

Doubt and Suspension: Two Attitudes or One?

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ABSTRACT: Are doubt and suspension of judgment similar attitudes? In the burgeoning literature on suspension of judgment, the notion of doubt is curiously absent. This paper aims to argue for the plausibility of an identity claim, which I term the “No-Difference View.” This view suggests that there is no substantial difference between being in doubt and suspending judgment. The argument will draw on historical and systematic considerations that support the No-Difference View as a plausible view within the logical space of positions.

KEYWORDS: doubt, suspension of judgement, belief, epistemology, mental states.

SUMMARY: Philosophers acknowledge similarities between the two attitudes of suspension of judgment and doubt but refrain from equating them. This paper explores the “No-Difference View,” arguing that doubt and suspension of judgment are fundamentally the same. The argument is supported by historical and systematic evidence, as well as shared epistemic and rational features.

1. Introduction

Are doubt and suspension of judgement the same attitude? According to Jane Friedman, “suspension of judgment is not a familiar folk-psychological attitude, but it is a doxastic attitude often discussed by epistemologists” (Friedman, forthcoming). In contrast, doubt takes a back seat in contemporary epistemological discussions, despite being a familiar folk-psychological attitude and holding a central role in epistemology, particularly since Descartes’s *Meditations*. While several contemporary philosophers recognize shared properties between doubt and suspension, none of them seems to be ready to endorse the stronger claim that these attitudes are identical. For instance, according to Friedman:

[S]uspension shares [with doubt] this push towards its own demise: in suspending we ask a question and (at least in some minimal sense) seek an answer. Although *I don’t think that doubt and suspension are identical*, [...] it wouldn’t be surprising if *doubt and suspension shared this property* [viz. it prompts us to inquire until it is extinguished]. It is widely thought that we find uncertainty and ambiguity and the like aversive. (Friedman, 2017, p. 316, my emphasis)

Similarly, in her seminal paper on suspended judgement (Friedman, 2013a) where she raises the “Reduction Question” of whether having a suspensive attitude just is “a matter of having some familiar indecision-representing attitudes”, Friedman carefully excludes belief and credences, but doubt is mentioned without being really examined. It is thus generally admitted, more or less explicitly, that doubt and suspension are two different attitudes. Their relationship remains underexplored.² Relatedly, the received triadic taxonomy of our main

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² Lee (2018) and Moon (2018), are notable exceptions in contemporary philosophy concerning the relationship between suspension and doubt. In their respective papers on doubt, they both discuss distinctions between different kinds of doubt and attempt to relate them to suspension. However, this question is not the central issue of the mentioned papers. According to Moon (2018,

doxastic stances, according to which there are three and only three doxastic attitudes – namely, *belief*, *disbelief*, and *suspension of judgment*—fails to make room for doubt.³ This triadic representation of our doxastic life implicitly supports the idea that doubt and suspension are separate beasts, where doubt is out of the picture (within the taxonomy of categorical attitudes). Consider for instance two recent statements of this representation:

[I]t is orthodox to think that there are (at least) three coarse-grained doxastic reactions that are governed by epistemic rationality: belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment. (Lord 2024, p. 419)

Whenever a person considers any proposition, that person must believe the proposition, or disbelieve the proposition, or suspend judgment about the proposition. A person cannot at any time have more than one of these attitudes toward one proposition. (Feldman 2014, p. 46)

It is quite incontrovertible that suspending on whether something is the case radically differs from *doubting that* something is the case: if you *doubt that* ghosts are haunting your house, you are not in a state of suspended judgement about the issue; if you *doubt that* *p*, you are taking a *non-neutral stance* towards *p*—you disbelieve, or are strongly inclined towards disbelieving, that *p*.⁴ So if you *doubt that* some ghosts are haunting your house, and I ask you whether it is indeed the case that ghosts are haunting your house, you will likely respond with a direct ‘No’ or be inclined to provide such a negative answer. But things are much less clear when it comes to the attitude of being in doubt as to whether *p*. Suppose you often hear weird and unexplained noises at night. Suppose you start *being in doubt* about whether ghosts are haunting your house, and cannot tell whether this is the case or not, which you would like to be able to decide. It would be natural here to say two things: (i) that you are in a state of suspended judgement about whether ghosts are haunting your house, and (ii) that you are in doubt on this issue. In such case, in answering the question whether ghosts are haunting your house, you will certainly utter that you cannot say ‘Yes’, *and* that you cannot say ‘No’. In our little scenario, you have a neutral attitude towards *p*: you neither believe nor disbelieve that ghosts are haunting your house – which is sufficient to show that *being in doubt* as to whether

p. 1830), verb forms of doubt, like “Fred doubts that Sally will arrive on time,” indicate “at least a strong inclination to disbelieve,” while sentences like “Fred is in doubt about whether Sally will arrive on time” suggest a more “on-the-fence suspension of judgment.” This idea is further explored in Rosa (forthcoming b.); see below § 5.1.4. Lee (2018, p. 55), contrary to Moon (2018), identifies suspension with intermediate levels of doubt (between slight and strong doubt). See also Hookway (2002) for interesting remarks on Peircian ‘real doubt’ and suspension, and Machuca (2021) concerning Sextus Empiricus’ notion of suspension and its compatibility with doubt.

