

FAITH, VOLUNTARY AND RATIONAL

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1. THE PUZZLE

These three all seem plausible, but are inconsistent:

1. Faith can be epistemically rational.
2. Faith goes beyond the evidence.
3. No epistemically rational attitude goes beyond the evidence.

Solutions to set aside:

- Denying (1) (faith haters and fideists)
- Denying (2) (by challenging scope claim)

2. TWO PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Faith as a testimonial belief (deny 2): faith is a belief (or attitude) based on testimony. Faith is straightforwardly based on evidence, and thus rational (Anscombe 2008; Zagzebski 2012).

Problems: (1) What is unique about faith's relationship to evidence? Even if faith and testimony are closely connected, this doesn't seem to tell the full story about faith and evidence. (2) How to explain faith's resilience in light of counterevidence?

Faith as an action (deny 3): faith goes beyond the evidence in the sense that it can be rational to *act as if* something is true, even if you have strong evidence that the thing is false (McKaughan 2013; Dormandy 2023).

Problems: (1) Uncreative in the sense that it falls out of basic decision theory. (2) Doesn't seem to tell us how attitude-focused faith can go beyond the evidence. (3) Not clear that it concerns *epistemic* rationality.

3. MY PROPOSAL: FAITH BREAKS EPISTEMIC TIES

3.1 Background: Evidence and Epistemic Permissivism

Evidence can be limited, complicated, and misleading. Even following our evidence perfectly doesn't always tell us exactly what to attitude to hold.

Epistemic permissivism: sometimes, the evidence rationally permits more than one belief-attitude toward a proposition.

- **Epistemic ties:** two attitudes are tied iff they are epistemically on a par, given the evidence. These ties can be:
 - **Intrapersonal:** involving a single agent and her evidence
 - **Synchronic:** at a time (rather than over time)
 - **Moderate** (involving withholding and believing OR withholding and disbelieving) and **Extreme** (involving all three belief-attitudes)
- Examples: Juror, Eye Chart, God

3.2 My Proposal

The basic idea: *faith breaks epistemic ties*.

- When 2 or 3 belief-attitudes are epistemically on a par—the evidence doesn't tell us which one to hold—one can demonstrate epistemically rational attitude-based faith by choosing the more faithful attitude.
 - Examples: theism, epistemic partiality

What is the more faithful attitude?

- Involves non-epistemic values (pragmatic, moral, relational/social, etc.)
- Certain attitudes may align better with our commitments.
- However, this may not always mean believing the best of others.

3.3 Motivating my Proposal

Straightforwardly solves our trilemma:

- **Faith can epistemically rational:** the attitudes in question are all rationally permissible, given the evidence. Evidence gets first say. Faith is irrational if you adopt an attitude that isn't evidentially permitted.
- **Faith goes beyond the evidence:** the evidence "leaves open" which attitude one should adopt.

Virtues of this solution:

- Consistent with evidentialism.
- Doesn't require we embrace that faith entails belief.
- Explains why faith often plays a crucial role when our evidence is inconclusive.
- Captures the idea that faith involves risk.

Objection: what about when our evidence only rationalizes a single attitude?

- Response 1: epistemic ties are actually quite common.
- Response 2: in no-tie cases, you could still be *disposed* to continue to hold the faithful attitude if you (say) received counterevidence.
- Response 3: action-focused faith can go beyond evidence in these cases.

4. FAITH AS VOLUNTARY?

Doxastic involuntarism very popular—but many people in that literature aren't thinking about the right cases. Most plausible cases of voluntary belief are going to be ones of ambiguous evidence, i.e. permissive cases.

- In these cases, we, at minimum, have a more robust (even if indirect) kind of voluntary control over our beliefs (i.e. we can form the belief more reliably and in a shorter time).
- I'm even open to a stronger claim: that we even sometimes have *direct* control in these cases (but I don't aim to defend that here).