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## Suspension as a mood

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### ABSTRACT

Suspension of judgment is a ubiquitous phenomenon in our lives. It is also relevant for several debates in contemporary epistemology (e.g., evidentialism/pragmatism; peer-disagreement/higher-order evidence; inquiry). The goal of this paper is to arrive at a better understanding of what suspension of judgment is. We first question the popular assumption that we call the Triad view according to which there are three and only three (paradigmatic) doxastic attitudes, namely, belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment. We elaborate a cumulative argument regarding crucial differences between belief/disbelief and suspension and conclude tentatively that suspension is not a doxastic state. On the constructive side, we defend the positive thesis (with special attention to justification/rationality and reasons for suspension) that suspension is rather an affective phenomenon, viz. a sort of mood. Finally, we consider further consequences of our view for contemporary debates in epistemology, and how it relates to ancient skepticism.

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## 1. Introduction

Few things are absolutely certain to us, some things are more plausible than others, but too often things are just not fixed yet and the evidence we have doesn't favor a possibility over its opposite. Often enough, we end up suspending our judgment on things. Consider the following cases:

### MEETING

A trustworthy colleague tells you there will be an official meeting you cannot miss in two weeks. However, as days pass, you hear no news from the director of the department. You run into another trustworthy colleague who expresses some doubts about the meeting; after all, there was nothing ordinary about this year, so maybe there will be no additional meeting before the end of the term. So, you end up suspending judgment. You are settled but not fixed yet. You are uncertain but not

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stanceless. You wait until you hear from the director. Maybe you even drop them an email. In the meantime, you suspend your judgment on whether there will be a meeting in two weeks.

## CROWD

William catches a glimpse of a man in a crowd at Victoria station, who looks like his brother, Harry. It can hardly be, for isn't his brother in Los Angeles? But wasn't the man in the crowd a dead-ringer for Harry? The crowd is slowly approaching. William suspends judgement, i.e., feels uncertain/hesitant, about whether his brother is indeed in the crowd.

## FRUSTRATED WATCHER

You have decided to watch a movie on Netflix. But after checking trailers for some time you are still undecided about what to watch tonight. You are not fixed on anything. And this very fact of being undecided and unfixed may produce a feeling of slight discomfort or even frustration as time passes and you still haven't chosen what to watch.

While suspension of judgment has long been a central topic in canonical epistemological debates, such as Pyrrhonian skepticism, there has been a recent surge of interest in it, spurred in part by Jane Friedman's influential work (notably Friedman, 2013a) among contemporary epistemologists who are examining suspension. The current state of discussions reveals a plurality of new and exciting proposals to define suspension of judgment. Alongside the older view on which suspension just is a state of non-belief after considering whether  $p$  (Sextus Empiricus, see Perin, 2018), there are intriguing proposals according to which suspension is a proper doxastic attitude terminating inquiry (Friedman, 2013a; Wagner, 2021), a belief about one's epistemic position (S. Crawford, 2004), a meta-cognitive state (Masny, 2020; Raleigh, 2021), a mental action (L. Crawford, 2022; McGrath, 2021; Meylan, 2024), an interrogative attitude (Archer, 2022; Friedman, 2017; Lord, 2020), a graded state of open-mindedness (Sylvan & Lord, 2022), an intermediate level of confidence (Sturgeon, 2020) or indeterminate credence (see Del Rio, 2024).<sup>1</sup>

It is certainly exciting to observe this recent explosion of accounts of suspension. However, it is also striking to realize that most of these share an unquestioned common element. Namely, most of the contemporary discussions —and older ones too, for that matter — assume what we will call the *Triad view* (hereafter, simply TRIAD): the claim that there are three and only three (paradigmatic) doxastic attitudes, namely, *belief*, *disbelief*, and *suspension of judgment*. Here are some recent statements of TRIAD:

Let's call the thesis that belief, disbelief, and the neutral attitude are mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive of one's categorical doxastic options *the tripartite conception*. (McGrath, 2021, p. 464)

[S]omething like this [i.e., that suspension is a neutral doxastic attitude] was already assumed in many discussions of the ‘tripartite division’ of the doxastic, e.g., Chisholm (1966). (Friedman, 2017, p. 322, note 3)

Belief and disbelief are two of the so-called *doxastic attitudes* that we can adopt towards a proposition. We can also, of course, not even consider a proposition and thus not adopt any doxastic attitude towards it. But most philosophers would hold that in addition to belief and disbelief, there is a third possible doxastic attitude that we can adopt towards a proposition: we can *suspend judgment* (or withhold assent) with respect to it. Suspension of judgment is thus a *bona fide* doxastic attitude alongside belief and disbelief and is not to be equated with the failure to adopt any doxastic attitude. Because it is a genuine doxastic attitude, suspension of judgment (just like belief and disbelief, and unlike the failure to form any doxastic attitude) can itself be justified or unjustified. (Comesaña & Klein, 2019)

So, suppose that our question is whether we are awake and not just dreaming. Our three options here are belief, disbelief, and suspension of belief. Our inquiry is directed at choosing among these options. (Sosa, 2017, p. 38)

It is natural to interpret the TRIAD as a claim that the three doxastic states it postulates constitute an *exhaustive and mutually exclusive* list of (full) doxastic states. That is, the common view appears to be that belief, disbelief, and suspension exhaust what sort of full or outright doxastic state one might have toward a proposition.<sup>2</sup>

Despite its natural appeal, TRIAD, understood as a view that describes an exhaustive and mutually exclusive list of full doxastic states that we might have, stands in tension with a pre-theoretically plausible observation. Namely, it stands in tension with the view that we do in fact sometimes are in more than one sort of full doxastic state. In particular, it would seem that we might believe that *p* and at the same time suspend our judgment about *p*. Here is one such case, attributed to Jane Friedman (in Friedman, 2017):

Friedman gives the example of someone, let us call her Beth, who temporarily forgets that she put her keys in her tennis bag. She spends the next 20 minutes wondering where she put her keys, until she finally recalls that she put her keys in her tennis bag. Friedman points out that insofar as Beth recalled where she put her keys, she did not learn anything new or acquire any new knowledge. This means that she knew where her keys were all along, including during the 20-minute interval when she was wondering where she put her keys. (Archer, 2018, p. 598)

It would seem that one can believe that *p* (on the assumption that knowledge entails belief) and suspend judgment about whether *p* at the same time. Archer (2023) proposes a similar example, in which Lisa searched for her phone while talking on it, unaware of her mistake for over a minute. Even though she was using it, she simultaneously knew its location and suspended judgment about it, showing two different mental states at the same time.

One can rightly point out that the combination of different doxastic attitudes about the same proposition (under the same disguise) is rationally incompatible.<sup>3</sup> For example, it would be irrational to believe that my team has scored a goal and at the same time suspend judgment about whether they have scored a goal, for example because the referee is using the VAR to check the validity of the goal. Note, that the Triad view is stronger than the rational incompatibility claim. According to the Triad, it is not merely irrational to believe that  $p$  and to suspend one's judgment about  $p$ , it is not even possible to have such a combination of doxastic states.

We suggest that the tension between the Triad view and the observation that we casually combine beliefs that  $p$  with suspension of judgment about whether  $p$  is best solved by revising the traditional view on which suspension of judgment is a doxastic state. In short, on our view TRIAD has to go. However, the reason why TRIAD is wrong is more substantial than the mere incompatibility with our pre-theoretic observations. In what follows we will develop a number of considerations that taken together speak against the Triad view. We also propose a positive view that explains better the observations that led us to question TRIAD, and in particular the view that suspension is a doxastic state. Our positive claim, namely, that suspension is a mood and thus is an affective and not a doxastic state, relies on an inference to the best explanation: given the observations and considerations about the behavior of suspension in comparison to the behavior of typical doxastic states on one hand, and to typical moods on the other hand, our best explanation of the observed differences and similarities is that suspension is a mood.

In what follows we first provide some additional clarifications on the desiderata that will guide our discussion and on the epistemological importance of arriving at a better understanding of suspension of judgment. Second, we elaborate on the differences between belief/disbelief and suspension and conclude tentatively that suspension is not a doxastic state. Third, we defend the positive thesis with special attention to justification/rationality and reasons for suspension. Finally, we consider some objections and further consequences of our view for contemporary debates in epistemology.