³ The triadic picture is largely assumed in contemporary epistemology. See for instance, Comesaña & Klein (2019), Friedman (2017, p. 322, note 3), Rosa (forthcoming b.), Sosa (2017, p. 38), and Wedgwood (2002, p. 272). Doubt is very rarely designated as the third stance in the triadic picture, thus taking the place of suspension; see Ducasse (1940), Johnson (1921), and Stebbing (1930).

⁴ Rosa (forthcoming a.) refers to such doubt as a “negative attitude”: the *doubt-that* expression corresponds here to an “attitude of outright disbelief,” or at least “an attitude that leans toward disbelief.” Gaultier (forthcoming) observes that “one could argue that this alleged form of doubt [doubt that] is not in fact a form of doubt at all, but just a belief or judgement: the belief or judgement that, given the available evidence, it is unlikely that A is the right answer to Q.”

p differs from *doubting that p* and *having doubts* about p , which both do not imply such a neutral attitude towards p .⁵

If we want to clarify the central roles these notions play, both in our mental economy and in our doxastic lives, it is crucial to capture their relations and similarities to each other. My goal in this paper is to argue that there is no substantial difference between the two attitudes of being in doubt (to which I shall simply refer in the rest of this paper by the term “doubt”) and being in a state of suspended judgement. I will thus examine considerations favoring the plausible thesis, the NO-DIFFERENCE View (henceforth “ND”), as I shall call it.

I shall first clarify what suspension involves, at least in its minimal form (§2), before showing that the NO-DIFFERENCE View finds strong support in unfortunately neglected discussions in the history of philosophy, whether about the descriptive or the normative aspects of doubt and suspension (§3). I shall then advance additional arguments in favor of ND, based on the similarity of the rational profiles of doubt and suspension (§4). In the final section, I will briefly examine whether ND is in fact compatible with certain of the views of suspension defended in the contemporary literature (§5). Rather than offering knockdown arguments, I will advance a variety of reasons in favor of ND, my primary aim being to argue for the overlooked plausibility of this view.

2. A minimalist characterization of suspension of judgement

In advocating for the plausibility of ND, I need to characterize the nature of suspension without endorsing a specific analysis. My aim is to establish common ground between the differing conceptions in the debate on suspension. As mentioned in the introduction, this paper examines the relationship between *being in doubt* and *being in a state of suspended judgment*. I assume that episodic ‘suspending’ marks the beginning of what is known in the literature as a ‘state of suspended judgment,’ similar to how a judging episode initiates a belief state. Two ambiguities in the literature are worth noting: (1) the difference between an active notion of suspension (as seen in agential views; see McGrath, 2024) and a stative view, which has been the focus since Friedman’s (2013a) seminal paper; and (2) the challenge of interpreting ‘suspension of judgment,’ given some strong assumptions in the debate (e.g., that suspension is a doxastic attitude (Friedman, 2017), and in understanding what exactly characterizing suspension as an attitude of “committed neutrality” amounts to; see, on this last point, Friedman, 2022). Therefore, I follow the majority of contemporary epistemologists in assuming that suspension is a mental state (Friedman, 2013a).

Even though, as Errol Lord (2023) aptly notes, the current debate about suspension of judgment “is in some ways the Wild West because there is large and largely implicit disagreement about the basic features of suspension,” I find amidst the ongoing discussions at least one discernible common ground: suspension is a sort of neutral attitude. One of the main points of contention between the different accounts concerns how to cash out this neutral stance:

⁵ See Howard-Snyder (2013, p. 359) on this distinction. In drawing this distinction between different kinds of doubt, Rosa (forthcoming a.) acknowledges that “to have doubts about p is neither to doubt that p nor to be in doubt as to whether p (not necessarily).” See Lee (2018, p. 142), Moon (2018), and Rosa (forthcoming a.) on the differences between (a) the verbal form of doubt, (b) the prepositional mass-locution ‘in doubt’, and (c) the count-noun usage of doubt. For the fine-grained semantic distinction between *doubt-that* and *doubt-whether*, see Asher (1987) and Uegaki (2023).

NEUTRALITY When a subject *S* suspends judgment on *p*, *S* is in a neutral state of mind about whether *p* is true or false.

There is nothing mysterious about this neutrality condition. We can understand it, referring to its etymology (*ne+uter*), as meaning ‘neither this nor that’. The required neutrality present across all cases of suspension implies neither believing *p* nor disbelieving *p*, or neither affirming nor denying that *p*. If ND holds, this essential feature of neutrality must also be present in all instances of doubt.

