

# SUSPENDED JUDGEMENT REBOOTED

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**Abstract** Suspension of judgment is often viewed as a member of the doxastic club, alongside belief and disbelief. In this paper, I challenge the widespread view that suspension is a commitment-involving stance. Friedman’s counter-examples to the traditional view that suspended judgement merely requires considering a proposition and being in a state of non-belief are criticized. I introduce a refined conception, emphasizing that suspension involves a proximal causal link between examining a proposition and the resulting non-belief state. This episode manifests as an incapacity at making a judgement, occurring under specific circumstances. The refined view clarifies the nature of suspended judgement.

Keywords: suspension of judgement; commitment; non-belief; incapacity; Jane Friedman

## 1. Introduction

Suspension of judgment is a commonly experienced phenomenon and an essential component of our intellectual life, holding central interest in epistemology. In plenty of situations, the evidence at hand does not clearly favor one possibility over another. So, often enough, we end up suspending our judgement on various matters. Consider straightforward examples: you’re just about to cross a busy street and see a car approaching. Uncertain that you can cross safely, you suspend judgment on whether the car will stop. Similarly, when a coin is flipped and you suspend judgment on whether it will land heads, or when you suspend judgment about whether the crucial penalty kick will be scored. Although these scenarios are common, analyzing what exactly suspension amounts to is not an easy task. Classically, suspension was defined as follows:

### **CONSIDERATION $\alpha$**

S is in a state of suspended judgment about p at t iff S has considered p by t and is in a state of non-belief with respect to p at t.

This is referred to as a Non-belief view in the literature (cf. Atkins 2017, Friedman 2013, Raleigh 2021). CONSIDERATION  $\alpha$  is widely accepted (see Conee & Feldman, 2018, p. 72), Feldman, 2003, p. 24n; Perin, 2018, p. 118; Salmon, 1995, p. 2; Wedgwood, 2002, p. 273), and historically consistent with Sextus’ view of suspension (Barnes, 1990, p. 9); Sinkiewicz (2019, p. 3). This definition outlines two central conditions: *Consideration*, where one must consider a question or proposition, and *Non-belief*, where one neither believes nor disbelieves the target-proposition. *Consideration* just is a precondition for judging whether p, as there can be no judging unless the mind is directed to something which is available to judgement. It follows that is also precondition for suspending judgement (see McGrath, 2024, p. 57; Zinke 2021). *Consideration* provides us with a criterion that distinguishes suspension from mere absence of

belief, or *Non-belief* simpliciter; the latter lacking this property. The ‘having considered the matter’ clause imply some deliberation, wondering, entertaining, or having thought about p as a condition for suspension: “We typically suspend judgement only after some period of reflection on a question” (Friedman 2024). Wagner (2021) takes it as requirement for any descriptive account of suspension: “a subject cannot be agnostic toward a proposition (or a question) if she is not or never was in cognitive contact with this proposition (or question)”. However, recent dissatisfaction with CONSIDERATION  $\alpha$ , spurred by Jane Friedman’s objections and positive characterizations of suspension (see Friedman 2013a, 2013b, 2017, 2024), has led to a proliferation of new and exciting proposals. These are motivated by the supposed failure of non-belief accounts, the endorsement of substantial assumptions, notably the triadic picture of doxastic attitudes, and the addition of some specific attitude to the state of non-belief capturing the neutrality of the suspender’s state of mind. Friedman argues that

“Suspension requires some sort of decision about or commitment with respect to the truth of p; it isn’t a state that we are in in virtue of being opinionless, rather it is a state of opinion. It is in this sense that suspension is, or at least involves, a proper doxastic commitment about the truth of p on the part of the subject.” (Friedman, 2013b, p. 59)

Contrary to the prevailing view that “suspending is a matter of taking up some attitude rather than merely not having some” (Friedman, 2017, p. 303), in the sense of adopting “some specific perspective on the truth of a proposition” (Conee 2021), I will defend a refined version of the non-belief plus consideration account of suspension, CONSIDERATION  $\Omega$ .

I will argue in the first part of this paper for the negative thesis that it is not necessary to define suspension as a committal attitude. We have already in our possession an account with building blocks satisfying enough to describe what suspension is. This account is simply underdeveloped and, consequently, has been an easy target for counter-examples (see Friedman 2013a). The lack of specificity in defining what “consideration” entails and its role, was too vague to establish a robust account. I will thus argue for the thesis that suspension is not a commitment-involving mental stance but is, within our cognitive economy, merely an absence of belief that manifests an incapacity to make a judgment.