## 2. Clarifications, desiderata, and importance for epistemology

A first clarificatory observation we would like to make before moving on is that we are not the first to question TRIAD. See, for example:

At the heart of Friedman's picture of suspension is a three-way taxonomy of non-probabilistic doxastic attitudes: someone who understands the question whether

$p$  either believes  $p$ , disbelieves  $p$ , or suspends judgment on  $p$ . We reject this familiar trichotomous perspective. (Goodman & Holguín, 2022, p. 645)

However, most of the critics propose *adding* more attitudes to the doxastic realm rather than subtracting elements from that list. See for recent proposals to expand the “doxastic zoo” (Archer, 2022, p. 5; Carter, 2018; Engel, 2018; Goodman & Holguín, 2022): for references. Our proposal is rather to subtract, or at any rate, to *subtract* suspension from that list.

The second clarification concerns the simple stoppage view of suspension. After the insightful and immensely influential paper by Friedman (2013a), virtually no one today defends the simple stoppage view of suspension according to which, roughly, suspension is (some sort of) absence of belief or disbelief (cf. Quine & Ullian, 1970, p. 8).

There were already doubts about the prospects of the stoppage view where suspension just is what it says it does – a pause where we have no judgment, no take whatsoever on the issue under discussion. Such a view is untenable, as the famous quote from Ralph Wedgwood illustrates: “The property of neither believing nor disbelieving  $p$  is not a type of mental state at all – even rocks and numbers have that property” (Wedgwood, 2002, p. 272).

Friedman (2013a) proposed several considerations in favor of the view that suspension is a *sui generis* doxastic attitude. Since then, the challenge for authors who are unsatisfied with this proposal and yet don’t want to return to the uber-simple stoppage view is to come up with a plausible theory of the “consideration” condition (e.g., Wedgwood, 2002) that we have to add to the absence of belief/disbelief to have suspension in a way that their view explains the difference between having no attitude at all and suspension. See, for instance:

Being interested into answering  $p$  is a minimal requirement for being in a state of suspended judgement about whether  $p$ . We might thus reject the idea that a subject having no attitude towards  $p$  (neither believing nor disbelieving  $p$  without further conditions) is a “suspender”. She might rather be described as a kind of “ungrounded agnostic”, i.e. someone who has done no serious enquiry into the question, even though she perfectly understands the question and knows what an enquiry into the matter would look like. (Ferrari & Incurvati, 2021, p. 10.)

Another alternative consists in treating suspension as a mental attitude of neutrality. But the task of cashing out what this neutrality amounts to is far from easy, and establishing how it differs from having no attitude remains on the agenda for those accounts. In what follows, we assume that a desideratum for any plausible theory of suspension of judgment what ever it is, is that it must be able to explain the difference between having no belief/disbelief and suspension of judgment. For distinguishing suspension

from simply having no opinion on whether  $p$  is an important desideratum in the literature (Atkinson, 2021, p. 582; Raleigh, 2021, p. 2452).

Another clarification concerns the importance of our discussion for epistemology. Recall the evidentialist view. It is a major view in epistemology according to which belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment are epistemically justified just in case these attitudes fit the evidence the subject has (cf. Conee & Feldman, 2004 among others). One consequence of the approach defended by Friedman (2013a, 2017) is that suspension of judgment is not subject to the evidentialist norm. Its justification then is not entirely dependent on evidence alone, but also on instrumental and arguably pragmatic considerations (e.g., if you desire to know an answer to a question, you ought to take the best, most economic means to answer the question).

Further arguments have been proposed in the literature in favor of the idea that non-evidential factors determine the justification of suspension (cf. Crawford, 2022; Lord, 2020; Schroeder, 2012). If TRIAD holds, these arguments seem to undermine the whole evidentialist project (also for belief). Roughly, the idea is that belief that  $p$ , disbelief that  $p$ , and suspension of judgment on whether  $p$ , are rationally mutually exclusive and exhaustive. In situations where the evidence is close but not entirely in equipoise between  $p$  and not- $p$ , pragmatic factors might tip the balance in favor of  $p$  or not- $p$ , or make suspension of judgment the appropriate attitude. Consequently, pragmatic factors could render believing that  $p$  unjustified or inappropriate (when suspension of judgment is the appropriate attitude).

Some authors have responded to Friedman and Schroeder by distinguishing suspension from agnosticism and from inquiry (cf. Ferrari & Incurvati, 2021; McGrath, 2021), where only agnosticism is a doxastic attitude, and instrumentalist norms determine justification only for inquiry.

If our positive proposal holds, we have here a different answer to Friedman and Schroeder's anti-evidentialist challenge: suspension is not a doxastic attitude; the evidentialist norm determines justification only for doxastic attitudes.

One might object to this proposal by insisting that excluding suspension from the doxastic realm in order to save evidentialism is not that easy. For even evidentialists have to give us a story about what happens in cases where evidence is equally balanced (for  $p$  and not- $p$ ). But if, to account for cases where evidence is equally balanced, evidentialists have to appeal to some other neutral state that they distinguish from suspension, Friedman/Schroeder objection is back on track – it can be reintroduced with respect to this new, perhaps technical state of neutrality. In short, the objection here seems to amount to a dilemma: either evidentialists deny the very existence of any sort of doxastic state that would be appropriate to have when one's

evidence is equally balanced, which seems to be an absurd position, or evidentialists who reject suspension have to re-introduce another neutral doxastic state through the back door, in which case it still has to be seen whether Schroeder/Friedman objection doesn't apply to this new neutral doxastic state.

From our point of view, the above objection amounts to a false dilemma. The two proposed options are not the only theoretical options available to an evidentialist. One may well restrict the doxastic realm (of full doxastic states) to belief and disbelief only, and claim that in the case of genuinely equally balanced evidence (not merely apparently equally balanced evidence), the appropriate response is to be in a suspensive mood – being in a mood of not “choosing” between  $p$  and not- $p$  while not being fixed on the issue.

Thus, a major upshot of our proposal is that evidentialism is immune to the above-mentioned recent challenges. Indeed, if we are right, there is an overlooked way of defending evidentialism in which one gives up entirely on the idea that suspension is a doxastic state. This way of defending evidentialism doesn't require a more complex distinction between ways of being neutral and thus doesn't require additional arguments to show that these distinctions are not *ad hoc*.

### 3. Differences and the negative thesis

In this section, we present seven substantial differences between belief/disbelief and suspension of judgment. We suggest that taken together these differences support the claim that suspension is of a different kind, that is, that suspension is not a doxastic attitude. That is, we are providing a cumulative case. Our observations taken individually don't have much weight, yet taken together they are best explained by our negative thesis. Since our argument is cumulative and relies fundamentally on the assumption that the substantial *number* of apparent differences is what needs to be explained and is best explained by the negative claim that suspension is not a doxastic state, our discussion of comparisons in what follows will leave out details, further elaboration of which should be left for another occasion. As it is common with inference to the best explanation arguments, our argument is not supposed to be a knockdown one. It may still be that we are wrong, the argument is not deductive. Yet, we believe that our hypothesis is overall the best available explanation of the observed data.

The first difference concerns intentional objects. While we can see clearly and distinctly what intentional objects of belief and disbelief are, i.e., propositions/possible worlds (that such and such is the case), what exactly the objects of suspension are is less clear. Are we suspending about facts in the world? Or maybe about the obtaining of some state of affairs? It has been



argued that one suspends judgment about questions (Friedman, 2013b, 2017) meaning by this that one is suspending about a set of propositions (which consist of a set of possible answers to the questions under scrutiny). But when I suspend judgment about whether there will be a meeting in two weeks, my attitude is not directed at both the proposition that there will be a meeting and the proposition that there will not be a meeting. There is something indeterminate or underdetermined in the object of my suspension. An observation that indicates the difference of objects in belief/disbelief and suspension is that while typical belief/disbelief reports have “*that*” complements, suspension reports have “*whether*” complements (cf. Friedman, 2017). The fact that suspension does not take “*that*” but “*whether*” as a complement can be taken (given some further assumptions) as an argument for the non-propositionalism of suspension (compare to Grzankowski, 2018). The upshot is that the intentional object of suspension, i.e., its supposedly representational content, is substantially different from that of belief/disbelief. At minimum, it is something clearly distinct from mere propositions/possible worlds.