For most contemporary epistemologists, the lack of belief/disbelief involved by NEUTRALITY is necessary, but not sufficient for suspension; further conditions need to be added to adequately capture suspension (see McGrath, 2024, for a recent overview of the debate).⁶ In the following sections, we will see that some of these further conditions recently discussed in the literature on suspension—in terms of preconditions for judging (e.g., ‘consideration condition’ or ‘cognitive contact’; see Wagner, 2022), and in terms of epistemic reasons—are constitutive of historical accounts of doubt.

3. Historical evidence for NO-DIFFERENCE

In this section, I will provide historical data from various philosophical traditions and periods. They converge in supporting the NO-DIFFERENCE view:

ND There is no substantial difference between being in doubt about whether *p* and being in a state of suspended judgement about whether *p*.

More precisely, the support ND receives from the history of philosophy takes three (partly overlapping) forms: (i) the *Simple view*, according to which the state of doubt is nothing more than a state of suspension; (ii) the *Scholastic view*, according to which two different species of rational doubt must be distinguished, and which characterizes doubt as an evidence-sensitive suspended state of mind; and (iii) the *Belief view*, according to which the state of doubt is a state of suspended judgment that consists of having a belief about one’s (defective) epistemic situation.

3.1.1 The Simple View

The *Simple View* is the idea that doubt is to be characterized in terms of suspension of judgment. We can read in Blackburn (2005, p. 104-105) that doubt is “[t]he state of neither believing nor disbelieving a proposition; a suspension of judgement.” According to this minimal definition, doubt is a privative or negative state: that of neither believing nor disbelieving something. This echoes Ralph Wedgwood’s account of suspension, according to which “one ‘suspends judgment’ about *p* when one consciously considers *p* but neither believes nor disbelieves *p*” (2002, p. 272). It’s worth noting that Wedgwood introduces a crucial consideration condition for suspension, which is absent from Blackburn’s lexical definition

⁶ Conceptions according to which suspension is not a proper doxastic stance, but rather an agentive intentional omission, a bracketing, a refraining from judging, or a postponing of belief-formation (see McGrath (2024) for an overview of different candidates) are compatible with NEUTRALITY. See Archer (2024) on the act/attitude relation in the suspension literature, and particularly McGrath’s (2021) account. Wagner (2022) also argues that suspension is a mental act of endorsing or committing to one’s indecision. Note that none of these authors reject NEUTRALITY.

(see Wagner, 2022, p. 673 on this “cognitive contact” requirement). Applied to doubt, this condition means that a subject cannot be in doubt about a proposition she has not considered. As G.F. Stout writes (1896, p. 102), “[i]n doubting we must at least *propose a question* to ourselves.” I cannot be in doubt about whether Ruby acted alone when killing Oswald if I have never considered the question, and the same goes for suspension. Another minimal characterization of doubt is provided by Berkeley (1713):

Philonous: Does doubting consist in accepting the affirmative or the negative side of a question?

Hylas: Neither. Anyone who understands English must know that doubting signifies a suspense between the two sides.

In this passage, Berkeley defines doubt (roughly) as suspension of belief (Hart 1980, p. 32-33). According to the Simple view, NEUTRALITY is the specific and central common feature of doubt and suspense: when you are in doubt, you are in suspense. Another characterization of being in doubt is found in Bolzano’s work (1973, p. 65):

If one proposition seems just as probable to us as its opposite, then we can neither judge it is true nor judge that it is false, but we are in doubt.

Bolzano does not use the term “suspension,” but his characterization of being in doubt is very close to it. Moreover, we can assume here that not making a judgement and falling into a state of doubt is the same as neither believing nor disbelieving that *p*.

The upshot is that, according to the *Simple view*, doubt is characterized in terms of suspension. This explicitly offer a descriptive condition essential to being in doubt and suspense: neither belief nor disbelief that *p* (or neither accepting nor negating that *p*) after considering a question. The two attitudes are characterized as both epistemically neutral towards their content. Being in doubt is thus identical to a suspended/suspensive state of mind. These definitions remain minimal but it seems legitimate, at this point, to consider ND as a plausible position.