Suspenders are abstainers, not committers. Or to put it differently, I will propose a Cantian view of suspension: Cantians claim that suspended judgement occurs when we *can’t* judge that p in specific circumstances. Committers, by contrast, take the phenomenon to involve a commitment-involving mental stance towards p. According to Cantians, the phenomenon is to be explained not in terms of *commitment* but of *incapacity*.

I will first identify distinguishing features of suspension (§2), and explore the commitment-involving approach (§3), highlighting its importance in recent discussions. I will then raise some considerations against these accounts and introduce a simpler, alternative view of suspension (§4). This departure from the doxastically committal approach is prone to objections, which I will address in detail. Finally, I will conclude by discussing the advantages of this non-committal approach, aiming to return to the *basics* and emphasize the simple and most important aspects of suspension of judgment (§5).

## 2. Some marks of suspension

Suspension of judgement is of central interest in epistemology. Interestingly, until the recent blooming of theories of suspension, it was not conceived as a proper doxastic attitude, in the sense of taking a stance or adopting a perspective about the truth of a proposition. Instead, and as mentioned in the introduction, older and “canonical views of suspension” (Friedman, 2017, p. 306) theorized it as a privative notion which consist in neither believing that  $p$  nor disbelieving that  $p$  plus some extra condition. But things are changing. A major trend of a surge in interest in suspension has been initiated by the work of Jane Friedman (notably Friedman 2013, and Friedman 2017). The current state of discussions reveals a plurality of new and exciting proposals to define suspension of judgement. There are intriguing accounts according to which suspension is an indecision-attitude terminating inquiry (Friedman 2013, Wagner 2021), a belief about one’s epistemic position (Crawford 2004), a meta-cognitive state (Raleigh 2021, Masny 2020), a mental action (McGrath 2020, Crawford 2022), an interrogative attitude (Friedman 2017, Lord 2020, Archer 2022), a graded state of open-mindedness (Lord & Sylvan 2022), an intermediate level of confidence (Sturgeon 2020) or indeterminate credence (see del Rio, forthcoming).

While it is exciting to observe the recent explosion of accounts of suspension, it is also striking to realize that “the current debate [...] is in some ways the Wild West because there is a large and largely implicit disagreement about the basic features of suspension” (Lord, 2023). Nevertheless, I think it is possible to characterize suspension, as theorized in the current debate, along the following two central features: (i) non-belief, and (ii) commitment. (i) and (ii) are generally accepted. The discussion of these characteristics will have to be relatively brief. As we will see (ii) is the newcomer in the debate, and it will have its own elaboration in the next section.

(i) *Doxastic Neutrality*: This first mark of suspension denotes *doxastic neutrality* (see Raleigh 2021), where the subject neither believes nor disbelieves a proposition—for instance, neither believing nor disbelieving that the approaching car will stop (assuming disbelief in  $p$  is just to believe that not- $p$ ).

(ii) *Commitment*: The second mark is playing a key role, and is largely endorsed in contemporary literature. It is indeed a widely shared assumption that suspension is a mental attitude of “committed neutrality”: “Suspended judgement is not the absence of belief and disbelief. It is the presence of a proprietary kind of neutral commitment, something more than a mere absence or lack. Suspended judgement is the propositional attitude of committed neutrality” (Sturgeon 2020:182; cf. Archer 2024:33; Friedman 2022; Lord 2020). Unlike the mere neutrality of *Doxastic Neutrality*, suspension involves a committed neutrality, suggesting a conscious decision or stance regarding the truth of a proposition (Friedman, 2013b, p. 59).

These two features shed some light on the nature of suspension. However, applying this notion of commitment to the toy examples mentioned in the introduction raises several questions. It remains unclear whether, in suspending judgment about whether a car will stop, or whether a coin will land heads, one is truly making any “sort of decision about or commitment with

respect to the truth of  $p$ ” (Friedman, 2013b, p. 59) concerning those specific issues. In such straightforward cases, it is difficult to see how the suspensive state constitutes a proper doxastic attitude about the truth of the considered proposition. This apparent difficulty suggests that further discussion is needed to adequately explain the presupposed committal aspect of suspension. In what way is it “a state distinct from merely lacking beliefs in some answers” (Friedman, 2017, p. 319)? Why is it necessary to conceptualize suspension as a form of commitment in the first place?