Second, we can observe that belief aims at truth/knowledge. There is a considerable amount of recent literature on the exact way of spelling this out (cf. Fassio, 2015 for an overview). However, it is somewhat odd to think that we aim at anything at all when we suspend judgment (cf. Miracchi, 2019, p. 433: “Suspension need not have an aim at all, precisely because it is in the most basic cases a *non-performance*.”). When I suspend judgment about the meeting, I am not aiming at the impossible state of knowing  $p$  and not- $p$  at the same time, I am not aiming at a contradiction either, nor at avoiding error (see Hazlett, 2022 for a different view, however). What exactly am I aiming at, if at all, is unclear. Crawford (2022, p. 572) toys with the idea “that a multiplicity of aims might guide suspending judgment in different cases”. But on her view of suspension – according to which it is essentially a practical matter of refraining from making a judgment about whether  $p$  –, these aims are mostly pragmatic, i.e., non-epistemic. If one wants to take on board the assumption that suspension is a doxastic attitude, a theory of suspension should illuminate how it is on par with belief regarding epistemic aims.<sup>4</sup> However, the orthodox approach in terms of truth/knowledge seems doomed to fail, or at least seems inadequate for suspension (cf. Atkinson, 2021 on aims of belief/suspension).

The third difference is somewhat connected to the second one and concerns correctness conditions. The truth/knowledge aim aspect in belief is often spelled out in terms of correctness conditions; belief is correct just in case it is true/amounts to knowledge. While there have been some suggestions in the literature about the correctness conditions of suspension of judgment (cf. Rosa, 2020, p. 2004: “(CS) A subject correctly suspends judgment about  $p$  if and only if (a) the subject suspends judgment about

$p$  and (b) in view of that subject's situation, it might be that  $p$  and it might be that  $\neg p$ "), we have some doubts whether suspension has correctness conditions at all. For one thing, Rosa seems to commit a fallacy here by appealing implicitly to suspension itself in (b) (isn't the most natural interpretation of "in view of that subject's situation, it might be that  $p$  and it might be that [not]  $p$ " just the mere claim that the subject suspends their judgment about whether  $p$ ?). It thus seems that his proposal fails to define without presupposing what he aims to define in one of the clauses of the definition. But more importantly, it is not straightforward that there are correctness conditions at all for suspension. To see why, we might ask ourselves when would suspension be incorrect, i.e., not fitting. The only possibility that we can think of is an alleged state of affairs where one suspends judgment whether  $p$  while knowing well that  $p$ , or while believing truly that  $p$ , or while having sufficient overall evidential support for  $p$ . We have two concerns about such a suggestion. First, we are not entirely sure whether such states of affairs are even possible. It is not clear to us that I can genuinely suspend judgment about when the meeting will be, while believing truly/knowing that the meeting will be, say, next Friday. If such a state is not possible, then it is not clear in what sense suspension may fail to be fitting. If so, it is then not clear what corresponding conditions for correct/fitting suspension could even be. Now, we are open to the idea that it might be metaphysically possible to suspend judgment about whether  $p$  while believing/knowing that  $p$ . However, and this is our second concern, if such mixed cases are possible and if suspension is unfitting only in such mixed state cases, then we have already a major substantial difference here with belief/disbelief. Correctness conditions/fittingness of belief don't depend on one having other mental states, whereas on this suggestion, correctness conditions of suspension would piggyback on one having a true belief/knowledge. To be clear, we don't say suspension doesn't have correctness conditions, we only insist that if it has, everyone has to agree that these conditions are substantially different from correctness conditions of belief. If so, this is another major difference between suspension and belief/disbelief.

The fourth point of difference concerns dedicated patterns of reasoning. Arguably, a common way of forming beliefs is by inferences. Notably, beliefs/disbeliefs are commonly formed as outputs of patterns of reasoning. Now, one way of theorizing patterns of reasoning is to appeal to schemas, e.g., deductive, probabilistic, inductive, and abductive. It is a natural idea to think that belief-producing reasoning aims at true belief/knowledge. Good deductive, probabilistic, inductive, and abductive schemas, when followed in our reasoning, produce when things go right, knowledge/true belief. In the case of suspension, things are different. We observe no dedicated schemas for good patterns of reasoning for suspension. What could such a schema even look like? Consider the suggestion of moving from a belief

that  $p$ , a belief that not- $p$ , to the conclusion state of suspension about  $p$ . Such a pattern would exhibit a terrible piece of reasoning. For example, imagine that I move from <I believe that there will be a meeting in two weeks> and <I believe there will be no meeting in two weeks>, to the conclusion state <I suspend judgment about whether there will be a meeting in two weeks>. This is not an instance of a good pattern of reasoning. No knowledge or true belief is produced through such a piece of reasoning. Moreover, I don't aim at anything when one's reasoning ends abruptly in suspension. That is, there is no clear pattern of good reasoning that leads one to suspension as an output. This is a major difference between suspension and belief/disbelief.

One might object and insist that the following piece of reasoning is good, and it leads to a suspension of judgment. If so, there is a corresponding good pattern of reasoning after all. Here is the supposed reasoning: <A bit of my evidence supports  $p$ . A bit of my evidence supports not  $p$ . I don't know whether  $p$ . I suspend judgment about whether  $p$ >. While we accept that this might look like an inner description of how we get into suspended judgment about  $p$ , it is still unclear to us how this could correspond to a good pattern of reasoning. Consider the first premise: <A bit of my evidence supports  $p$ >. This then supports  $p$ , making the belief that  $p$  a prima facie good conclusion here. But then consider the second premise: <A bit of my evidence supports not  $p$ >. This leads to a belief that not- $p$ , which should be prima facie a good inference. If you question the prima facie goodness of an inference from a bit of evidence that  $p$  to the belief that  $p$ , then you have difficulty explaining why we shouldn't be skeptics. So, on the face of it, there are two prima facie good inferences from two bits of evidence to two beliefs. But of course, you don't want to say that the inference that ends in having contradictory beliefs is a good one. But what theoretically well-motivated grounds do we have to resist this conclusion? One cannot just say that, in this case, the pattern corresponds to an inference that terminates in a suspended judgment, because that would be merely an *ad hoc* move. After all, you have to explain why the inference from <a bit of evidence supports  $p$ > to <belief that  $p$ > is not a good inference in this case. Why having contradictory beliefs is not OK as having a conclusion response?

Our fifth point is an observation concerning rationality/justification of belief/disbelief and suspension. We can easily observe that it makes sense to evaluate belief/disbelief but also suspension from the point of view of rationality/justification. After all, if I suspend judgment about whether the meeting will be in two weeks, just after hearing from my dean that the meeting will be in two weeks there is something problematic rationality-wise with my suspension. However, we also observe that there is a major difference in factors that determine the rationality of belief/disbelief on the one hand, and the rationality of suspension on the other hand. In the case of belief, a major (or the only, for evidentialists)

role in determining its rationality is played by positive evidence in favor of the believed proposition. In the case of suspension, the only factors that play a role in determining its rationality are factors of “absence” – that is, lack of conclusive evidence/other positive considerations one way or another concerning some proposition. It is the fact that one’s evidence doesn’t favor  $p$  over not- $p$  that justifies one in suspending judgment. Crucially, it is not positive evidence itself, but only the lack of conclusive evidence one way or another that matters for justification of suspension: “[...] the absence of sufficient support for either the proposition or its negation justifies suspension of judgment” (Feldman & Conee, 2005, p. 106). It is equipollence or ambiguity of evidence rather than positive support that makes suspension rational.