3.1.2 The Scholastic View

The *Scholastic view* builds on the *Simple view*, which defines doubt as “a state in which the mind is suspended between two contradictory propositions and unable to assent to either of them” (Sharpe 1909, p. 141). However, the Scholastic view adds a crucial normative condition: a subject doubts a proposition *p* based on epistemic reasons. This emphasis on reason-responsiveness explains how doubt can vary in epistemic rationality depending on the available evidence. Unlike the Simple view, the Scholastic view highlights that reason-responsiveness is constitutive of doubt, and introduces a significant distinction in the types of reasons for doubt. Rational doubt is thereby divided into two species, *negative doubt* and *positive doubt*.⁷ To illustrate these two species of doubt, here are two toy examples:

⁷ Sharpe (1909, p. 141) provides a concise and useful explanation of the distinction: “Doubt is either *positive* or *negative*. In the former case, the evidence for and against is so equally balanced as to render decision impossible; in the latter, the doubt arises from the absence of sufficient evidence on either side.” This distinction has been recognized and endorsed by a long tradition taking its origins in St. Thomas Aquinas (*Super Sent.*, lib. 3 d. 23 q. 2 a. 2 qc. 1 co.; *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate*, q. 14 (“On faith”), art. 1) and Suárez (*De triplici virtute theologica*, in

The Crowd Estimation

Kate is asked whether some large assembly forms an odd or an even number based on a photographic picture of some event. She leans to neither side, for lack of the means of deciding, even with probability, one way rather than another.

What is Kate's state of mind? A question is presented to her for consideration. She has no valid reason to believe that the number of people in the picture is even or odd. She remains neutral, in a perfectly balanced state, unable to judge. She is in doubt about which is the correct answer, not having the slightest ground for mentally affirming any of these conflicting answers. It is the lack of conclusive evidence one way or another that bring about this state. This is a case of what the scholastics called **negative doubt** (*dubium negativum*): "It may be defined as the equipoise of the mind, due to the absence of any valid reasons on either side" (Rickaby, 1888, p. 45). The second example is the following:

Edmund in Paris

One autumn evening, Edmund is strolling on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées. He sees a figure standing in a store window, which he initially takes to be a real man, perhaps an employee working there. Then, however, Edmund becomes hesitant and asks himself whether it is not just a mere dummy.

Similar to Kate's state of mind, Edmund also finds himself suspended between two alternatives. His hesitation stems from an equal balance of pros and cons regarding the two alternatives, making the decision impossible—at least until he settles the question by, for instance, moving closer or handwaving the supposed man in the window store, waiting for a reaction. As G.F. Stout puts it, "there is a positive tendency both to affirm and deny the mutually exclusive alternatives" (Stout 1896, p. 102). Edmund's dubitative attitude consists of a fluctuation between conflicting beliefs: <There is a man standing there> and <No, there is no man there, it is a mere dummy>. Using the scholastic terminology, we can classify his doubt as positive. **Positive doubt** (*dubium positivum*), corresponds to "the equipoise of the mind, due to the fact that the reasons on either side are equal and opposite" (Rickaby, 1888, p. 45). This idea of equally balanced reasons should be put in parallel with the definition of suspension in Book I of the *Pyrrhonian Hypothesis* (§ 96), where Sextus remarks that

Suspension of judgement gets its name from the fact that the intellect is suspended so as neither to accept nor to reject anything because of the equipollence of the matters investigated. (Annas & Barnes 2000, p. 49)⁸

Suárez 2015, p. 950, p. 953-954) before becoming a *locus classicus* in Neo-scholastic textbooks. According to this tradition, doubt is one attitude that one can have towards some content, and it differs in kind from opinion, suspicion, or certainty (see for instance Coppens, 1891, and Rickaby, 1888).

⁸ To press this point, let me note that Machuca (2021) has recently examined the question of whether the Pyrrhonist's suspension is incompatible with doubt, and thus concludes his paper: "I think we can safely say that doubt per se is not at variance with the Pyrrhonian stance." Machuca also accepts (as I do in this paper) the distinction between *doubt-that* and *being in doubt*, and explicitly characterizes doubt as "the mental state of indecision and puzzlement described by such sentences as 'S is in doubt about whether p' or 'S doubts whether (or not) p'" (Machuca, 2021, p. 51).

To summarize, according to the Scholastic View, doubt manifests in two species, both fundamentally reflecting a suspensive state of mind. As articulated by Rickaby (1888, p. 45), “in one case, the balance is due to the absence of producible reasons [negative doubt], in the other case to the presence of exactly countervailing reasons [positive doubt].” As we will see below (§4), this distinction is mirroring evidential norms for suspension discussed in contemporary epistemology.⁹

3.1.3 The Belief View

Similarly to the two previous views of doubt, according to the *Belief View*, doubt is a suspension of judgment. However, there is an important component integrated into the analysis of doubt. Doubt involves NEUTRALITY *and* having a belief about one’s (defective) epistemic situation. To illustrate this conception, let’s turn to Robert Flint, an underrated representative of the Belief view (I divide the quotation into three parts for clarity):

[a] So far from implying an entire absence of judgment, doubt is a suspension of judgment based on the judgment that neither an affirmative nor a negative judgment would be warranted in the circumstances. [...] [b] Doubt is an actual or positive condition of mind, and often a most legitimate and valuable one, but it requires justification equally with belief and disbelief, and it can only be justified by showing that, for affirmation and negation, the reasons both for belief and disbelief are insufficient – that they counterbalance and counteract one another. [...] [c] To doubt is to believe that there is no warrant for a firm decision—that there is insufficient evidence for a resolved and settled belief. (Flint 1903, p. 256-257)