### **3. The commitment-involving stance accounts of suspension**

According to the contemporary popular approach, suspension is, or involves, a proper doxastic attitude. Recent accounts diverge in details, but they commonly agree that theorizing about suspension starts with the idea that it “is some sort of doxastic attitude” (Friedman, 2017, p. 319), and most of them share unquestioned common elements. Namely, most of the contemporary discussions assume

#### **COMMITMENT**

Suspension of judgement is a neutral, commitment-involving mental stance we may take towards a given proposition.

On this picture, suspension is a neutral doxastic attitude—which is or involves a committed neutrality rather than a mere de facto neutrality (i.e. neither believing nor disbelieving that  $p$  simpliciter). Here is a sample of related quotes from the literature accepting COMMITMENT:

“Epistemologists have long recognised that belief and disbelief do not exhaust the possible commitment-involving mental stances we may take towards a given proposition. A third, neutral, commitment-involving mental stance is also possible. This third neutral mental stance has been variously referred to as *suspension of judgement*, *withholding judgement*, or *agnosticism*.” (Archer, 2024, p. 6)

“[I]n trying to figure out which state or states suspension is, we need to investigate the ways in which we can be committed to neutrality. We need to investigate the ways in which  $p$  can be in your outlook [one’s doxastic stance on the world] in a neutral way.” (Lord 2020, p. 128)

“[B]y suspending judgment about  $Q$  we commit to a particular sort of neutrality with respect to  $Q$ —we commit to keeping the question open in thought, or to keeping it an object of inquiry.” (Friedman, 2017, p. 317)

“That one suspends judging seems to imply some sort of commitment to continued efforts to judge.” (Friedman, 2017, p. 317)

“For refraining from believing (disbelieving) the proposition in question also requires that the subject is committed to not being committed to the truth (falsity) of the proposition in question.” (Ferrari & Incurvati 2021)

“The mental state of agnosticism [...] has to be analysed as a complex state that consists of a structural relation between two components: one component is the subject’s doxastic indecision and the other component is the commitment that is directed at her own indecision.” (Wagner 2021)

All these authors emphasize making the notion of commitment central to an account of suspension, resting implicitly on the principle of COMMITMENT PARITY:

### **COMMITMENT PARITY**

Belief and suspension share the common property of being commitment-involving attitudes.

According to positive doxastic accounts (in contrast to non-belief ones), suspended judgment is equated with belief and is thus thought of “as a way of deciding where one stands on a question or the truth of some proposition” (Friedman, 2013, p. 167 fn. 5). In the case of belief, the generally accepted view is that belief is a commitment to truth: “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 2015:42).<sup>1</sup> In contrast, suspension of judgment also represents *p*, but not *as true*. Under this model, epistemologists assume that suspension involves a commitment to neutrality. The argument unfolds as follows: If belief and suspension are considered on a par (assuming the triadic picture of doxastic attitudes), and if belief is a commitment-involving attitude, then suspension must also be a commitment-involving attitude. Just as a believer is committed to the truth of *p* by believing *p*, a suspender is committed to neutrality about *p* by suspending judgment about *p*. It follows that both belief and suspension share the common property of being commitment-involving attitudes (cf. Sylvan & Lord, Forthcoming). From COMMITMENT follows another principle:

### **INSEPARABILITY**

The mental state of suspended judgement is not separable from a commitment-involving property.

According to positive doxastic accounts (in contrast to non-belief ones), the mental state of suspended judgment is inseparable from some form of attitudinal commitment. The *Sui Generis*, *Belief*, and *Agential* views each articulate INSEPARABILITY in distinct ways:

**SUI GENERIS VIEW:** Suspending judgment about whether *P* involves a commitment to keeping a question open on one’s research agenda.

**BELIEF VIEW:** Suspending judgment about whether *p* involves a commitment to having a belief about one’s epistemically deficient standing.

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<sup>1</sup> Kriegel notes that “Importantly, belief shares this truth-commitment with other cognitive states, such as assuming, remembering, expecting, and realizing that *p*. It also characterizes suspecting, speculating, surmising, being convinced that, and being certain that *p*, though with varying degrees of confidence.” (Kriegel 2015:42-43).

AGENTIAL VIEW: Suspending judgment about whether *p* involves a commitment to refrain from judging until better conditions are met.

What these views have in common is the presupposition that suspension represents “a certain kind of epistemic stance or attitude or commitment”, as noted by Friedman (2017). However, there are several considerations that can be brought against COMMITMENT and INSEPARABILITY.