Note that while these observations about the differences in factors that make suspension and belief/disbelief justified are common in the literature, no one we know of questions the basic assumption about suspension being a doxastic state. But why should we hold onto this assumption? Errol Lord, a proponent of a version of pragmatism, admits that “if belief and disbelief were the only games in town, then evidentialism would be easily vindicated. But by nearly everyone’s lights they are not. The competition also includes suspension” (Lord, 2020, p. 140). But this is exactly what we are not so sure of about suspension. In contrast to evidentialists, pragmatists will emphasize non-evidential reasons in the formation of rational suspension, but to repeat ourselves, note that both camps adhere to the assumption about the doxastic Triad. We will say more later on about the specific rationality of suspension. At this point, we only need to emphasize that there is a real difference regarding the nature of factors that make suspension and belief/disbelief rational. This difference is most easily explained by the view that suspension is not a doxastic state.

Sixth, in believing that  $p$ , the mind is supposed to “fit” itself to the way things are. The belief that  $p$  tries to get the world right: “Believing that  $p$  embodies a mental commitment to the truth of  $p$ . To believe that  $p$  is to represent  $p$ , but represent it in a specific way, namely, as true” (Kriegel, 2015, p. 42). Suspension appears to have what some have called (concerning other states) a “null direction of fit” (Kriegel, 2015, p. 195). Suspension tries neither to get the world right, nor to right the world. Flowerree (2021, p. 130) also notes this dissimilarity in claiming that “it is clear that belief and disbelief involve making a claim about the world; and withholding need not. This makes a strong asymmetry between belief or disbelief on the one hand, and withholding, on the other.” Belief/disbelief is a paradigmatic case of the world-to-mind direction of fit. Suspension of judgment cannot be easily classified concerning its direction of fit. It might even appear that it has none. Perhaps it is a case of a mental phenomenon without any direction

of fit. At this point, we only want to stress the strong difference between belief/disbelief and suspension concerning the direction of fit.

Seventh, the difference concerns phenomenology. Belief/disbelief doesn't seem to have any particular phenomenology at all (but see McCormick, 2022 for a different view). Suspension of judgment, however, often enough appears to be “colored” – to have internal phenomenology. When I suspend judgment about whether there will be a meeting in two weeks, I can get frustrated about this indeterminacy, this frustration can grow into anxiety. Alternatively, I can also get intrigued and curious about the prospect of having yet another meeting. This does not imply that any instances of clinical or cold-blooded suspension are impossible. The point is rather that suspension has a kind of phenomenology that makes it closer to an affective experience which may vary in intensity and awareness.

Given the above seven differences between belief/disbelief and suspension, we might conclude that suspension is not a doxastic state. That suspension is not a genuine doxastic state appears to be the best available explanation of the above-observed differences.

We conclude that while suspension is a proper mental episode, it is best conceived as being non-doxastic.

#### 4. The positive view: moody suspension

After showing that suspension is non-doxastic, what would be the alternative? We want to take seriously the idea that suspension can be an affective phenomenon. We are inclined to think that the best candidate to account for suspension as an affective episode is that it is a mood. In this section, we elaborate our argument in order to test this hypothesis. The argument explores the similarities between suspension and typical moods and concludes by an inference to the best explanation, that our best conclusion is that suspension is indeed a mood. In what follows, we observe eight similarities in suspension and moods. It is thus an argument in favor of a positive thesis, namely that suspension is a mood.

The first similarity concerns intentional objects. We begin with a simple observation that it is not clear how to think about intentional objects for moods. Some think moods have no objects, others suggest that their objects are general, vague, indeterminate, or undetermined. In short, whether there are intentional objects of moods is subject to debate. Nevertheless, it seems that a view that moods do have objects, *albeit* different from, say, emotions, can be defended. Philosophers who defend the view that moods have objects observe that they don't have *particular* or *concrete* singular objects (cf. Mitchell 2019; Price, 2006; Rossi, 2021; Tappolet, 2018). The similarity with suspension is that if moods have objects, it is not entirely

straightforward what their objects are (“aboutness”), and clearly, there is an aspect of indeterminacy/vagueness/undeterminedness in what the objects are.

Second, on plausible views of moods, they present undetermined/vague (non-concrete) evaluative properties (cf. Mitchell 2019; Rossi, 2021; Tappolet, 2018). This is similar to suspension, assuming that uncertainty/equipollence/equipoise is an evaluative property. The suggestion is thus the following: Suspension presents the world or one’s informational environment (or part of it) as being uncertain/equipoise. This does not mean that the world has *objectively* these evaluative properties. When suspending, one is not responding to how the world is, but to how one perceives one’s informational environment. To get a concrete grasp of this idea, let’s go back to the CROWD case. Suppose that William catches a glimpse of a man in a crowd at Victoria station, who looks like his brother, Harry. It can hardly be, for isn’t his brother in Los Angeles? But wasn’t the man in the crowd a dead-ringer for Harry? The crowd is slowly approaching. William feels uncertain/hesitant about whether his brother is indeed in the crowd. We contend that in such a case, in suspending judgment, the subject responds to how he perceives the world at this instant *t*, i.e., as balanced between two live options.

The third similarity concerns aim. It would seem plausible to claim that moods have no clearly determined aims. There is nothing in particular that I am aiming at when I am in, for example, a lazy mood or a jovial mood. Similarly, in line with our observations above, we can think that suspension has no clearly determined aim either. When I am in a lazy mood, I don’t aim at anything in particular. Similarly, when I suspend judgment on whether there will be a meeting in two weeks, I don’t aim at any cognitive goal in particular.

Some authors have recently proposed that suspension does have an aim. The existing proposals tie this aim to either possible apt judgment (Sosa, 2021, p. 55), to a subsequent judgment (McGrath, 2021, p. 467), or to an intention to judge (cf. Masny, 2020, p. 5024). To our ear, these suggestions sound like overly restrictive technical senses that would capture only philosopher’s narrow notions of suspension. Clearly, there are cases where we don’t think it will ever be possible to make a determined judgment on whether *p* or not-*p*. There are, of course, cases where we suspend judgment *and* also hope that new evidence comes and that we will be able to judge that *p* or that not *p*. But this is not the *internal* aim of the state of suspension. It doesn’t play the role that, say, truth, or knowledge, seems to play in the case of belief or that the danger seems to play in the case of fear – the internal standard that fixes the correctness conditions.

The fourth similarity between suspension and moods concerns correctness conditions. It is not straightforward what exactly could be the

correctness conditions of being in a lazy mood. It is not clear to us what could be correctness conditions for being irritated. One might think that it is correct or fitting for one to be irritated just in case one's environment is frustrating. However, we can follow Tim Bayne and observe that "the experiences associated with moods simply don't seem to be in the business of saying how things are" (Bayne, 2021, p. 173). Similarly, it is not straightforward what the correctness conditions of suspending judgment could be. Could it be that these are determined by how things stand with you, i.e., how you relate to your informational environment? We don't have a definite answer to this question. We only want to stress that, here again, suspension looks very similar to moods: what exactly, if at all, could be their correctness conditions is not clear (and again, suspension and moods are very different from belief and emotional attitudes, e.g., fear, in this respect).

The fifth similarity is about dedicated patterns of reasoning. It is clear that we don't reason *into* moods. This is not to say that we don't *get* into a given mood, while reasoning (say, overthinking). However, no mood is an appropriate conclusion-response in a good pattern of reasoning from premise-responses to a conclusion-response. The same seems to hold concerning suspension. We don't *reason to* suspension; we *get* into the state of suspension. Think of the absurdity of a situation where one would wake up in the morning and telling themselves "Today, I will try to solve this complex problem I am struggling with, so, I will aim to end up in a state of suspension!". Compare it with "OK, today I will try to solve this complex problem, so I am to figure it out and advance my knowledge/understanding". We just don't aim to arrive at a state of suspension and we don't have dedicated patterns of reasoning terminating in suspension. This is clearly similar to moods. Think of the absurdity of someone telling oneself "OK, today is a nice day, I will try to arrive to the state of a happy mood for the rest of the day". We don't reason toward moods; we simply happen to be in them (which is not to say that we cannot use techniques to get ourselves to fall into a mood, like, say, listening to an upbeat/nostalgic music).