In part [a] we encounter a first formulation of the *Belief view*. Flint indicates that the doubt is based on a judgement, but not specifically on a first-order judgment regarding whether p is true or not. Instead, the content of the judgement concerns our capacity to make a rational judgment about whether p (“neither an affirmative nor a negative judgment would be warranted in the circumstances”). In part [b], and in contrast to the Scholastic view, Flint combines, in his description, the two traditional types of reasons for doubt (insufficient reasons, and counterbalanced reasons for and against belief/disbelief). Finally, in part [c], there is a complete formulation of the Belief view, which can be rephrased more contemporarily: to doubt whether p is to believe something about one’s (deficient) epistemic situation regarding p , specifically that one is not in a position to be justified in believing/disbelieving p . Both the Scholastic and the Belief views claim that doubt is a suspension of judgment grounded in epistemic reasons, but they differ in how doubt is analyzed. The Belief view conceives doubt as a conjunction of a first-order doxastic stance concerning whether p (corresponding to NEUTRALITY) and a higher-order belief about one’s epistemic situation. In this picture, to doubt is not merely to have an absence of belief or disbelief about the targeted issue, but also to have, as a necessary condition, a belief about one’s perspective concerning the targeted issue, e.g., that one lacks rational grounds to form a rational belief.

In summary, in contrast to the Simple and Scholastic views of doubt, a further specific condition is necessary: being in doubt requires having a belief about one’s epistemic (defective)

⁹ Interestingly, Archer (2024) and Zinke’s (2021) respective accounts of negative/positive justification and privative/positive justification for suspension align closely with the Scholastic view on the positive/negative justification of doubt.

situation concerning *p*. For instance, according to Stout, doubt “presupposes belief in a disjunctive judgment. It consists in acknowledging the reality of one or other of two or more alternatives without deciding between them” (Stout 1896, p. 101). The Belief view of doubt finds a parallel in the recent literature on suspension. For example, Sean Crawford argues that: “Suspension of judgement necessarily involves thoughts about one’s own epistemic perspective on whether or not *p*, namely, that one’s epistemic perspective falls short of establishing whether *p* and thus that one does not know whether *p*” (Crawford, 2004, p. 226). The belief-based view of suspension is further articulated by Raleigh (2021), and Masny (2020, p. 5024): “S suspends judgment about *p* iff (i) S believes that she neither believes nor disbelieves that *p*, (ii) S neither believes nor disbelieves that *p*, (iii) S intends to judge that *p* or not-*p*.” Without delving into the details of these accounts, it’s noteworthy that recent explanations of suspension closely resemble older accounts of doubt, providing additional support for the plausibility of the NO-DIFFERENCE view.¹⁰

4. The Rational Profiles of Suspension and Doubt

At this juncture, the focus is on the shared characteristics between doubt and suspension, particularly their rationality and convergence in terms of epistemic justification/rationality. It is widely acknowledged that a crucial requirement for a theory of suspension is to elucidate what makes holding this attitude epistemically justified or rational (see Archer 2022; Atkinson, 2021; Raleigh, 2021; Zinke 2021). If one embraces the NO-DIFFERENCE view, it follows that *being in doubt* and *being suspended* are necessarily governed by the same epistemic norms. What are these norms? The following two (the Absence of Evidence and the Counterbalanced Evidence norms) are the less controversial ones in the literature on suspension:

Absence of Evidence Norm

In the absence of [relevant] evidence for or against an ordinary contingent proposition *p*, it is epistemically permissible to suspend judgment about *p*.

This norm should bring to mind the concept of *negative doubt* articulated by the Scholastic view (cf. § 3.1.2). To expound on this norm, Friedman (2013b) claims that “if you are going to have some attitude towards an ordinary contingent proposition that you understand but about which you have absolutely no evidence either for or against, you cannot be going wrong by suspending judgment” (Friedman, 2013b, p. 60). In other words, it is a *permissibility* norm, i.e., in such evidential situation, suspending judgement is permissible from an epistemological point of view. For instance, suppose that you have no information about the distribution of 100 balls in one urn. It could be 99 white balls and 1 red, it could be 50/50, 49/51, or 75/25. You simply do not possess the information. Will the next ball be red or white? According to the

¹⁰ See Archer (2024) for a critical discussion of the variety of belief-based accounts of suspension, and Wagner (2022, p. 679) on the different contents of the relevant higher-order belief. See also Hookway’s (2002) discussion of belief views of doubt, according to which “to doubt a proposition is to take an evaluative stance towards it” (Hookway, 2002, p. 247). However, in Hookway’s Peirce-inspired account of ‘real doubt,’ an affective component is essential: being in a state of real doubt involves anxiously evaluating one’s epistemic situation as epistemically dangerous or unsafe, which in turn shapes our actions to eliminate the doubt through inquiry (see Gaultier, forthcoming).