### **3.1. Considerations against COMMITMENT and INSEPARABILITY**

I now present several considerations against the principles of COMMITMENT and INSEPARABILITY. Although I do not have a definitive knock-down argument, I hope to show that they are not necessary to capture the essence of suspension.

The first consideration pertains to the fact that, based on the reading of the commitment property provided by the commitment-involving accounts of suspension, other neutral attitudes also share the same property of “committed neutrality”. There is indeed a large group of attitudes that one can qualify as neutral towards the truth or falsity of *p*. Just to mention a few: thinking of *p*, considering *p*, contemplating (that) *p*, wondering whether *p*, imagining that *p* (cf. Kriegel 2015, chap. 3). These attitudes, like suspension, are neutral towards the truth or falsity of *p*. To be clear, I am not claiming that suspension has nothing to do with neutrality. Everyone must agree that this condition is substantially important for suspension. However, it seems that appealing to a “committed neutrality” property is not a sufficiently distinguishing characteristic.

Secondly, applying a normative interpretation of COMMITMENT (cf. Archer, 2024, pp. 69-70) does not clarify what suspension actually is. If by suspending judgment about *p*, I am rationally committed to not using *p* or not-*p* as a premise for my reasoning or actions, this highlights something important about the normative status of my attitude, but not about the psychological state I am in (cf. Tebben, 2018; Singh, Forthcoming). The normativity of suspension, and how it relates (or not) to structural rationality or substantive rationality, is indeed significant. However, it would be presumptuous to think that this will provide the final word on its nature. We risk confusing “the ontological issues about what mental phenomena are” with “epistemological issues about how mental phenomena are to be explained” (Fodor & Pylyshin 2015, p. 2; cf. Staffel 2024). Furthermore, COMMITMENT does not offer more explanatory power than the classical view that suspension is a privative notion, or a negative disposition. Understanding suspension as being committed to neutrality about whether *p* in dispositional or normative terms merely collapse to return to the classical view that suspension *is* a negative disposition—a disposition not to posit or reject—a disposition not to assent (cf. Sextus), and thus is not a positive commitment-involving stance.

The third point addresses theological agnosticism, which is frequently cited in arguments for COMMITMENT. If one is neither an atheist nor a theist, there exists a third option: being an agnostic. This is a specific stance regarding the question, “Does God exist?”. It is widely accepted that the theological agnostic neither believes nor disbelieves in God’s existence, thus maintaining a neutral state concerning whether *p*. However, it could be argued that this agnosticism is merely an absence of belief in God’s existence. The argument goes roughly like this. If one considers the following scenarios, there are only two relevant options

rather than three: (a) evidence for God's existence outweighs evidence for God's non-existence, and (b) evidence for God's existence does not outweigh evidence against it. In scenario (a), the rational response would be theism, and in scenario (b), atheism. Agnosticism, therefore, is not a viable option (see Wilczewska, 2020). This reasoning could be generalized to other binary questions such as, "Is Oswald a lone shooter?" or "Will the coin land heads?". The answers are potentially 'yes' or 'no'. 'I don't know' does not settle any of these questions but merely reports one's current (unsettled) epistemic or psychological state regarding those issues. In both scenarios (a) and (b), if one aims at answering sincerely, one is committed to settling the question either positively or negatively. Suspending judgment in these cases equates to the absence of settling the question either positively or negatively—it is "the absence of a relevant disposition to affirm and the absence of a relevant disposition to deny" (Sosa, 2021, p. 113). We can reformulate this point as follows: If your evidence neither supports believing *p* nor disbelieving *p*, then it supports neither affirming nor denying *p*, i.e., suspending judgment about *p*. This does not imply that you are taking a first-order stance or forming an opinion on the issue. Even in cases where evidence is not a decisive factor in making a judgment, a proper third stance is still lacking. To support this view, consider Pascal's wager:

"Let us then examine the point and say 'God is', or 'He is not'. But to which side shall we incline? Reason can decide nothing here . . . A game is being played . . . heads or tails will turn up. What will you wager?" (Pascal, *Pensées*, No. 418.)