The sixth similarity is about the apparent oddity of justification/rationality and reasons in both suspension and moods in general. According to a common idea, we don't base moods on reasons that speak in favor of them. Consider a Buddhist monk who is in a profound state of serenity. It appears a bit odd to say that his serene mood is based on reasons that would speak in favor of being in that mood. It would seem that he doesn't base his serenity on any reasons at all. It is just an effect of his meditative efforts. According to some theorists, this constitutes a major difference between moods and specific emotional attitudes, e.g., being afraid of an angry dog, where the fact that the dog runs toward me is a reason for me to be afraid (Deonna & Teroni, 2009, 2012). However, note also that there does seem to be a sense in which we can evaluate moods. Consider a football fan whose team has lost

and is relegated to another league but who is in a euphoric mood for several days. It would seem that there is something odd in this situation. We can reasonably ask him, “But why are you euphoric? Your team has lost!” It would seem that, in a sense, we can evaluate his euphoric mood as somewhat inappropriate or unjustified. So, how can we make sense of the apparent fact that we don’t base our moods on reasons that would speak in favor of them, and yet, moods can be evaluated as justified or unjustified in response to *why-questions* (i.e., “*Why are you in this mood*” questions)? Before suggesting one way of addressing this apparent tension in moods, we note that suspension is clearly similar to moods here again. It would seem that we don’t base suspension on positive reasons we have for suspending, and yet, clearly, suspension can be evaluated as appropriate or not. After all, when I suspend judgment about whether there will be a meeting in two weeks, I am not basing this suspension on a positive consideration that by itself speaks in favor of suspending, but on the absence of conclusive evidence one way or another. On the other hand, my suspension can be inappropriate, say, in a situation where I have no idea whatsoever about the very possibility that my colleague is a spy, and I just jump to the suspensive state about whether he is a spy. It’s even odd for me to consider the question. In short, it is a case where I have no reason even to consider or entertain the possibility of my colleague being a spy, and yet I suspend judgment out of the blue on whether he is a spy. We suggest, then, that suspension is similar to moods in that as in the case of moods we don’t seem to base it on positive reasons, and yet it can be evaluated as justified or unjustified.

Before moving on, we would like to suggest a way to explain this tension in both moods in general and in suspension. Our explanation appeals to a recent theory of normative reasons, namely, the Erotetic theory of reasons (cf. Logins, 2022). According to this view, reasons are (appropriate) answers to normative *why-F? questions* (e.g., Why believe this? Why do that?). Normative *why-questions* come in two readings. On one reading they ask for a reasoning/an argument in favor of F-ing (or not-F-ing). Yet on the other reading, they ask for an explanation of why one ought to F/not-F (or alternatively, of why it would be good to F/not-F). This feature of normative *why-questions* is inherited from the two readings of *why-questions* in general. For instance, the question “Why is this old friend of ours a spy?” can be understood as either asking for an argument that he is, or as asking for an explanation of how come he is a spy. In the context where the first reading is relevant, one is typically challenging the claim that the friend is a spy and aims to get things right. In the context where the second reading is relevant, one is typically accepting that the friend is a spy but aims to have a better understanding of why the friend is a spy. The same duality is in place in normative *why-F questions*. This duality of normative *why-F questions* gives ground to two sorts of normative reasons, since in this



theory normative reasons are appropriate answers to the normative why-F questions. So, we have reasoning normative reasons on one hand, that is, reasons that are connected to argument and patterns of reasoning to get things right. And on the other hand, we have explanatory normative reasons that are connected to explanation and our aim to better understand normative statuses, like obligations, permissions, and values. In moods, like in suspension, there seem to be no normative reasoning reasons. The fact that we cannot base moods on positive considerations that would speak for us in favor of being in the state of the relevant mood is a symptom of just this. The sort of rationality that is attached to figuring things out through reasoning and argument (in particular, figuring out what state/attitude one should be in) is absent in moods. Moods cannot be rational in this reasoning/argument-relative sense of rationality. And we observe the same in suspension. We cannot reason with the aim of ending up in a state of suspension. And there seems to be another sense of rationality or appropriateness/justification in both moods and suspension that is connected to normative explanatory reasons. The question “Why be euphoric?” clearly makes sense and can ground an evaluation of an agent when it is understood in the sense that asks for normative explanatory reasons for being euphoric, not for positive argumentative considerations that would support being euphoric. When there is nothing that would explain why one should be euphoric in a given situation (recall the case of the football fan whose team lost), we can evaluate the agent as unjustified in the sense that is connected to normative explanatory reasons. The same seems to hold in the case of suspension of judgment. When I jump to the suspensive state of mind out of the blue, when I should not even consider the question at hand, there are no explanatory normative reasons that could explain why I should suspend in this case. This explains why I am unjustified in suspending in this case. The justification of suspension here is relative to normative explanatory questions, just as it seems to be in the case of moods. The proposal just sketched seems to explain the tension that we can see in moods and suspension, namely, that there seem to be no positive considerations on which we can base moods or suspension, and yet in some cases at least, it clearly appears reasonable to evaluate moods and suspension as justified or not. Elaboration of a full-blooded theory of rationality of moods and suspension will be left for another occasion. What matters for us at this point is that the observed tension in reasons and justification seems to be the same in moods and suspension and that a likely solution to this tension will apply equally to both. This is, then, another similarity in moods and suspension.<sup>5</sup>

One might object at this point that it hasn't yet been shown that there cannot be reasoning reasons for suspension of judgment about  $p$ . Sure, one might insist, we can accept that there are no normative reasoning reasons for moods, but we still have to show that there are no normative reasoning

reasons for suspension. Our opponent might wonder why the fact that I am not in a position to know that  $p$ , or perhaps that I know that my evidence for  $p$  is inconclusive, cannot be a normative reasoning reason to suspend. But if there are normative reasoning reasons to suspend, then suspension is not a mood.

In response to this worry, we would like to note that normative reasoning reasons can be understood as contents of premises of patterns of good reasoning, which, in turn correspond to good arguments. So, if  $p$  is a content of a premise of a good pattern of reasoning, then there has to be a good argument from  $p$  to the content of the conclusion-response for which  $p$  was content of the corresponding premise-response. But what kind of proposition would be the conclusion of an argument which would have “I am not in a position to know that  $p$ ” as a premise? It is not easy to see what could it be. One might think, perhaps, “ $p$  or not  $p$ ” is the conclusion that is supported by the premise “I am not in a position to know that  $p$ ”. But “ $p$  or not-  $p$ ” doesn’t seem to follow from the “I am not in a position to know that  $p$ ”. Perhaps  $p$  is self-defeating and paradoxical. If “ $p$  or not-  $p$ ” holds, this should be in virtue of disjunction introduction and it has nothing to do with me being in or not in a position to know that  $p$ . It would seem there is no good argument that could capture the schema of reasoning where one moves from one not being in a position to know to one suspending judgment on  $p$ , which is not to say that suspension cannot be rational. Its rationality merely seems to be sensitive to other factors than good patterns of reasoning and argument. It would seem it is connected to normative explanatory reasons, i.e., reasons that play a role in explaining why one should suspend rather than reasons that help one to reason toward suspending whether  $p$ .

The seventh similarity between moods and suspension concerns the direction of fit. A tentative proposal here is that moods appear to have a null direction of fit. When I am nostalgic, I don’t seem to be aiming to fit the world to mind, nor mind to the world. The direction of fit is absent altogether. The same appears to be the case with suspension. When I suspend judgment about whether it will rain this afternoon, I am neither attempting to fit my mind to what is happening in the world, nor am I trying to change it, and to fit the world to my perspective. Moods and suspension seem to be similar in that their direction of fit is null.

The eight similarity concerns phenomenology. Moods clearly have a phenomenology. Their phenomenology appears to be distinct from that of emotions (cf. Mitchell, 2019; Rossi, 2021). And there also appears to be a specific phenomenology in suspension. This phenomenology comes in two kinds, depending on the individual’s personality. Sometimes, suspension comes with the feeling of discomfort from being undecided, of not being fixed. This discomfort may amount to a feeling of frustration.

