

# Permissive Epistemic Standards and Rational Isolation

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## Abstract

The aim of the paper is to criticize and ultimately reject a formulation of epistemic permissivism that has received a fair amount of traction in recent literature, what I call 'Epistemic Standards Permissivism' ('ESP' hereafter). ESP is the view that what explains why there can be multiple rational replies to the same evidence is that agents can have different, yet equally rational, *epistemic standards*. I defend three objections to ESP. Each of these objections is motivated by a concern that ESP fails to acknowledge the epistemic value of *perspectival understanding*. Understanding the perspectives of others is required for determining how others can hold distinct yet rational epistemic standards. I argue that this oversight of ESP is reason enough to resist this view. ESP imposes an unwelcome isolation from the rationality of others with distinct epistemic standards. I discuss how being isolated from the rationality of others leads to unacceptable epistemic consequences. Specifically, this form of rational isolation prohibits the use of invaluable resources needed for epistemic growth and enrichment, such as the testimony and disagreement of rational peers.

## 1 Introduction

Percy and Ursula are skilled paleontologists who have recently been studying the Tyrannosaurus Rex. Though they have reviewed the very same evidence, they disagree. Percy is confident that the Tyrannosaurus Rex was a predator; Ursula is confident that it was not. Of course, only one of them could be right about this, but does this mean that whoever got it wrong has failed to rationally assess the evidence? Or, might both researchers be responding to the evidence rationally, despite reaching incompatible conclusions?

More generally: does a body of evidence rationalize just one doxastic response or is it possible (in at least some cases) for there to be multiple rational

ways of responding to the evidence? Defenders of *impermissivism* argue that there is at most one rational response, and defenders of *permissivism* argue that there can be more than one.<sup>1</sup> The aim of the paper is to criticize a formulation of permissivism that has received a fair amount of traction in recent literature, what I call ‘Epistemic Standards Permissivism’ (‘ESP’ hereafter). ESP is the view that what explains why there can be multiple rational replies to the same evidence is that agents can have different *epistemic standards*.<sup>2</sup> I defend three objections to ESP, each of which is motivated by a concern that ESP fails to acknowledge the epistemic importance of perspectival understanding. Understanding the perspectives of others is crucial for determining how others can hold distinct yet rational epistemic standards. In closing, I discuss how being isolated from the rationality of others leads to unacceptable epistemic consequences. Specifically, rational isolation prevents the use of invaluable resources for epistemic growth and enrichment, such as the testimony and disagreement of rational peers.

## 2 Varieties of Permissivism

### 2.1 Interpersonal and Intrapersonal

Permissivism comes in various stripes. However, most permissivists endorse *interpersonal* permissivism and reject *intrapersonal* permissivism.<sup>3</sup> Interpersonal permissivism allows for differing rational responses to a body of evidence, E, *across agents* and intrapersonal permissivism allows differing rational responses to E, for a *single* agent.<sup>4</sup> The following figure depicts the difference

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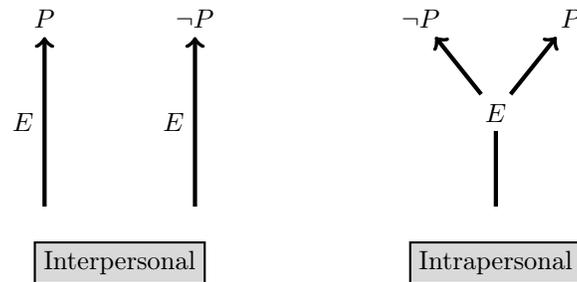
<sup>1</sup>Defenders of impermissivism include Christensen (2007), Dogramaci and Horowitz (2016), Feldman (2006), and White (2005, 2013), among others. Defenders of permissivism include Li (Forthcoming), Kelly (2013), Rosen (2001), Schoenfield (2012), and Weisberg (2017), among others.