There is indeed no possibility for the existence of a Pascalian Agnostic, for the simple reason that being agnostic about God's existence does not fit within the potential bet. As Swinburne explains, "betting on God involves becoming Christian; and not betting on God involves not acquiring the necessary belief and thus not becoming Christian" (Swinburne, 2005, p. 126). If one suspends judgment about *p*, how could one bet on the truth or falsity of God's existence? According to this argument, in theological context, being agnostic is essentially equivalent to being an unbeliever in God's existence, much like the atheist is. So even if the agnostic might perceive himself as neutral towards the question of whether *p*, at the end of the day, he is merely abstaining from believing that *p*, and abstaining from believing that not-*p*, rather than being committed to neutrality on that question.

My fourth point concerns the phenomenological character of suspension. There seems to be a distinctive phenomenological character to suspension in comparison to belief/disbelief. Think about our ordinary scenarios of the crossing pedestrian, or the impatient soccer spectator. It seems intuitive to accept that they both have a certain intense feeling (with a positive or negative valence) in their respective situations. The phenomenology of suspension seems completely different from the phenomenology of forming and having some commitment-involving attitudes such as having an interrogative attitude, a belief about one's epistemic situation, or refraining from judging here and now. These appear to be further attitudes or episode consequents to one's mental state of suspended judgement, they are neither constitutive nor a component or distinguish mark of the mental state itself. Additionally, a research path that needs to be explored further is the fact the state of mind one experiences during an episode of suspended judgment typically triggers, or is accompanied by, emotions like curiosity (where one's need for closure about a question *Q* needs to be satisfied), frustration (when one gives up

on a question), or simply a lack of care or interest to investigate further. The affective component is conspicuously absent from the nowadays conventional picture of suspension. This oversight may be due to the (too quick) acceptance of COMMITMENT PARITY.

The fifth consideration requires us to distinguish between the experiential episode (and state) of suspension itself, and the accidental attitudinal properties—such as having a meta-belief about one’s epistemic situation or a questioning attitude. These latter attributes are circumstantial, often expressed by attitude reports, and explain potential actions of the suspender in specific situations (e.g., inquiring further about *Q*, postponing judgment until better conditions for judgment are available). It is reasonable to inquire when the suspender entered that state or experienced the episode of suspense, and to consider its causes and effects. However, in our theoretical description of what suspension is, we should not conflate the mental phenomenon with its accidental properties, which may or may not accompany the experience, depending on various psychological and situational factors. That one has an interrogative attitude or is forming a belief about one’s epistemic situation is only derivative from the basic feeling of uncertainty or incapacity to judge with respect to *p*. The suspender’s further evaluative attitude (as described by Wagner 2021) or meta-perspective (as seen in Belief views; see Masny 2020, Raleigh 2021) is only contingent, grounded in a more primitive mental episode. They are not intrinsic parts of the mental state itself but can be a reflective product of being in that state. Thus, they are separable from the neutral state of suspended judgment (neither believing nor disbelieving that *p*).

One core idea of this paper is that suspension is not akin to selecting a third option from a doxastic menu. Recent accounts impose a commitment-involving property that is not essential but merely contingent to a mental state that could be more simply explained. This property manifests differently according to various accounts. However, this property is arguably extrinsic, rather than intrinsic, to suspension and is not necessary for suspension to occur.

Even if additional considerations could be brought to the table (see XXX), I tentatively conclude that COMMITMENT and INSEPARABILITY are not necessary criteria to capture suspension. Suspended judgment does not involve “a settled doxastic attitude,” and should not be “thought of as a way of deciding where one stands on a question or the truth of some proposition” (Friedman, 2013, p. 167, fn. 5).

#### **4. Suspension is doxastically noncommittal**

It is indeed accepted and acceptable that the most fundamental characteristic of suspension is its attitudinal neutrality, the fact that it involves neither truth-commitment nor falsity-commitment. From this observation, I have indirectly argued that suspension is essentially noncommittal rather than a commitment-involving stance. Suspension exhibits or involves the *absence* of truth-commitment. Suspension is doxastically noncommittal, i.e. it *does not* involve commitment to the truth of *p*.

To repeat one argument. Suppose you consider the following question: Is it raining right now in Tegucigalpa? There are only two answers to this question: yes and no. If yes, you judge that it is indeed raining; if no, you judge that’s not the case. In both alternatives, you are committed to the truth-value of *p*. What if you suspend judgment that it is raining right now in



Tegucigalpa? You are merely neither judging that it is the case nor judging that it is not the case after considering the question (e.g. by using your background information, or inquiring into the geography of Central America and weather forecasting). In this sense, you are not committed to the truth of either propositions <It is raining in Tegucigalpa right now> and <It is not raining in Tegucigalpa right now>. If you have considered the question and cannot judge either way, you are merely lacking belief in some answers. It does not imply that you are taking a stance nor that you provided any answer to the question at hand by suspending judgment.