Consider FRUSTRATED WATCHER, a situation where you have decided to watch a movie on Netflix. But after checking trailers for some time, you are still undecided about what to watch tonight. You are not fixed on anything. And this very fact of being undecided and unfixed may produce a feeling of slight discomfort or even frustration as time passes and you still haven't chosen what to watch. We would suggest that this kind of feeling of discomfort is one of the feelings proper to suspension. Another feeling that can be triggered in suspension is feeling inquisitive, feeling curious, and intrigued. Imagine, a good friend of yours has a job interview today. You know the interview was this morning and that whether she gets the job will be known later on that very same day. As hours pass your feeling of curiosity grows in intensity as you still haven't heard from your friend yet. You are getting impatient. You really want to know whether your friend got it. Your feeling of inquisitiveness grows further in intensity. Now, we explain below (section 5) why suspension can trigger two distinct feelings (in short, it has to do with varying levels of need for closure). The important point for us here is that there seems to be a clear phenomenology in paradigmatic cases of suspension. And this is another similarity with moods.

Our positive hypothesis is that suspension is best interpreted as a special sort of mood. That is, the above similarities between suspension and moods suggest that suspension is a kind of mood. That suspension is a mood seems to be the best available explanation of the above eight similarities, taken together. Despite not being a knockdown argument, we provide further clarifications in the next sections, in response to four objections, adding some more weight to our hypothesis.

## 5. Four objections against the mood view of suspension

The first objection concerns the difference between our view and existing accounts in the literature. One might worry that our view does not significantly differ from current views of suspension, given the possibility that certain mental phenomena could qualify as both moods and doxastic states, thereby suggesting a hybrid position instead. If we entertain the idea that suspension could be both a mood and a doxastic state, this would constitute a “hybrid” view of suspension (cf. Raleigh, 2021, p. 2454). This is an intriguing proposal. One possible hybrid position, for instance, could hold that suspension is constituted either by occupying a doxastic state or by experiencing a certain type of mood, though neither condition would be individually necessary for suspension. We argue for a more radical position, starting from observations about assumptions in the current debate (often left unexamined), the existence of a certain tension within TRIAD, and the significance of suspension in epistemology. By proposing that suspension is a mood, we believe we can address several persistent epistemological

problems (see [section 7](#) below), or at least outline possible solutions. These problems remain unresolved if one holds that suspension is strictly a doxastic state. While we agree that suspension and belief are related – but without being in competition –, we contend that, constitutively, suspension no longer appears to be a doxastic state per se. In this sense, our proposal neither aligns with nor fits neatly within any of the existing views in the literature.<sup>6</sup>

The second objection concerns the relation between our view and a previously discussed one – Sosa’s (2021) conception of suspension (cf. Atkinson, 2021; Lord, 2023; Miracchi, 2019; Simion, 2022). We mentioned Sosa as endorsing TRIAD and discussed his understanding of the aim of suspension. One crucial difference between our view and Sosa’s is that he considers suspension a type of mental performance aimed at avoiding error (a subsidiary aim) to attain knowledge (the primary aim) within a telic virtue epistemology framework. Our concern, as discussed above, is that it seems somewhat odd to think we are aiming at anything when we suspend judgment. Along these lines, we struggle to see how suspension could be conceived as a performance (cf. the already quoted observation by Miracchi, 2019, p. 433: “Suspension need not have an aim at all, precisely because it is in the most basic cases a *non-performance*.”).

By contrast, one advantage of our view is its ability to address certain epistemological problems that Sosa’s view cannot, as clarified below in [section 7](#). For instance, our view accounts for the rationality of both believing and suspending in cases of peer disagreement, reconciles belief and suspension in situations involving conflicting moral and epistemic demands, and accommodates skeptical arguments by interpreting them as relating to the psychological experience of a suspensive mood rather than a doxastic change.

Lastly, we presented our view as having the advantage of defending evidentialism against common challenges. While our paper does favor an evidentialist (restricted) picture of doxastic attitudes – limited to belief and disbelief–, we argue that the core of evidentialism can be sustained without treating suspension as a doxastic attitude on a par within TRIAD. When understood as a mood, suspension is not constrained by epistemic evidential norms – unlike belief and disbelief (see McCain, 2023 for an alternative response to Sosa’s challenges against evidentialism).

The third objection concerns the valence of moods. It is the valence objection. Valence is a crucial component of affective experiences (Deonna & Teroni, 2012; Walle & Dukes, 2023). This term of art helps to characterize and classify affective phenomena as either good/positive or bad/negative. If we can evaluate emotions in terms of their hedonic valence, we can do the same for moods. Our opponent would argue that valence is an important feature of moods about which our view of suspension as a mood

is silent, or cannot even account. There are promising ways of responding to this objection. First, we can note that there is no dominant account of valence in the literature that explains what makes certain moods positive and others negative (cf. Deonna & Teroni, 2012, p. 15, and Teroni 2018 on the valence of emotions). Thus, it has recently been noted that in the affective sciences “there is also widespread disagreement in how researchers conceptualize this basic construct [that valence is an essential aspect of emotion]”, and that there are “significant inconsistencies in how valence is defined and operationalized by contemporary emotion researchers” (Walle & Dukes, 2023, p. 463). We are not suggesting that these observations block the objection. However, it is necessary to be more precise about what our opponent means under valence. If the objection is to be expressed in hedonic terms, we might respond in the following way. According to the hedonic account of valence, moods fall into two groups: good moods and bad moods. If you think of suspension as a mood, it must fall into one of these two categories. We want to respond that the valence for suspension comes in degrees on a whole spectrum-between very mildly valenced or strongly valenced positive/negative depending on phenomenological and psychological factors. Consider again the example of the FRUSTRATED WATCHER. His inability to resolve his uncertainty about which movie to watch causes him to experience a phenomenologically unpleasant mental episode. Or, in the case of CROWD, Harry might experience suspension as a strongly positively valenced feeling, because the uncertainty involves the possibility that it is really his brother who might be in the crowd. In this sense, we are not arguing that suspension is an unvalenced or “neutral mood” (see Kriegel, 2022). But neither are we suggesting that suspension is necessarily a phenomenologically unpleasant mood. Rather, the idea is that most of the time we are not aware of the quality/valence of the mood we are in when we are in a suspensive mood. We are thus not saying that suspension systematically feels good or bad. Our explanation for this is based on our view of the connection between the mood of suspension and the emotions associated with it (see below). Roughly speaking, since suspension can trigger very different emotions, it follows that the valence of suspension is also plural and situational.<sup>7</sup>

The fourth objection concerns the fact that, unlike emotions, moods are generally characterized as long-lasting, non-transitory, and pervasive. This is the pervasiveness objection. For our opponent, our view of suspension as a mood contradicts this intuitive idea. It is more common to think of suspension as temporary, ephemeral, and reactive to particular situations. Moods are supposed to have some duration and to color our world, whereas suspension does not seem to have such characteristics. However, the temporal criterion is not a good choice when trying to mark a difference between moods in general and suspension. As Prinz

(2004) notes, some moods can be short-lived. He gives the following example: “[i]magine a situation in which one is sent into a gloomy state after peering out a window at a gray sky, only to have gloom interrupted by a welcome phone call from an old friend. The claim that moods are just long-lasting emotions does not hold up” (Prinz 2004, p. 183). So there may be temporary or short-lived moods. They do not affect us deeply in the sense that our whole view of the world is affected (as opposed to depression, which is one of the paradigmatic moods). To give some examples, think about being euphoric, annoyed, restless, inspired, and discouraged. We argue that these are short-lived moods comparable to suspension. Take euphoria. It is a brief, intense feeling of happiness or exhilaration, often in response to a specific positive event (the euphoric mood can disappear instantly in response to another specific event). Being annoyed is a short-lived mood of irritation, often triggered by minor inconveniences or frustrations. For example, suppose you get on the train and see a good empty seat, when suddenly someone rushes in front of you to steal the coveted seat. You’re annoyed until you quickly find another seat nearby. We think this is exactly what happens with suspension. It is a mood that can quickly disappear, e.g., by learning a new piece of information, or it can persist until you find some relief from whatever it is about which you are suspended. In the latter case, the phenomenology may be less pregnant than in the former, where the mood is purely episodic.

