I wrote 'can', which implies that] finding contradicting evidence doesn't guarantee falsification, but we can drop a theory

(2.9) jordancurve: Where's the asymmetry between provisionally "dropping" a theory and provisionally accepting a theory?

(2.10) TheRat: evidence doesn't give you reason to accept a theory

(2.11) curi: giving something a different name isn't pointing out an asymmetry.

(2.12) curi: i think you don't know what the asymmetry is. otherwise you would have mentioned it by now.

(2.13) jordancurve: You didn't answer my question. My question didn't mention evidence.

TheRat never responded to these comments.

(2.15) jordancurve: False. For example, say I use some evidence A to refute theory X, and later evidence B plus some other theory leads me to conclude that A was false, thereby rehabilitating X.

(2.16) curi: i don't agree with this either. e.g. b/c dropping theory X helps us adopt theory Y.

(2.18) TheRat: what you're advocating for jordancurve with no asymmetry is verificationism.

(2.17) TheRat: That doesn't mean that Theory X is true due to the evidence you collected

jordancurve never responded to this comment.  
It's unclear what symmetry has to do with "verificationism", which, according to Wikipedia, is "the philosophical doctrine which maintains that only statements that are empirically verifiable (i.e. verifiable through the senses) are cognitively meaningful, or else they are truths of logic (tautologies)."

(2.19) jordancurve: I never said it was "true"; I said we "adopted" it, which we do.

TheRat never responded to these comments.

This is apparently meant to be a response to question 2.9 about asymmetry, but it doesn't describe an asymmetry. TheRat elaborated in 2.14.

jordancurve's remark about not mentioning evidence is a non sequitur.

2.14 was a key point of contention. Here, with the term "help", TheRat introduces the **first** of five terms he will use to refer to the role of evidence in adopting a theory.

Here, TheRat introduces a **second** term to refer to the role of evidence in adopting a theory: "due to".