The idea, thus, is that one can account for the neutrality of the suspender, not by adding some attitude to his state of non-belief, but by appealing to the simple fact of the suspender's incapacity to make a judgment on the targeted proposition/question, after having considered the question/proposition, provided that the "state of non-belief has the right sort of causal history or sustaining conditions" (Perin, 2018, pp. 122-123). This incapacity comes as a result of having considered the question (e.g., whether God exists, whether it is raining right now in Tegucigalpa, whether Oswald was a lone shooter)—and "that consideration, however brief or superficial, must constitute a genuine effort, however slight or poorly executed, to determine what is the case" (Perin, 2018, p. 123). This is how I propose to understand CONSIDERATION  $\alpha$ . In the next section, I will now turn to the classical objections to CONSIDERATION  $\alpha$ .

#### **4.1. Some reasons for rejecting CONSIDERATION $\alpha$**

The main objections to CONSIDERATION  $\alpha$  have been early formulated by Friedman (2013, 2017), with her conclusions widely accepted by several philosophers (Archer 2024, Atkinson 2021, McGrath 2024, Raleigh 2021, Wagner 2021). Friedman (2013) argued that CONSIDERATION  $\alpha$  is false because "considering or having considered  $p$  is not necessary for being in a state of suspended judgment about  $p$ , and  $p$ -non-belief plus having considered  $p$  is not sufficient." I will now present the central objection, followed by different ways to respond to these counter-examples, which will give me the opportunity to start sketching some elements of my positive proposal.

The first main counter-example used against CONSIDERATION  $\alpha$  and noncommittal accounts is the "mid-wondering" objection (cf. Archer 2024, Lilly 2019, McGrath 2024 for a recent formulation). It can be summarized as follows: "just adding that the subject consider the relevant matter won't do, for the considering might be brief and incomplete and merely accidentally connected to the non-belief" (Friedman 2017, p. 303). However, Friedman's counter-examples do not hold.

She argues that being in a state of non-belief with respect to  $p$  plus *having finished considering  $p$  is not sufficient*. She describes a case where a subject starts considering  $p$  at 15:00—begins to think about some relevant answers to a question  $Q$ —but before he gets very far, the plumber calls over to fix his leaky shower, and he drops the question completely. Friedman notes that "at 15:07 (while  $S$  is explaining the problem to the plumber),  $S$  has stopped considering  $p$  and is in a state of non-belief with respect to  $p$ , but  $S$  is not agnostic about  $p$  at 15:07; he isn't suspending judgment about the question.  $S$  is in a state of non-belief with respect to  $p$  after considering whether  $p$  in this case, but  $S$  is not agnostic about  $p$ " (Friedman, 2013a, p. 170). This illustrates how Friedman's attempt to show that considering is not sufficient. But

there is a very simple explanation for why S is in a state of non-belief without suspending judgment. It is simply that S in fact did not finish considering p; he just stopped deliberating.

The trick is that Friedman's example conflates "*having finished considering*" with "*stopped considering*". To take an analogy, suppose S starts cooking before being interrupted by one's neighbor ringing at his door. We certainly wouldn't say that S has finished cooking; he just stopped cooking. The process of cooking is incomplete just as the process of considering whether p is incomplete for S in the previous case. The same contrast goes between having finished a race because you completed it and having finished because you stopped and quit the race due to an injury. In the latter case, you did not properly complete the race.

Friedman's counter-example targets "having finished considering p" as not sufficient, but it is in fact described as a case where the subject's consideration/deliberative process is interrupted, stopped, or abandoned (see the other case in Friedman, 2013, p. 170). We need to distinguish between suspension resulting from dropping a question after having finished considering, i.e., having completed our consideration of, the question, which might end in assenting: "I throw in the towel about Julius Caesar's last breakfast content", and dropping a question *before* having finished considering the question, which might be reported as follows: "I don't care anymore about finding a plausible answer." I conclude that Friedman's counter-examples fail to demonstrate what they intend to show.<sup>2</sup>

The second type of counter-example against CONSIDERATION<sub>a</sub> rests on "forgetting cases." Consider a scenario where Sam deliberated about p five years prior to time t and is in a state of non-belief about p at t<sub>1</sub> but either (a) can no longer grasp p at t<sub>2</sub>, or (b) has lost track of his stance on p at t. S has thus considered whether p, is in a state of non-belief, but we would not want to attribute a suspended state to S.