Absence of Evidence Norm, suspending judgement about whether it will be a red ball or a white one is epistemically permissible.¹¹ The other evidential norm is as follows:

Counter-balanced Evidence Norm

In case evidence is counterbalanced for or against an ordinary contingent proposition p – it equally supports believing p and disbelieving p – it is epistemically rational to suspend judgment about p .

This norm is directly tied to *positive doubt* (cf. § 3.1.2). Suppose now, that you know that there are 50 white balls and 50 red balls in a 100-ball urn. Will the next ball pulled out of the urn be red? In this case, the justification for the attitude of being in doubt is typically the same as for suspension. This aligns well with a widespread theory in epistemology, evidentialism, according to which, roughly, the attitudes of belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment should fit one's evidence. It follows from this general principle that when your evidence doesn't favor p over not p , you should suspend judgment. See, for instance:

“The justification of each attitude emerges in a unified and natural way from the support that the evidence provides: sufficient support for a proposition justifies belief, sufficient support for its negation justifies disbelief, and the absence of sufficient support for either the proposition or its negation justifies suspension of judgment.” (Feldman & Conee, 2005, p. 106)

An evidentialist theory of justification will provide the same verdicts for both attitudes of being in doubt and suspension in situations in which S simply has no evidence relevant to whether p is true, and in which S has counterbalanced evidence relevant to p 's truth (see McCain, 2023). Now consider our earlier examples illustrating the Scholastic view (see § 3.1.2, ‘The Crowd Estimation’ and ‘Edmund in Paris’). In both cases, the subjects’ attitudes are justified/rational based on their evidential situation. This observation reveals that there is no normative divergence between suspension and being in doubt; they are both subject to exactly the same evidential norms. Therefore, the following two questions are essentially one and the same:

- (1) When is it epistemically permissible/rational to be in doubt?
- (2) When is it epistemically permissible/rational to suspend judgement?

With these considerations on the table, the conclusion that follows is that suspension and doubt are normatively alike. What is examined under the term “suspension” in the recent epistemological literature has the same normative profile as what is traditionally understood under the expression “being in doubt”. It is of course possible that two attitudes sharing the same normative profile nonetheless metaphysically differ. But this is unlikely, which supports the idea that when philosophers nowadays argue about suspension, their object is nothing over and above the more classical notion of “doubt”. But what would our contemporaries say about the NO-DIFFERENCE view?

5. What would our contemporaries say about the NO-DIFFERENCE view?

¹¹ I intentionally articulate the norm in terms of epistemic permissibility (see Engels, 2010; Friedman 2019b; Pollock, 1987), rather than requirements, or fittingness. This distinction does not affect the argument.

So far, I have established a descriptive and a normative equivalence between being in doubt and suspended judgement. These equivalences constitute the two primary reasons supporting a view such as ND. Normatively, it has just been observed that doubt and suspension are governed by the same norms. Descriptively, the *Simple view* and the *Scholastic view* of being in doubt correspond to the contemporary NON-BELIEF VIEW of suspension, while the *Belief view* of doubt corresponds to the BELIEF VIEW of suspension, as characterized by Raleigh (2021):

NON-BELIEF VIEW: Suspending whether p just consists in neither believing that p nor disbelieving that p . Possible extra conditions: (i) the subject has considered the proposition p , (ii) the subject's lack of belief/disbelief is for 'epistemic' reasons. (Raleigh 2021, p. 2052)

BELIEF VIEW: Suspending whether p consists in having some kind of belief – e.g. about whether one ought to believe p , about whether one is in a position to know whether p . (Raleigh 2021, p. 2054)

Concerning the descriptive equivalence, contemporary proponents of the BELIEF view of suspension would likely find it intriguing that this view has been entertained in the literature about doubt (see Hart, 1980). There appears to be an (almost) identical structure between the BELIEF view of suspension and the Belief view of doubt. It seems that one can seamlessly switch between them. Similarly, for the NON-BELIEF views of suspension which directly relates to (i) the *Simple view* and (ii) to the *Scholastic view*.¹² Regarding the normative equivalence, I believe the parallel was adequately established in the previous section. I now aim to present three objections that contemporary philosophers might use to oppose ND, and, finally, a last consideration favoring the plausibility of ND.