<sup>2</sup>Defenders of ESP include Douven (2009), Schoenfield (2014), and Titelbaum and Kopec (forthcoming), and Simpson (2016). Historically, William James (1896) argues that there can be different *epistemic goals* that fix what is rational to believe. See Kelly (2014), Weisberg (forthcoming), and Horowitz (forthcoming) for discussions which connect James to permissivism. Subjective Bayesianism is another clear instance of ESP given that prior probability assignments can differ due to subjective factors. See Weisberg (forthcoming) for a discussion of this connection between ESP and Subjective Bayesianism.

<sup>3</sup>For example: Schoenfield (2014), Titelbaum and Kopec (forthcoming), and any Subjective Bayesian like, for example, Meacham (2014). Cf. Dogramaci and Horowitz (2016):146 who note upon this tendency among permissivists

<sup>4</sup>Note that interpersonal and intrapersonal permissivism are not necessarily mutually exclusive positions. It is possible for a permissivist to endorse both. See, for example, Weisberg (forthcoming) and Li (Forthcoming). Also, cf. Dogramaci and Horowitz (2016) who argue

between these two forms of permissivism:<sup>5</sup>



The view common to many permissivists, namely, the endorsement of interpersonal variation and the denial of intrapersonal variation can be formulated more strictly as follows:

INTER WITHOUT INTRA PERMISSIVISM (IWIP)

For at least some bodies of evidence  $E$ , and some proposition  $p$ , it is possible for an agent,  $A$ , to adopt a rational response,  $R$ , towards  $p$  given  $E$  and for a distinct agent,  $B$ , to adopt a different rational response,  $R^*$ , towards  $p$  given  $E$ .  $A$  can only rationally hold  $R$ , and  $B$  can only rationally hold  $R^*$ .

Take note of the use of ‘some’ in the above formulation. It is not the case that defenders of IWIP (and ESP), hold that *all* cases are permissive; to my knowledge, no permissivist holds this stronger and more radical stance. Instead, they admit that some bodies of evidence are impermissive. For example, they may claim that it would be irrational to have any credence other than .5 in the proposition that a fair coin will land heads.

It is also important to notice that defenders of IWIP are committed to there being a *unique* rational response at the level of the *individual*. Various contenders in the literature claim that one’s own epistemic standards determine what is uniquely rational for *them* to believe. Schoenfield (2014) compares epistemic standards to dials: rational agent each have their own personal dial that points precisely to the appropriate doxastic attitude for that agent to hold given her evidence. Moreover, and this is the crucial part, the dials may not all function in the same way; there can be different dials that point to different credence values even when taking account of the exact same evidence.<sup>6</sup> Less

that interpersonal permissivism requires intrapersonal permissivism.

<sup>5</sup>This figure is taken from Weisberg (Forthcoming): 5.

<sup>6</sup>Schoenfield (2014): 200.

metaphorically, Schoenfield says:

... the permissivist thinks that what it is reasonable to believe about  $p$  needs to be understood relative to some set of epistemic standards... the reason it is permissible for Anna and Bob to differ in their beliefs with regard to  $p$  is that Anna and Bob have different sets of standards, which differ regarding whether to believe  $p$ , given their body of evidence. Crucially, *no one set of epistemic standards will ever warrant belief in  $p$  and  $\neg p$ .*<sup>7</sup>

What permits for variation in rational responses towards the same evidence is differences in epistemic standards. The rationality of one's response to the evidence is always *relative* to one's standards which prescribe exactly one reply given a body of evidence.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.2 Immodesty and Moderation

More needs to be said about what epistemic standards are. Schoenfield defines them as: "function from bodies of evidence to doxastic states which the agent takes to be *truth conducive*."<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Weisberg (forthcoming) defines epistemic standards as "... the patterns of inference you think are *truth-conducive*."<sup>10</sup> It is important to emphasize the "taking-to-be-truth-conducive" aspect of what it is to have epistemic standards. By adopting a set of standards one thereby endorses those standards as *truth-conducive*. Having standards, then, requires that one an attitude of *immodesty* towards them; it requires that one take one's standards to be the most reliable and accurate way of acquiring true beliefs and avoiding false beliefs. Accordingly, one should think that standards which deviate from one's own will fall short in this regard, they will be less reliable, less accurate, less likely to result in true belief, and more likely to result in false belief. Sophie Horowitz (2014) notes that immodesty towards one's own standards is motivated by the thought that "a rational agent should

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid: 200. Italicization of the last sentence added.