Case (a) represents a failure of understanding: S had cognitive contact with p, grasped it and, let's assume, believed that p. Now, S no longer understand p. For example, suppose S can no longer grasp the concepts of thermodynamics, perhaps due to a brain injury. In that case, S no longer believes that this or that claim in thermodynamics is true or false—S simply have no stance anymore toward this content. As Conee and Feldman (2018) suggest, suspension is not possible over concepts one cannot grasp, and it is easy to extend this verdict to concepts

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<sup>2</sup> This type of counter-example backfires, as Friedman (2024, p. 75-76) notes that her view of suspension as a sui generis interrogative attitude is challenged by "interruption cases." Her solution is to locate suspension at "a pre-inquiry stage of question reflection." Friedman recognizes that suspension is typically a possible outcome of an inquiry, but she insists that suspension itself is essentially inquiring (being in an inquisitive state of mind) and vice versa. She maintains a strong reflective conception of suspension, positing that it involves the recognition by the subject of an epistemic gap—suspension being a "response to the recognition of a critical epistemic gap" (when we do not have an answer to a question). Friedman's concept of the intricate relationship between suspension and inquiry, which she describes as a "harmony" and "two natural bedfellows" in Friedman (2024), contradicts the established view that "suspension of judgement about q does or should come at the end of inquiry into q—it is or ought to be the product of such an inquiry" (Friedman 2024). According to her approach, the process unfolds as follows: there is a "pre-inquiry" stage of reflection that comes before wondering. We first jog our memory to find the answer, and if no answer is reached this way, we may "decide" to inquire. It is at this point that we suspend judgement about q: "Part of what it is to open a question in thought in this way is to suspend judgement about it" (Friedman 2024). On my view, the pre-inquiry phase can already end in a state of suspended judgement, causing, or not, depending on the subject's need for closure, a proper inquiry to resolve Q. Suspension is not a questioning attitude and does not necessarily motivate inquiry (inquiry being understood as an activity guided by a questioning attitude, see Guilielmo (2024); and see Masny (2020) on Friedman's view of the relationship between suspension and interrogative attitudes).

one can no longer grasp. A simple explanation is that in a case like (a), the state of suspended judgement does not occur anymore as the causal chain between the consideration of whether p with the state of non-belief is no more existent. Compare with a proposition p that you can still grasp but didn't think about for a long time. As soon as you'll reconsider whether p, assuming your background information on p stayed fixed, you might be able to believe/disbelieve/suspend regarding p. This points to adjusting CONSIDERATION  $\alpha$ .

Case (b) seems odd. Suppose I believed p at  $t_1$  after deliberation, but at  $t_2$ , I am in a state of non-belief about p because I cannot recall my stance about p—did I believe or not that the man approaching me was wearing patterned socks on that day? It's true, assuming I forgot everything about this situation, that I do not suspend judgment about p at  $t_2$  despite *having completed consideration* and being in a state of non-belief, so this situation goes against CONSIDERATION  $\alpha$  (note that at  $t_2$ , I might be suspending about what was my doxastic attitude about p at  $t_1$ —but the targeted content is different in this case). However, this appears to be merely a failure to retain a belief. That I lost track of my stance on p, resulting in p no longer being part of my belief system, indicates that the belief was not critical for me to retain. There is no more direct causal link between my deliberation and belief at  $t_1$ , and my current state of non-belief at  $t_2$ . My belief that p, formed at  $t_1$ , did not persist, and most importantly, it now has no more causal connection with considerations that could be clues (or their absence) for answering p at  $t_2$ .

From these counter-examples, it is clear that the mental episode/state of suspended judgment must be based on some examination of p, and most importantly, it requires a proximal causal connection between the examination of p and the resulting non-belief state. Various reasons might lead to forgetting one's original stance on p; however, when this causal link is severed, suspension of judgment cannot be sustained. It then falls upon the individual to reconsider p and making up her mind again. Having considered the question—which is different from stopped considering the question as shown above—is the sole special constraint for entering the state of non-belief and genuinely suspend judgement. Undergoing the mental episode—or entering the state—can be due to internal factors, such as being sleepy, drunk, or overly cautious, or due to external factors like a hypoxia condition or optical illusions, which prevent making a judgment about p at t.