## 6. Further consequences and clarifications of the positive proposal

In this section, we elaborate further consequences and clarifications of our positive view according to which suspension is a mood (of a special sort).

The first point to consider is the mood-emotion connection. It is common to accept that every mood has a corresponding emotion, see: “For every mood type, there appears to be a corresponding emotion type” (Rossi, 2021, p. 7122). Thus, one might wonder if suspension is a mood, which emotion corresponds to it? In response, we suggest that there are indeed some emotions that correspond specifically to suspension of judgment. Among these, we can find curiosity and anxiety.<sup>8</sup> When I am in a suspensive state of mind about whether my friend got the job, I may be curious about it. Alternatively, I may also be increasingly anxious about whether my friend got the job. That suspension is a mood best explains why we have these dedicated emotions that are connected to suspension, – it just is what moods are, moods typically have dedicated emotions.

One can wonder nonetheless about the above suggestion and worry that the above-mentioned emotions are quite different. What explains the difference in emotions that are connected to suspension? In particular, when

we also observe that typical moods don't give rise to so disparate emotions. The mood of serenity will not typically trigger emotions as different as curiosity and anxiety. What explains this variety of emotions in connection to suspension?

In response to this worry, we rely on the idea that there are multi-track mood dispositions (cf. Rossi, 2021), and suspension might just be one of these. A multi-track mood just is a mood that can produce a variety of emotions. Think for instance about irritability. It can trigger acute sadness, but it can also lead to anger.

Here is, then, a tentative suggestion for further explanation of the multi-track nature of suspension. Which of the relevant emotions is triggered depends largely on one's need for cognitive closure/avoidance of closure (cf. Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). The term "need for closure" "refers to the desire to possess some knowledge on a given topic, any definite knowledge as opposed to confusion and ambiguity" (Mayseless & Kruglanski, 1987, p. 164). Accordingly, the higher the need for closure is for the subject, the higher the likelihood of anxiety/frustration as a corresponding emotion in case of informational ambiguity. Similarly, the lower the need for closure (or the higher the need for avoiding closure), the higher the likelihood of curiosity/feeling intrigued. Being in a suspensive mood can thus trigger frustration and anxiety, but also curiosity and inquisitiveness.

Furthermore, our positive hypothesis also explains how and why skeptical temperament is connected to suspension of judgment. It would seem that moods are connected to temperaments (cf. Deonna & Teroni, 2009, p. 364; Kostochka, 2020, p. 11417). If suspension is a mood, it could be the corresponding mood to the skeptical temperament. By skeptical temperament, we don't necessarily mean a philosophical view; it is more about one's overall outlook.

The second consequence of our view is that it is closely tied to the philosophical skeptical tradition concerning the nature of suspension. We observed in the first section above that suspension is of central interest to skepticism. It is indeed a key ingredient in Pyrrhonian and Academic skeptical traditions. Interestingly, the literature on Pyrrhonism is generally affable about describing the skeptic as being in a certain disposition. A point often overlooked is that, in the Pyrrhonian tradition, suspension is conceived as an affective state rather than a doxastic attitude. We can note that the current debate on suspension in the literature has generally loosened one's ties with this tradition while trying to fit their views with Pyrrhonian insights somehow confusedly. In fact, the affective state of suspension discussed by skeptics is akin to being in a certain mood. For example, see Bett (2019) on Sextus:

This is the repertoire of ‘skeptical phrases’ that he employs to emphasize the fact that he is not making any definite assertions about the nature of things. Instead, as he says, these are ‘*indicative of the skeptical disposition and of our feeling*’ (*PH I.* 187); that is, they report or express a state of mind rather than describing a state of affairs in the world, and the state of mind that they report or express is one in which opposing impressions or arguments seem equally convincing. [...] His way of spelling out the phrase ‘I do not apprehend’ is that it ‘is revelatory of our own feeling, in terms of which the skeptic stands back for the present from positing any of the unclear things being investigated or doing away with them’. (*PH I.* 201) (Bett, 2019, p. 13)

It is not too late to remind us also of the often-quoted passage from Sextus in which suspension is clearly not a doxastic state: “At *PH I.* 7, Sextus explicitly says that suspension is an affection” (Machuca, 2022, p. 73). And in their translation of Sextus, this is how Annas and Barnes (2000) render *PH I.7*:

The Sceptical persuasion, then, is also called investigative, from its activity in investigating and inquiring; Suspensive, from the feeling [*pathos*] that comes about in the inquirer after the investigation; Aporetic, either (as some say) from the fact that it puzzles over and investigates everything, or else from its being at a loss whether to assent or deny; and Pyrrhonian, from the fact that Pyrrho appears to us to have attached himself to Scepticism more systematically and conspicuously than anyone before (Annas & Barnes, 2000, p. 4).

Furthermore, consider Pyrrhonists’ story of how suspension is produced. Pyrrhonists claim that “while the affection of being persuaded by the argument against demonstration is not the result of an assessment of its epistemic strength, the affection of suspension is the result of an assessment of the epistemic strength of the arguments for and against there being demonstration” (Machuca, 2022, p. 74). One way of understanding this observation is that for Pyrrhonists, suspension lacks argumentative normative reasons, but this doesn’t mean that it cannot be properly assessed. And this is exactly the idea that we suggested above in the sixth point of similarity between suspension and moods.<sup>9</sup>

## 7. How our proposal addresses some epistemological problems

We would like to conclude this paper by observing how exactly our proposal helps to resolve several epistemological problems.

First, it defends evidentialism. If suspension is a mood, and thus not a doxastic state, the suggestion that suspension of judgment is under non-evidentialist norms is of no worry for evidentialism. Indeed, conceiving of suspension as a mood allows us to reject recent objections to evidentialism (that we introduced in section 2, cf. Crawford, 2022; Lord, 2020; Schroeder, 2012) at their root. Practical aspects might affect the rationality of suspension. But since suspension is distinct from doxastic states, it doesn’t pose a threat to evidentialism (unless evidentialists endorse TRIAD, on which



suspension is on a par with belief and disbelief). Our proposal on this count is preferable to alternative responses that introduce additional (and arguably, *ad hoc*) distinctions to deal with cases where non-evidential factors influence the rationality of suspension (cf. McGrath, 2021).

In our discussion, we have worked with a somewhat unspecified version of evidentialism. In particular, we have focused on justification or rationality without specifying the exact normative property it entails. One prominent approach in contemporary debates identifies justification with permissibility. Another, not necessarily unrelated, trend frames epistemic norms negatively – where, for instance, an evidentialist norm holds that it is impermissible to have evidentially unsupported beliefs. Recently, however, an alternative to this permission and negative-duties-focused approach has gained traction. According to what we might call *positive evidentialism*, not only should we avoid holding evidentially unsupported beliefs, but we also have an obligation to believe based on sufficient evidence. On this view, there are positive epistemic duties, which evidentialists interpret as requiring conformity with one's evidence (see Ichikawa, 2022, 2024; Simion, 2023 for recent proposals in positive epistemology). This approach has interesting implications for cases involving morally or practically loaded propositions, such as racist, sexist, or ableist beliefs, where the wrongness of such beliefs is often tied to a positive duty to believe otherwise. One common response is to interpret this duty as fundamentally moral or practical. However, positive evidentialists offer an alternative explanation: if there are positive duties to believe, then morally or practically loaded propositions could simply be one among many cases where an epistemic and properly evidentialist obligation to believe arises, provided the evidence one possesses supports the proposition. (This does not imply that positive evidentialists must deny the existence of moral, practical, or other types of duties to believe.) One influential line of thought appeals to the inappropriateness of suspension in cases where one's evidence strongly supports a proposition and is far from being in equipoise. For example, it seems problematic to suspend judgment about whether it is raining while standing in the rain and completely soaked. If the three relevant alternatives regarding the question – belief, disbelief, and suspension – are considered, one ought to believe it is raining, as neither disbelief nor suspension is rationally appropriate. This reasoning seems to support the conclusion that there are evidentialist obligations to believe.