5.1.1 Pragmatic encroachment

Some dissatisfaction might arise with the evidentialist framework used to explain the rationality of suspension.¹³ An alternative view from the pragmatist camp suggests that the justification/rationality of suspension doesn't solely depend on one's evidential situation but should integrate practical factors (see Lord 2020; Schroeder, 2012, 2021). For instance, pragmatic encroachers argue that in certain high-stakes cases, the significance of the outcome requires that you accumulate more evidence before judging (to avoid a costly error). Here, the stakes raise the standard of justification for belief, i.e., the evidence is insufficient to justify your belief. Pragmatists, assuming the triadic picture of doxastic attitudes, conclude that one should suspend judgment, as believing is unjustified in such cases. This challenges the

¹² Non-Belief views are generally considered the "canonical views of suspension" (Friedman, 2017, p. 306) but have been largely opposed in recent literature (see Archer, 2024; Atkinson, 2020; Friedman, 2013a; McGrath, 2024; Raleigh, 2021; Wagner, 2022). Epistemologists tend to consider that these accounts do not provide sufficient conditions to adequately capture suspension, fall prey to counter-arguments, and require additional conditions (see Archer, 2024; Friedman 2013a; McGrath 2024). There is, in fact, no explicit, extended defense of Non-Belief views in recent publications. However, for views of suspension that endorse the consideration condition, see Conee & Feldman (2018, p. 72); Perin (2018, p. 118); Salmon (1995, p. 2); Wedgwood (2002, p. 273), and Sextus' view of suspension (see Barnes, 1990, p. 9); Sinkiewicz (2019, p. 3).

¹³ Thanks to Léna Mudry for raising and discussing this challenge.

plausibility of ND: Is it really reasonable to suggest that the subject should be in doubt about whether p in such cases?

To ease potential tension, let me offer the following observations. First, I stated in the previous section that I was simply picking the two less controversial norms, viz. norms that pragmatists should also accept as relevant for the rationality of suspension. Second, it seems that pragmatists work with a different notion of suspension. In the cases they have in mind, suspension is not typically viewed as a mental attitude but rather as a mental action. On these views, ND fails. There is a clear categorical distinction between the mental action of putting off judgement, or refraining from judging, and being in a state of doubt. The former involves an agentive component, distinguishing it from maintaining a neutral mental stance toward a proposition.

The third observation to make is that there is an ambiguity between ‘judgement^a,’ which consists of “the conscious taking of a propositional and conceptual content to be true” (Dorsch 2009, p. 40), and ‘judgement^b,’ which refers to the act of judging, i.e., an event that constitutes the formation of the former. As noted by Dorsch, “events of forming a judgement are often, or perhaps even always, instantaneous, while the formed judgements may remain in continuous existence for a considerable amount of time” (Dorsch 2009, p. 41). When read literally, it seems that the phrase ‘suspension of judgement’ is understood as if it is judgement^b that is suspended (Rosa forthcoming b.). There is definitely an ambiguity between the *active* and *stative* meanings of the noun phrase “suspension of judgement.” I contend that the notion of suspension used in pragmatic encroachment cases is the active one. In this view, suspension is essentially an action that involves the suppression of an inclination to consider something, while the end-state of active suspension of judgement corresponds to the mental state of suspended judgement^a. The concept of suspension targeted in this paper is the latter one. The crucial distinction to acknowledge here is between the mental state of suspension and the mental processes or events preceding it, such as refraining, omitting, bracketing, or putting off judgment (see McGrath, 2024).

The fourth observation is that when you are in doubt, you are also unable to make up your mind for one side over the other. In other words, when you are in a suspensive state of mind at t , you are unable to judge that p at t with your current evidence at t . This echoes Sextan suspension, which is “a state of inability to form judgments or beliefs: when a person’s intellect is suspended because it has come to a standstill, he is unable either to accept or to reject any judgment or belief about the matter under investigation—he could not form a judgment or a belief even if he wanted to” (Machuca 2021, p. 28). The inability condition that constitutes suspended judgement/being in doubt is not central to the notion of suspension used by pragmatic encroachers. In these high-stakes cases, where having an unjustified belief could potentially have catastrophic consequences, subjects are not unable to judge whether or not p based on their current evidential situation. They are already inclined to judge that p based on their evidence (e.g., that Smith did the crime, that the bank will be open), but refrain from judging that p for practical reasons—the high-stakes considerations. They are not effectively in a state of suspended judgement about whether p is the case, i.e., undecided, hesitating between alternatives. Instead, they are inclined towards one alternative but refrain from fully believing and, most importantly, from acting on this belief without acquiring further (sufficient) evidence. Consequently, I conclude that there is no real tension, as I am using a different notion of suspension in this paper along with (almost) uncontroversial norms for suspension. I also want to emphasize that my intention wasn’t to provide a full account of the essence of suspension and doubt.

5.1.2 Doubt and Inquiry

Contemporary philosophers might oppose ND in arguing in favor of another significant view of suspension that defines it as an interrogative/questioning attitude playing a central role in inquiry (Archer, 2022; Friedman, 2017; Lord, 2020). This view seems to directly challenge ND. However, a note of caution is necessary.