<sup>8</sup>At Ibid: 198 Schoenfield poses an objection against the impermissivist claiming that this account is implausible because it assumes that agents are capable of making very *fine grained* judgments about what precise credence one should have in a body of evidence. However, given that Schoenfield herself endorses IWIP she is prone to a very similar objection. On her account, agents have epistemic standards that are able to make fine grained judgment about what doxastic attitude to have given a body of evidence.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid: 199, my emphasis.

<sup>10</sup>Weisberg (forthcoming): 5, 9-13, my emphasis. Additionally, Dogramaci and Horowitz (2016): 131 characterize epistemic standards in terms of rules, processes, or methods "that licence certain beliefs given certain evidence.". Also, see Simpson (2016):10-11.

be doing well by her own lights”<sup>11</sup> and characterizes immodesty as “. . . a kind of “internal harmony” among one’s beliefs about the world and one’s beliefs about truth.”<sup>12</sup> By employing one’s standards one can be confident that they are on the path towards true belief.

According to ESP, an agent, A, can take standards, S, to be the most truth-conducive and another agent, B, can take a *distinct* set of standards, S\*, to be the most truth-conducive, and *both* A and B can be rational when deploying their differing standards and believing in accordance with them. This is so even if S and S\* prescribe *conflicting* credences given the same evidence. A and B are both rational, says ESP, because each is processing the evidence correctly according to the dictates of their respective standards.

To be clear, it is not the case that just *any* epistemic standards are rational. Defenders of ESP generally deny what is often called ‘extreme’ or ‘immoderate’ permissivism: the view that one’s standards are rational simply in virtue of being coherent or internally consistent.<sup>13</sup> Rather, defenders of ESP go in for a *moderate* form of permissivism and impose robust rational constraints on standards. In a footnote, Schoenfield says that the “most plausible version of permissivism” posits “*substantive* rational requirements” on epistemic standards.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, Horowitz suggests that standards which might assign a higher credence to non-skeptical hypotheses compared to skeptical hypotheses might be a potential rational constraint.<sup>15</sup> Though, often defenders of ESP fail to explicitly spell out what these constraints might be.

### 2.3 Partial or Total?

Another feature of epistemic standards that often goes unexplained is if standards are partial or total functions. If standards are *total* functions then for any body of evidence, E, one’s standards can process E as an input and output a rational doxastic state to have given E. On the other hand, if epistemic standards are *partial* functions, then there will be some Es such that one’s standards are

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<sup>11</sup>Horowitz (2014): 43.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid: fn. 5. Note, Horowitz herself defends an impermissive view. Also, see Horowitz (Forthcoming), Feild (2008, 2009), and Elga (2010) for further discussions of immodesty towards one’s own epistemic rules and methods.

<sup>13</sup>See Horowitz (2014):43-5 for a discussion and criticism of this view in the context of Subjective Bayesianism. Also see White (2005) for a criticism of this position.

<sup>14</sup>Schoenfield (2014): 214. Italics added.