Our positive proposal is compatible with positive evidentialism. Nothing in our account of suspension suggests that there cannot be positive duties to believe, where such a duty involves believing what one's evidence overall supports. However, we must emphasize that the argument beginning with the inappropriateness of suspension in certain cases and concluding with the existence of positive evidentialist duties to believe will not constitute a good argument on our approach. In short, if our argument against the

Schroeder/Friedman objection to (negative) evidentialism succeeds by undermining the link between appropriate suspension and appropriate disbelief, it equally undermines the positive evidentialist argument from the inappropriateness of suspension to a duty to believe based on evidence. Fundamentally, our critique of the Schroeder/Friedman style of objection to evidentialism rests on two key points: (1) suspension is not a doxastic state (the failure of TRIAD), and (2) the rationality or justification of suspension supervenes solely on normative explanatory reasons (and not on normative argumentative/reasoning reasons). As such, we cannot conclude that one should not believe a given proposition on the basis of pragmatic reasons from the fact that there are pragmatic reasons to suspend judgment about the proposition in question. The justification of suspension and disbelief relies on different factors. They are not like communicating vessels. There is no epistemic justification fluid that flows from suspension to disbelief to equalize levels within TRIAD. If our argument is correct, it follows that we cannot conclude that there is a positive evidentialist duty to believe merely because suspension is unjustified in certain cases. When suspension is not appropriate, overall normative explanatory reasons speak against it. When belief is justified, overall normative reasoning reasons speak in favor of it. Belief and suspension remain distinct and non-communicating vessels, assuming our objection against TRIAD and our explanatory approach to the rationality of suspension are on the right track. Once more, this is not to deny the possibility of epistemic evidentialist duties to believe, which remains fully compatible with our view. However, a fuller treatment of the possibilities of such positive duties lies beyond the scope of the present discussion.<sup>10</sup>

Another well-known challenge to evidentialism stem from peer-disagreement/higher order evidence. Roughly, the objection is that in cases of peer-disagreement and in cases of higher order evidence (for instance, cases where you have evidence in favor of your fallibility), you may be in a situation where your evidence supports strongly  $p$ , but the fact that your peers disagree with you on  $p$  or the fact that you learn about your fallibility seems to speak in favor of suspending judgment on  $p$ . If so, then, according to this objection, this is a case where evidentialism predicts that you are rational in believing that  $p$  but at the same time, you are rational in suspending judgment about  $p$ . This, according to the proponents of the objection, cannot be the case, since, assuming TRIAD, you cannot be rational in both believing that  $p$  and suspending judgment on whether  $p$ .

Our proposal gives a possible way out of trouble for evidentialists. Rejecting TRIAD allows us to maintain that there is nothing problematic rationality-wise in both believing that  $p$  and suspending judgment on whether  $p$ . Suspension, on our view, is not a doxastic state, and as discussed in section four on reasons and rationality of suspension, the rationality of

suspension depends on normative explanatory reasons and not on normative reasoning reasons. The rationality of belief depends on normative reasoning reasons (these are the reasons that track argumentative patterns). Considerations that determine the rationality of belief are distinct from considerations that determine the rationality of the mood of suspension.

Third, our proposal solves the problem of *epistemic partiality in friendship*. Suppose I learn that my friend is accused of a terrible crime. I know a great deal about his character, his behavior, his past, and so on. It can be argued that I have a moral obligation, imposed by friendship, not to believe that my friend is guilty until I have conclusive evidence of his guilt (and even then, I might irrationally resist the effects of the new information). So, it seems that I cannot simultaneously satisfy the demands of friendship and my epistemic duties (to believe according to my available evidence). This is a case where I should believe that my friend is guilty and suspend judgment. I fail in terms of epistemic standards, but I satisfy the moral standards of friendship. Our proposal has a solution to this tension. In this case, our view says that one has a doxastic attitude – one believes that a friend is guilty because of the weight of the evidence against his innocence – and one is in a certain mood, i.e., one feels uncertain about one's friend's guilt. Believing and suspending is forbidden by the TRIAD, whereas we think it is perfectly okay, because the subject is not holding two incompatible doxastic attitudes simultaneously, but rather one doxastic attitude and one moody attitude.

Fourth, we can apply this last verdict to cases of response to radical skepticism. The skeptical arguments – according to which there is no external world, that I am a brain in a vat, or that the zebra I'm looking at in the zoo is not a real zebra (but a cleverly disguised mule) – have no rational impact on what I believe about the world and its inhabitants. I don't rationally revise my cherished beliefs and end up in a state of suspended judgment. What happens is that I retain these beliefs, but I am not immune to the psychological effects of the skeptical arguments, which plunge me into a not-so-pleasurable mood of suspension in which (almost) everything now feels uncertain. Our view, moreover, is compatible with the underestimated idea that the skeptic's goal is precisely to put us in such a mood, rather than to get us to adopt a certain doxastic attitude, i.e., suspension of judgment according to TRIAD.

## 8. Conclusion

Our concern here has been on the nature of suspension of judgment. We presented a cumulative case of seven substantial differences between suspension and belief/disbelief. We suggested that taken together these differences support the claim that suspension is of a different kind, that is, that suspension is not a doxastic attitude. There are two important upshots.

Firstly, it presents a way of rejecting the popular assumption that we call the *Triad view* according to which there are three and only three (paradigmatic) doxastic attitudes, namely, *belief*, *disbelief*, and *suspension of judgment*. Secondly, and as a consequence, it offers a novel way of dealing with recent objections raised against evidentialism by, so to speak, directly pulling the rug from under their feet. Furthermore, we also argued for the positive thesis that suspension is indeed a mood. We thus offered the best explanation for the observation of eight similarities between suspension and moods. We remarked how suspension is connected to very different emotions, and also how this view aligns with the Pyrrhonian conception of suspension as an affective phenomenon. The idea that suspension is not a doxastic attitude but rather an affective phenomenon has been surprisingly ignored, up to now, in the contemporary debate. In this paper, we took this idea seriously and made it livelier by arguing that suspension is a mood.

## Notes

1. As will become clear, we limit our discussion of suspension to the traditional picture of full doxastic attitudes, aligning with a common view in mainstream contemporary epistemology. We do not intend to deny the relevance of several stimulating proposals that conceptualize suspension in terms of subjective probabilities. Rather, we acknowledge that these belong to a different framework, one with many virtues and applications in formal epistemology (see Brössel & Eder, *in press*; Hájek, 1998; Norton, 2008; Sturgeon, 2020).
2. We restrict the claim to “full” doxastic states, to leave the debate on how, if ever, credences (degrees of belief) are connected to full or outright belief. For discussion on this connection, see Clarke and Staffel (2024), and Jackson (2020).
3. This is not to be conflated with a view discussed in epistemology known under the label of Permissivism.
4. In this paper, we assume that disbelief is a doxastic state. Its aim is plausibly also truth or knowledge but of a negated proposition. If one questions this, then one needs to explain in what sense disbelief is a doxastic attitude.
5. For a recent discussion of the rationality of moods in terms of “reasons-for-which explanations”, see Bradley (*in press*).
6. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for prompting us to clarify this point.
7. See Price (2006) and Tappolet (2023, pp. 33–36) for different approaches to moods and their relationship to emotions.
8. Thanks to Laura Silva for making us realize this connection. For a discussion of curiosity conceived as an emotion rather than merely a desiderative state, see Brady (2009, 2018) and Carruthers (*in press*).
9. Other philosophical views that might consider, or are compatible with, the idea of suspension as an affective state – such as the Peircean inspired view of doubt as an affective state (see Hookway, 2002) – could form the basis of an intriguing investigation. Here, however, we have chosen to limit our focus to classical skepticism, as its treatment aligns with our discussion of the philosophical consequences of our view. This focus leads to a rethinking of the psychological impact of skepticism and the skeptic’s aim in confronting interlocutors with perplexities (see Section 7). We thank

an anonymous reviewer for pointing out that further explorations in the history of philosophy may provide support for our proposal.

10. See contributions in Stapleford and McCain (2020) for discussions on epistemic duties, and Ichikawa (in press) on “misplaced suspension of judgment, [which] like misplaced belief, can constitute an important doxastic error.” We thank an anonymous reviewer of this journal for pointing out the connection between our discussion and positive evidentialism.

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