

HOW TO BE (AND HOW NOT TO BE) AN IMPURIST  
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1. INTRODUCTION

What should I believe?

- **Evidentialism1:** Doxastic attitude D toward proposition p is epistemically justified for S at t iff having D toward p fits the evidence that S has at t (Conee and Feldman 1985: 15).
- **Evidentialism2:** Evidence alone determines rational belief.

But evidentialism is controversial.

“Old school” deniers: externalists, reliabilists, proper functionalists.

“New school” deniers—what I will call the “**Impurists**”:

- **Pragmatic Encroachment:** practical factors can affect whether it’s epistemically rational to believe p (where the practical factors are irrelevant to the truth of p).
- **Moral Encroachment:** moral factors can affect whether it’s epistemically rational to believe p (where the moral factors are irrelevant to the truth of p).
- **Epistemic Partiality:** the closeness of a relationship can affect whether it’s epistemically rational to believe p (where p is often a fact about someone in the relationship, but the closeness of the relationship is irrelevant to the truth of p).
- **Practical/Moral Reasons for Belief:** practical factors can be normative reasons that count in favor of believing p (where the practical factors are irrelevant to the truth of p).

2. PROBLEMS FOR THE IMPURIST

There’s something quite intuitive about the impurist views, and some of the motivating cases are compelling. On the other hand, they run into some problems/worries:

- **Purist Intuition:** How do these non-evidential factors have any power/say at all? The connection between truth- and evidence-related factors and rational belief is much easier to see; it’s odd to think practical and moral stuff could affect *epistemic* rationality.
- **Scope Question:** How much can these non-evidential factors affect epistemic rationality?
  - Attitude-Scope: If all my evidence clearly points to p, can they tip the scales so I should believe not-p?
  - Proposition-Scope: Can these non-evidential factors make a difference to what I should believe about any proposition at all?
- **Control Worry:** it’s easy to form/give up beliefs on the basis of evidence. We do this all the time. But is it as easy to change our beliefs in response to practical or moral factors? In some cases, it seems much harder.

**Thesis:** the impurist should embrace *permissivism*, as it helps with all three of these problems.

3. PERMISSIVISM

**Permissivism:** the evidence can permit more than one attitude toward a proposition.

For our purposes, we'll need something slightly more specific:

**Intrapersonal permissivism:** there are evidential situations in which *a particular individual* can adopt more than one *belief-attitude* toward a proposition.

How does permissivism help? Well, in permissive cases, the evidence leaves open, or underdetermines, what one ought to conclude (either 2 belief-attitudes or all 3).

In these sorts of cases, it's much more palatable to think that a non-evidential factor could come in and break the "epistemic tie." This doesn't violate epistemic rationality (by definition), but also gives the non-evidential stuff a role to play in the question, what should I believe?

- **Impurist-friendly view:** epistemic rationality is permissive when considering evidence alone. When non-evidential factors are considered, the rationally available attitudes might be narrowed down. Epistemic rationality is determined by the combination of epistemic + non-epistemic factors.
- **Purist-friendly view:** epistemic rationality remains permissive, but in many of the impurist's motivating cases, all-things-considered rationality is not.

Some impurists already seem to borrow from permissivism (albeit implicitly):

- Basu and Schroeder (2019) favorably cite Nelson's (2010)'s argument that we don't have positive epistemic duties. See also Kalwall (2013) on friendship and epistemic partiality.
- Many admit that, if your evidence radically changes, what you should believe changes.
- Suggestion: this change occurs when the evidence goes from permissive to impermissive.

To sum up the view I am suggesting:

- Non-evidential factors *only* play a role when the evidence is permissive.
- The non-evidential factors can only break epistemic ties; they cannot render the epistemic irrational, rational. In other words, non-evidential factors cannot make an epistemic difference in impermissive cases.

#### 4. THE POWER OF PERMISSIVISM FOR THE IMPURIST

**Purist Intuition:** the evidence is the primary thing that determines rational belief. We aren't required to go against the evidence, and rational agents *always* hold a belief-attitude that the evidence supports.

**Scope Question:** Permissivism can help us *constrain* both the attitudes and the propositions that non-evidential factors can affect.

**Control Worry:** a number of authors have argued that, in permissive cases, we have significantly more control over our beliefs. I find this very plausible.

Q&A: I'd love to hear your thoughts on:

- Set up stuff, defining evidentialism, rival views, etc.?
- Are there other problems for the impurist that permissivism helps with?
- Are you convinced that permissivism in fact helps with the problems I considered?
- Should I include practical reasons for belief?