<sup>15</sup>Horowitz (2014):48. Recall that unlike Schoenfield, Horowitz herself defends a version of impermissivism.

unable to process them as inputs in the sense that one's standards will not output any doxastic attitude whatsoever to hold given E. In other words, if epistemic standards are *total* functions, then for *any* body of evidence they will assign a credence value to each and every proposition and if they are *partial* functions they will not.<sup>16</sup> It is also worth noting that given that one must take a stance of immodesty towards one's own standards, one's standards will assign a credence value of 1 to the propositional representation of one's epistemic standards.<sup>17</sup>

Schoenfield, for example, does not indicate explicitly whether standards are complete or partial functions. In Section 4, I argue that epistemic standards are most plausibly partial functions. It is highly unlikely that one's standards will be sensitive to *all* of the evidence one is confronted with. By this, I do not mean that one cannot process a body of evidence because they lack some specialized skill, or because it would take too much time or effort. Instead, I believe that there are in principle reasons to think that there is evidence that only some agents can process and others can't.<sup>18</sup> At this juncture, I simply wish to flag this aspect of epistemic standards that tends to go unaccounted for in espousals of ESP.

To summarize so far: defenders of ESP (in general) claim that evidence is *interpersonally* permissive and not *intrapersonally* permissive. The attitude that one should take towards one's epistemic standards is one of immodesty: one should believe that one's standards are the most truth-conducive. Furthermore, defenders of ESP tend to go in for a *moderate* form of permissivism according to which not just any standards count as rational. Instead, there are substantive

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<sup>16</sup>This distinction between partial and total functions is reminiscent of a distinction made by Matthew Kopec and Michael Titelbaum (2016): 190-191 between versions of the impermissivists thesis that permit for rational dilemmas compared to versions of impermissivism which do not. Versions of impermissivism which claim there is *at most* one rational attitude one can take towards  $p$  given E allow for rational dilemmas meaning that it is possible for there do be cases where there is no single rational attitude to have on the basis of E. Feldman (2007): 205 defends this version of impermissivism. Alternatively, versions of impermissivism which do not permit for rational dilemmas claim that there is always a *unique* rational attitude to take towards  $p$  given E. This versions of impermissivism is defend by White (2005): 455.

<sup>17</sup>Throughout the paper I use credences (i.e. degrees of belief), but nothing crucial turns on this. Epistemic standards can alternatively be understood as functions from evidence to all-or-nothing beliefs.

<sup>18</sup>The claim certain individuals hold differing access to epistemic resources and knowledge is prevalent in the literature on standpoint epistemology, see, e.g., Pohlhaus (2011) and Code (1993). Much of what I say in section 4 aligns with standpoint epistemology generally, however, I approach the idea that some agents have epistemic access to evidence that others do not through a different angle, namely, though the lens of transformative experience.

constraints placed upon epistemic standards that determine which standards are rational and which are not. What are these constraints on standards? As far as I know, defenders of ESP have yet to offer any satisfying answers to this question.

In the next section, I offer three objections against ESP. What unifies these objections is that they reveal the extent to which defenders of ESP fail to appreciate the importance of *perspective* in determining what is rational to believe. I argue that this oversight renders ESP unsatisfactory because it isolates agents from the rationality of others.

### 3 Understanding Others

#### 3.1 Bridging the Gap

Imagine a potential interlocutor of yours, call her ‘Franny’. Franny is, much like yourself, a smart, responsible, and astute epistemic agent. She is not mindlessly receptive or gullible when it comes to assessing the evidence she encounters. Conversely, she is mindful and always does her due diligence in determining what to believe. Assume that both Franny and yourself have epistemic standards that a view like ESP would deem rational. Imagine further that you are trying to put yourself into the perspective of Franny when she is assessing evidence relative to her standards. What might this be like?

Recall that a part of what it is to hold epistemic standards is to take them to be the most truth-conducive; by following your standards you can be confident that you will end up with more true beliefs and fewer false ones. Now consider Franny, she too thinks that *her* standards—which differ from yours—are the most truth-conducive. Hence, she, like you, thinks that by believing what *her* standards prescribe she will be positioning herself to form more true beliefs and fewer false ones. Here is the situation:

FRANNY’S PERSPECTIVE: My standards, S, are the most truth-conducive.

YOUR PERSPECTIVE: My standards, S\*, are the most truth-conducive.