I previously emphasized that one necessary condition for being in doubt is to have a question in mind (to “at least *propose a question* to ourselves” says G.F. Stout, 1896, p. 102). Moreover, the possibility of conceiving *doubt-whether/being in doubt* as having a questioning attitude has historical foundations. Peter Abelard, for instance, famously stated that “by doubting we come to question and by questioning we reach the truth” (*Sic et Non*). Additionally, a norm such as ‘Don’t Believe and Inquire’ (see Friedman 2019a) according to which one ought not to inquire into/have an interrogative attitude towards a question *Q* at time *t* and believe *p* as an answer to *Q* at *t*, finds precedence in the writings of J.H. Newman: “He who inquires has not found; he is in doubt where the truth lies, and wishes his present profession either proved or disproved. We cannot without absurdity call ourselves at once believers and inquirers also” (Newman, 1870, p. 191). I believe that ND would still hold in the context of the contemporary debate on inquiry, provided we establish that being in doubt belongs to the category of questioning attitudes. This is certainly not implausible.¹⁴

5.1.3 The Affective Side

I have not addressed the frequently observed affective aspects of doubt (Hookway, 2002; Vazard, 2019). If there is an asymmetry between doubt and suspension in this regard, ND would be challenged. Is there a specific form of affectivity that attaches to the former but not to the latter? Does doubt come with a specific epistemic feeling that suspension of judgment characteristically lacks? The potential (a)symmetry requires further investigation. It seems premature to assume a clear difference between doubt and suspension regarding their affective aspects without thorough examination. In a subsequent paper, I hope to offer an initial exploration into considering suspension as an affective state, further supporting the plausibility of ND.

5.1.4 The Plausibility of NO-DIFFERENCE

At this stage, contemporary philosophers might find the NO-DIFFERENCE view (ND) at least somewhat more plausible—particularly if one is an optimist. My intent is not to offer a novel account of suspension or doubt but rather to present my case for ND based on independently plausible assumptions regarding suspension and doubt. Having presented historical and normative evidence for ND, I believe my argument stands. ND emerges as a genuine possibility within the logical space of positions. Furthermore, another reason supporting ND is that it provides a highly parsimonious categorization of our mental states. Maintaining the view that we possess two distinct mental states (suspension and doubt) lacks simplicity in our mental

¹⁴ See Gaultier (forthcoming) for an alternative view, as he argues that having an inquisitive attitude is neither reducible to nor identical with being in doubt.

taxonomy. It would be more parsimonious to consider that being in doubt about whether p is equivalent to nothing but suspending about whether p .

One natural consequence of ND concerns the popular triadic picture of doxastic attitudes. Luis Rosa (forthcoming a.) addresses this question independently of arguing directly for ND:

We can also ask whether the kind of doubt that is at play in [expressions of the form] ‘Shanti is in doubt about whether aliens exist’—namely, a state of being in doubt as to whether a given proposition is true or not—is the third kind of categorical stance that features in the traditional taxonomy of doxastic attitudes, alongside belief and disbelief. The third stance is ascribed through different expressions, depending on who is writing. Often deployed expressions include ‘suspends judgment’, ‘withholds belief’, ‘is agnostic’. [...] Could that be a state of doubt? (Rosa, forthcoming a.)

According to ND, the answer is affirmative: being in doubt and suspension are indeed interchangeable in the triadic picture.

A final point worth mentioning is the following. In another paper on the third mental stance of the triadic picture, Rosa (forthcoming b.) argues that the idioms ‘is in doubt as to whether p ’ and ‘the state of being in doubt about whether p ’ are good substitutes, and even “the best ways to ascribe and refer to the third stance from the traditional taxonomy of categorical doxastic stances.” According to Rosa, “[t]o be in doubt as to whether p is to be on the fence regarding whether p is true or rather false,” i.e., “[a] person who is on the fence is a person who does not take sides” (Rosa forthcoming b.). This corresponds perfectly to our toy examples in section 3.1.2, in which we saw that being in a state of doubt consists in a doxastic fluctuation between alternatives. Moon (2018, p. 1830) also makes the connection between an “on-the-fence suspension of judgment” and reports ascribing a state of doubt (“Fred is in doubt about whether Sally will arrive on time”). Interestingly, H.H. Price also describes the state of suspension as being on the fence: “As we fix our mind on the evidence in favour of p we may have an inclination to assent to p ; and then, turning our mind to the evidence for q , we may have an inclination to assent to q instead. But though we may have these inclinations to assent this way or that, we do not yet actually assent. We remain in a state of suspended judgement” (Price 1969, p. 205). These additional observations confirm the plausibility of ND.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, I started with the plausible assumption that *being in doubt* is a more fitting candidate than *doubting-that* to capture the mental state of suspended judgment. Historical considerations were provided, indicating a strong connection between the two attitudes. Additionally, I highlighted how contemporary views of suspension align descriptively and normatively with earlier accounts of doubt. In Section 4, it was observed that doubt and suspension are both governed by the same epistemic norms, eliminating any divergence in terms of rationality. While the considerations presented in support of the NO-DIFFERENCE view are not decisive, they are adequate to deem it a plausible position within the logical space of views on doubt and suspension.

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