

# INTERPERSONAL FAITH AND SELF-FULFILLING BELIEFS

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## 1. Introduction

Faith that  $p$ : a commitment regarding  $p$  that involves a belief-like component and a desire-like component.

What kind of faith concerns us?

- Two strands:
  - Intrapersonal faith: faith in yourself.
  - Interpersonal faith: faith in others.
- Faith that (as opposed to faith in).
- Faith as a mental state (as opposed to faith as an action).
- Faith's epistemic rationality (as opposed to practical rationality).

Desiderata for a theory of faith:

- 1) Explain how faith can be rational but “go beyond the evidence.”
- 2) Explain the rationality of a “leap of faith.”
  - Often cashed out in terms of action.
  - Here, I'll explore how we might understand this as a mental thing.

**Thesis:** sometimes, epistemically rational faith is self-fulfilling (or self-justifying). This is appealing way to meet both of these desiderata (and others!)

## 2. Self-Justifying Beliefs

**Self-justifying beliefs:** beliefs that, when adopted, create evidence for themselves (James 1986).

### 2.1 Types of Self-Justifying Beliefs

- 1) Involves a powerful being or machine. Examples: Rain, Millionaire, Mind-Reading Machine.
- 2) Beliefs about yourself. Examples: Hiker, Illness, Public Speaking.
- 3) Beliefs about others. Examples: Basketball Game, Surgery, Marriage.

### 2.2 The Rationality of Self-Justifying Beliefs

It's widely accepted that self-fulfilling beliefs are epistemically rational.

- Less controversially, these beliefs are rational when the initial probability (before you adopt the belief) is middling (around 50%) or unspecified/unclear (e.g. Dahlback (forthcoming), Drake (2017), Kopec (2015), Peels (2015), Reisner (2007), (2013), (2015), and Velleman (1989)).
- Others even argue that it's rational to adopt a self-justifying belief when the initial probability is low (a good bit less than 50%) (e.g. Raleigh (2015), (2017), Joyce (2007)).

Why is this rational?

- **Externalist story:** The belief is produced by a reliable process (although, of course, we'd have to cash out the process-type appropriately, but the idea is that in cases of self-justifying beliefs, the true belief to false belief ratio is favorable).

- **Internalist story:** IF you believe it, it becomes quite likely to be true. And if you know something is quite likely to be true, you have good evidence for it, so it's rational to believe it.
  - Forming the belief raises the objective probability of p. Assuming you have some level of awareness of what is going on, it also raises the epistemic probability of p—by forming the belief, you have good evidence p is true.
- **Note on direction of fit:** May be one of the only cases of beliefs that have a world-to-mind direction of fit.

### 3. Faith as Self-Justifying

Appeals to types (2) and (3) above.

- Interpersonal faith: marathon, job interview.
- Intrapersonal faith: *Alone* (show), personal ambitions/commitments.
- Some cases of faith involve both: a marriage commitment, finishing a dissertation.
- Faith and belief: story doesn't depend on faith's entailing belief.

Reasons to think that faith is self-justifying:

1. **Desiderata 1:** Explains how faith can be rational but nonetheless have a unique relationship to evidence.
2. **Desiderata 2:** Explains how a “leap of faith” can be rational (and need not always be cashed out in terms of action).
3. **Communicating faith:** Explains why communicating faith to others (in the interpersonal case) is so crucial—which is one reason why relationship and community is so important to faith (Preston-Roedder 2018).
4. **Epistemic Partiality:** Explains why we might treat those close to us—friends and family—epistemically differently than neutral third-parties (Stroud 2006; Morton and Paul 2018).
5. **Doxastic voluntarism:** Gives us genuine choices about where to place our faith—and interestingly, often either choice ends up being rational (Frankish 2007: 535; Peels 2015).
6. **Evidentialism:** Faith need not violate evidentialism: the idea that we should proportion our epistemic attitudes to the evidence.

### 4. FAQs

**Question 1:** Why think the above mechanism raises the probability of the target proposition enough for faith to be rational? (Antill 2019).

**Question 2:** Is probability-raising sufficient for rational belief? (Buchak 2014).

**Question 3:** Does one have to be aware of the mechanism in order for this to be rational?

**Question 4:** How widely does this apply? Does this apply to all cases of interpersonal and intrapersonal faith?

**Question 5:** Does this apply to theistic faith?

**Question 6:** Aren't you just summarizing William James' arguments?

**Question 7:** What about the desire component of faith?