By hypothesis, S and S\* differ. Your task now is to try, as hard as you possibly can, to grasp the sense in which Franny’s standards are truth-conducive.

Your first attempt to meet this task results in your thinking that at most

*Franny* takes S to be truth-conducive, but this is a far cry from *your* taking S to be the most truth-conducive. You wonder if this is the best you can do and search for a way to collapse the gap between the following two statements:

- (1) I take Franny to take S to be truth-conducive.
- (2) I take S to be truth-conducive.

You realize that the major barrier preventing you from moving from statement (1) to statement (2) is that you take your own differing standards S\* to be the most truth-conducive.

In your second attempt you try and rid yourself of these standards in order to take a *standard-free* neutral position ('S-neutral', hereafter). You think this could work; after all, if ESP is right then there must be some way you can see Franny as forming beliefs in a truth-conducive manner especially if you are to think of her as rational.

Weisberg (forthcoming) thinks that the ability to occupy an S-neutral standpoint is *required* by ESP. He says:

This is exactly what a permissivist claims to be able to see: that our standards are not the only rational ones, others hold contrary standards that are rational too. So from the permissivist's own perspective, we can see that S and S\* are equally promising as guides to the truth.<sup>19</sup>

In a footnote Weisberg adds:

Unless there is some perspective from which one can see that alternative standards really are rational – not just that they appear that way to those who hold them...then we cannot say...that people with different [standards]...are rational to interpret the evidence differently.<sup>20</sup>

Weisberg argues that one can entertain an S-neutral perspective from which one can assess the rationality of others' standards. What would an S-neutral perspective be like and how does it function to evaluate the rationality of epistemic standards? There must be some criteria that this perspective uses to judge the rationality of standards, some sorting method for determining which

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<sup>19</sup>Weisberg (forthcoming): 10. Weisberg uses 'S' and 'S\*' in the same way that I am using them.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid: fn. 18. Also see *ibid*: 12.

standards are rational and which are not. If so, this would *not* be an S-neutral perspective. It is highly implausible that one can rid themselves of standards entirely while still preserving the ability to adjudicate between standards for rationality.

Even if it were possible for one to occupy an S-neutral position it is unclear why this perspective would classify *multiple* standards as rational. It arguably more likely that an S-neutral perspective would pick out the *actually* truth-conducive standards (leaning in favor of impermissivism). Or, worse, a truly S-neutral perspective may simply be incapable of telling anything at all about the nature of rationality entirely (it would have too little to go off of). Furthermore, given that standards are functions from bodies of evidence to credences, the S-neutral perspective (if possible) must give a high credence to both S and S\*, but it is not clear how this can coherently be done if S and S\* prescribe conflicting credence values. In any event, it is at least unclear how an S-neutral perspective would support ESP over an impermissive view.<sup>21</sup>

ESP offers no satisfying way of understanding *from one's perspective* the sense in which other standards are truth-conducive, and hence, rational. But, perhaps rationality is not about truth-conduciveness; maybe the rationality of other standards can be grasped absent any assessment for truth-conduciveness. I explore this possibility next and argue that it too is problematic.

### 3.2 Asymmetry

The above considerations highlight an asymmetry typically found in ESP accounts that's worth making explicit. Defenders of ESP grant that one can think of other standards as being just as rational as one's own, while simultaneously holding that one's own standards are the most truth-conducive. That is, you can think of Franny's standards as, in Schoenfield words, "not as truth conducive but just as rational."<sup>22</sup>

One must understand the rationality of one's own standards *differently* from how one views the rationality of other standards. It is impossible for one to take one's own standards as rational but not truth-conducive, but one can understand the standards of *others* this way.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, when standards differ from one's

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<sup>21</sup>For a related discussion see Field (2008).

<sup>22</sup>Schoenfield (2014): 202.

<sup>23</sup>Simpson(2016):15-16 discusses the weirdness in this aspect of Schonfield's account, namely, that judgments about accuracy and rationality come apart.

own this is the *only* way to grasp their rationality under ESP.

