

EPISTEMIC TIES AND HOW TO BREAK THEM

Liz Jackson, Toronto Metropolitan University

liz-jackson.com

1. Introduction

Common thought: what's epistemically rational to believe depends on your evidence.

- Sounds nice! But this doesn't mean epistemology is just simple and easy. Evidence is limited, complicated, misleading, and may not always clearly point in one direction.

Thesis: I'll argue that the rational evidence-follower will encounter what I call *epistemic ties*. Then, I'll provide a suggestion for how we might break these epistemic ties.

2. What are Epistemic Ties?

To embrace epistemic ties is to embrace a form of epistemic permissivism.

Two attitudes toward a proposition are epistemically tied \equiv_{df} they are both equally epistemically rational, given a body of evidence.

The type of ties I argue for involve:

- A single person and her evidence (intrapersonal permissivism)
- The belief-attitudes (belief, withholding, disbelief)
- Two attitudes (moderate) OR all three attitudes (extreme)
- A particular time (synchronic permissivism)

3. Why Think There are Epistemic Ties?

Not only do I think epistemic ties exist, I actually think they're quite common in everyday life. However, my goal here is just to convince you that they sometimes occur.

Four Arguments for Epistemic Ties:

- Argument 1: Self-Justifying Beliefs
- Argument 2: The Evidence Trickle Argument (Roeber 2020) (Eye Chart)
- Argument 3: The Limitations of Evidence (Juror)
- Argument 4: IBE and Competing Explanations (God)

Objection: in cases of epistemic ties, shouldn't you just withhold belief?

- Response 1: skeptical worry
- Response 2: Jamesian goals
- Response 3: moderate permissivism (evidence trickle)

4. How Do You Break an Epistemic Tie?

Here's a fun upshot of believing that epistemic ties occur.

Consider *impurism*, the view that epistemic rationality is affected by (e.g.):

- Practical factors (pragmatic encroachment)
- Moral factors (moral encroachment)
- Closeness of relationship (epistemic partiality), etc.

Impurism leads to problems.

- 1) *Purist Intuition*: can these non-truth-related things really affect epistemic rationality?
- 2) *Scope Question*: how far do we take this?

Suggestion: Non-epistemic factors can break epistemic ties.

- Non-epistemics stuff make a difference to epistemic rationality *only* when there's an epistemic tie.
- This gives the epistemic priority when it comes to justified belief (helping with *Purist Intuition*).
- This also tells us how much of a difference the non-epistemic stuff can make (helping with *Scope Question*).

There's a purist and an impurist way of embracing my suggestion, depending on how you think the details of the norms work.

- **Impurist-friendly view**: non-epistemic factors affect *epistemic* rationality, but only in cases of epistemic ties.
- **Purist-friendly view**: non-epistemic factors never affect epistemic rationality (it remains permissive), but can affect *all-things-considered* rationality in cases of epistemic ties.

5. Conclusion

You should believe in epistemic ties because there are good arguments for them, and they carve an attractive middle way between purist and impurist views in epistemology.