One cannot adopt standards that are not taken to be the most truth-conducive; this violates immodesty and results in the odd predicament of forming beliefs according to standards that, by one's own lights, are not the best guides to the truth.<sup>24</sup> There is thus a major tension in ESP: one can only treat one's own standards as the most truth-conducive, but according to defenders of ESP, one can nonetheless identify other standards as *just as rational*. Defenders of ESP are silent on what explains this asymmetry. No compelling story is offer for why a tight connection between truth-conduciveness and rationality is unnecessary when judging others' standards, but this connection *is* necessary in one's own case. Furthermore, once one abandons the requirement that judgments of rationality must coincide with judgment about what is most truth-conducive rationality appears to lose its value. The more the rationality of others standards is pulled apart from judgments about accuracy and truth, the less one is able to see others as being *just as rational* as one's self. This result runs contrary to what appears to be a core premise of permissivism, namely, that this can be seen.

### 3.3 Anything Goes

Maybe standards get the status 'rational' simply in virtue of being held by an agent who takes them to be truth-conducive. That is, it only requires that some agent have a stance of immodesty towards her standards. This will, after all, cultivate an "internal harmony" between one's beliefs about the world and one's beliefs about truth, as Horowitz notes.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, I can understand Franny's standards as rational because *she* takes them to be the most truth-conducive.

An immediate worry with this approach, however, is that rationality is stricken of its usefulness. Agents get the status 'rational' on the cheap. If this were right, then standards that are wildly inaccurate and radically out of touch with reality would count as rational so long as an agent took them to

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<sup>24</sup>What's more, it may be impossible for an agent to genuinely form beliefs on the basis of standards that they do not endorse as truth-conducive because one cannot believe what one does not think is likely to be true. Or, to put this point another way: one can't believe in the face of a defeater, i.e., a standard that they take to be more truth-conducive that prescribes a different doxastic state.

<sup>25</sup>Horowitz (2014): fn. 5. It is worth reiterating that Horowitz herself is an impermissivist.

be the most truth-conducive.<sup>26</sup> This would be extreme or immoderate permissivism which many defends of ESP deny. They instead endorse a *moderate* approach to permissivism and imposes rational constraints on standards beyond immodesty, but recall that these constrains are insufficiently spelled out.<sup>27</sup>

In addition to immodesty, perhaps we should require that the agent who holds the standards must be a *rational* agent. So, I can know that Franny's standards are rational because I know that *she* is rational. Even with this constraint ESP remains unsatisfying. This is because it lacks explanatory depth and looms with circularity. Why are standards rational? ESP's Answer: because some *rational* agent takes them to be truth-conducive and this makes them *rational*. The relationship between Franny's rationality and the rationality of her standards remains unclear—especially once an appeal to accuracy or truth-conduciveness is off the table.

A key insight that generates these three objections is that defenders of ESP fail to account for the role of *perspective* in one's adoption of epistemic standards. By invoking a permissive rage of rational standards ESP blocks the potential for agents to see others standards as reliable and trustworthy routes to the truth. This is because adoption of a standard requires a commitment to those standards being the *most* accurate means for evaluating evidence and forming true beliefs (and avoiding false belief). A direct consequence of this is that any standards but one's own will be seen as less than optimal from one's own perspective. Defenders of ESP have generally taken this to be a *good* thing because agents are not forming their beliefs arbitrarily, but instead are believing in accordance with the standards that they deem to be maximally accurate.<sup>28</sup> But what this commitment to one's standard also yields is an unwelcome isolation from the rationality of others—by adopting standards one thereby obscures from view the rationality of standards that differ from one's own.

In the next section, I explore a case study involving disagreement and transformative experience. This will further illustrate problems faced by ESP, namely,

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<sup>26</sup>Cf. Horowitz (2014): 45, and Dogramaci and Horowitz (2016): 139.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Schoenfield (2014): fn. 16.

<sup>28</sup>This relates to an objection raised in White (2005) against permissivism. White argues that if multiple beliefs are rational to have in light of the same evidence, then whatever the agent ends up believing is arbitrary (they can just choose from a number of different rational replies). Schoenfield argues that *because* one takes an immodest approach to their standards—one takes them to be the most truth-conducive—then one has a non-arbitrary reason to maintain the belief prescribed by one's own standards opposed to a belief prescribed by some other rational standard.

that ESP leads to epistemic isolation from the rationality of others. Focusing on transformative experience and disagreement also demonstrates why epistemic standards are most plausibly thought of as partial functions (as was previously noted in section 2.3).

## 4 Disagreement and Transformative Experience

Here are some things I have never experienced: having a child, serving time in a maximum security prison, and being deaf. L.A. Paul (2014) classifies these as *epistemically* and *personally transformative* experiences (‘EPTE’ hereafter). An experience is *epistemically* transformative, Paul claims, if one learns something new from having that experience that one could not have learned otherwise. An example she offers is Jackson’s (1982) Mary in the black and white room.<sup>29</sup> When Mary leaves the black and white room and sees red for the first time she, in virtue of having this experience, knows what it is like to see red; her “epistemic perspective” is changed.<sup>30</sup> Paul describes *personally* transformative experience as follows:

If an experience changes you enough to substantially *change your point of view*, thus substantially *revising your core preferences*. . . it is a personally transformative experience.<sup>31</sup>

Paul discusses a blind saxophonist’s EPTE, specifically, his transition from being blind to being sighted. She says:

. . . in addition to changing the way he organizes and lives his life, and changing his relationship with his family and friends, it will change his auditory and tactile experience, which are likely to change many of his central lived experiences, including his experience of playing the saxophone.<sup>32</sup>

When having an EPTE, then, at least two things happen: (i) one gains knowledge about what it is like to have that experience—knowledge that could not have been gained independent of the experience and (ii) one’s core preferences undergo change (sometimes irreversibly so). Reflecting on EPTE is useful for our

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<sup>29</sup>Paul (2014):76.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid:10.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid: 16. Italics added.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid: 170.

purposes because it offers a way of understanding how one's epistemic standards can undergo change. One's epistemic dispositions and patterns of attention will not remain the same after having an EPTE. EPTEs also reveal why epistemic standards are most plausibly partial functions from evidence to credences. This is because EPTE are experiences that can serve as evidence for certain agents, but *only on the condition that the agent has the EPTE*. By hypothesis, Paul argues, an outsider has no clue what it is like to have these experiences.<sup>33</sup>

Additionally, EPTEs illustrate extreme cases where one is completely alienated from the rationality of others. To see this imagine a couple, Raquel and Avery, who each possess rational epistemic standards yet disagree on whether their deaf born child should receive a cochlear implant allowing her to hear.<sup>34</sup> Imagine further that Raquel is deaf and that Avery has had more or less perfect auditory perception his whole life. Avery thinks that the decision is a no-brainer: *of course* their child should receive a cochlear implant. Raquel is strongly opposed to this as she deeply appreciates being apart of the deaf community. This is a unique and cherished part of her identity; it is an essential part of who she is and her way of being in the world. She does not think that deafness is something that needs to be "cured" with a cochlear implant. To the contrary, she is *happy* that her child will also be a member of the deaf community. Avery is trying his hardest to level with his partner and understand where she is coming from, but no matter how hard he tries he just does not get it. He fails to grasp the sense in which Raquel could genuinely and *rationally* believe that being deaf was a *good* thing for their child. The same goes for Raquel in the other direction, she cannot grasp why Avery fails to understand that the implant would be a bad (and even morally objectionable) procedure for their child to undergo. She just does not get his point of view, and does not see how this procedure could ever be a *good* thing for their child. Each is unable to fathom the rationality of the others' judgment.

According to ESP it is possible for Raquel and Avery to have standards which are equally rational. Raquel and Avery are very much in the same position as you were to Franny at the beginning of the paper. Each is unable to see the rationality of the others' standards. Avery is unable to see Raquel's opinion

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<sup>33</sup>Paul (2014):85-9 notes that one may have indirect evidence from testimony or empirical statistical evidence but this will be insufficient for truly understanding what these experiences are like.

<sup>34</sup>This case is adapted from Paul (2014): 56-60.

as posing a serious challenge to his own. But, at the same time, it does not appear that Avery has grounds to downgrade Raquel's view as wrong or mistaken either. Instead, his standards simply lack the processing power needed to understand the credibility of her position.<sup>35</sup> Raquel's testimony neither bolsters nor diminishes Avery's confidence in his own belief concerning their child. The same holds *mutatis mutandis* for Raquel. Polarized disagreements between individuals with diametrically opposed, yet rational, opinions demonstrate why the more permissive rational standards are the more potential there is for rational alienation. That is, cases where two individual who hold opposed and radically different views are nonetheless both rational.

ESP faces serious hurdles when it comes to understanding the rationality of others. In some cases, such as those involving EPTs, one is completely incapable of judging another as rational and this can leave one epistemically paralyzed: unable to make any rational assessments concerning the evidential significance of others' testimony. This is due to limitations in one's own standards, one lacks the ability to see the rational credibility in standards that deviate from one's own.

Because ESP allows for multiple sets of rational epistemic standards, it also thereby creates barriers to understanding the rationality of others which can lead to rational isolation. Being isolated from the rationality of others serves to severely limit the kinds of rational engagements one can have with others and, importantly, the extent to which one can glean epistemic goods from them. In the last section, I discuss how being rationally isolated from others has detrimental epistemic consequences because it may prohibits the use of important resources needed for epistemic growth and enrichment, such as the testimony and disagreement of others.

## 5 Further Implication

The inability to judge others as rational is no trivial concern. Trust in the evidential assessments and judgments of others is an invaluable and ubiquitous feature of epistemic life. A substantial amount of knowledge one has is acquired

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<sup>35</sup>This point relates to what Rovane (2011) calls 'normative insularity', see especially her discussion of disagreement at 41-5, though, Rovane makes a much stronger claim than I do. Discussion of this would take the paper too far afield.

through the testimony of others.<sup>36</sup> Sinan Dogramaci (2012) notes:

...if you present me with testimony but not your evidence, I can still trust that, whatever your evidence was, you formed the same belief that I would on the basis of it. Furthermore, not only can I make use of your...evidence, I can make use of your computational resources for reasoning.<sup>37</sup>

Dogramaci's point is that to gain knowledge through testimony one must be confident that one's informant is telling the truth. But, this requires one to trust that the standards they employ are reliable guides to the truth. Defenders of ESP will have a hard time justifying beliefs formed on the basis of testimony, if there are barriers to judging the rationality of others.

ESP, furthermore, limits the kinds of rational engagements we can have through disagreeing with peers who hold different rational standards. If one is unable to grasp the sense in which one's dissenter's standards are just as rational as one's own, then one may not take a rational agent's disagreement as an indication that one's own belief is misguided. By the lights of ESP, one can simply recognize that one's standards are the most truth-conducive and that – while one's dissenter is just as rational – from one's perspective they are not getting things right. Disagreement with others who hold rational yet differing standards are unlikely to provide one with higher order evidence that one may have assessed the evidence wrongly.<sup>38</sup>

ESP faces some serious drawbacks. This view is an unsatisfactory approach because it fails to appreciate the crucial role perspectival understanding, specifically understanding rationality of others' epistemic standards, has in cultivating and enriching one's own epistemic life.

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<sup>36</sup>For an in-depth defence of this point see C.J.A. Coady (1992) and Lackey (2008).

<sup>37</sup>Dogramaci (2012): 525. Also see, Dogramaci and Horowitz (2016).

<sup>38</sup>Cf. Christensen (2007) and Kelly (2010).

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