## 5. A refined non-committal account

The refinement of CONSIDERATION  $\alpha$  can be articulated, roughly, as follows:

### CONSIDERATION $\Omega$

S is in a state of suspended judgment about p when:

- i. S neither believes p nor disbelieves p at  $t_n$  in a non-arbitrary way, and
- ii. S's non-belief state at  $t_n$  is the product of/is based on a specific proximal causal history dependent on S's completed examination between  $t_0$  and  $t_n$ .

Condition i. and ii. capture the classical mark of doxastic neutrality attributed to suspension. It blocks atypical cases in which a state of non-belief about p is produced because, let's say, one received a brick on one's head. Condition i. and ii. establish that S is in a neutral state and that

there can be no state of suspended judgment without a specific etiology. The causal history can be explained in terms of JUDGING INCAPACITY:

### **JUDGING INCAPACITY**

Suspension of judgment involves an episode of incapacity to judge non-arbitrarily (i) in circumstances C, (ii) at time  $t_n$ , (iii) regarding a given proposition one has examined (iv) across a specified interval of time,  $[t_0, t_n]$ .

There is a causal dependence between the consideration of Q and the outcome of JUDGING INCAPACITY—the outcome is causally dependent on considerations  $c_1, c_2, \dots c_n$  about Q. Suspension is essentially an inability to make a judgment as to whether p or not-p is more plausible. This causal dependency of the consideration condition should be understood in terms of a proximate cause, as described by Gale (1965, p. 211). A *proximate cause* is defined as a cause that can be simultaneous with its effect, or it can be temporally contiguous with its effect. Here, the examination clause, or *Consideration* condition, should be understood as a mental episode (a process) which is constituted by a mental act and an object, the mental act being intentionally directed towards the object. *Consideration* can be brief or superficial, but must constitute a “genuine effort, however slight or poorly executed, to determine what is the case.” (Perin 2018, p. 123) If the consideration is blocked, interrupted, or abandoned, it cannot produce any judgement about p (and hence install a new belief), just as it cannot result in a suspended judgement state.

Generally, suspension cases are trial cases—in which a subject is “confronted with a theoretical or practical problem and makes up his mind,” as noted by Peter Geach (1976, p. 11). These are experiments in judging whether p, where a subject is disposed either to believe that p, or to believe that not-p, but as an outcome of his consideration, the subject ends up in a non-belief state about the targeted object. Consider the soccer example: in the case of the penalty kick, I can of course hope, imagine, or guess that the player will score, but it would be arbitrary at t, without further information, to make a judgment. The outcome of the trial is suspended judgment, and the subject experiences JUDGING INCAPACITY. JUDGING INCAPACITY is localized in circumstances C, and at time t, and is generally overdetermined by external negative influences in the subject’s immediate environment (e.g., because it is foggy and you cannot distinguish whether it is your friend Pierre approaching, or because the object you’re considering is too far away) or by internal contingencies (e.g., because you’re sleepy, inebriated). JUDGING INCAPACITY with respect to p at  $t_1$  does not mean that you cannot judge that p at  $t_2$  (except if you’re dead at  $t_2$ ). JUDGING INCAPACITY simply means that at  $t_1$ , you cannot judge non-arbitrarily based on your available epistemic reasons to judge that p at  $t_1$ . It does not imply one’s awareness of these reasons. This view succinctly explains what suspension is in terms of JUDGING INCAPACITY.

CONSIDERATION  $\Omega$  might be understood causally without the need for demanding meta-cognitive states. Note that considering p does not necessarily involve any sophisticated process of reflection, although it is typical during (scientific) belief formation attempts. CONSIDERATION  $\Omega$  requires only minimal attentiveness to some informational input — but it does not necessarily imply any conscious reasoning. When one undergoes a mental episode of suspension, one experiences a feeling of uncertainty, which does not necessarily

mean that one is aware of feeling uncertain. Consider our examples of the crossing pedestrian and the thrilled football fan.<sup>3</sup>

## 6. Concluding remarks

I regard it as an advantage of my view that it provides a straightforward understanding of the value of suspension, including its causes—our cognitive limitations—and its effects—such as inquiry, prudence in action, and awareness of our epistemic conditions. Being aware of one’s own JUDGING INCAPACITY is valuable. Of course, most of the time, JUDGING INCAPACITY remains under the radar or is not immediately recognized by the suspender as a positive outcome per se. Why does suspension often seem to lack value, assuming that suspension involves not taking any stance? It is because suspension simpliciter, as a temporary mental episode without any further consequences, is not inherently valuable (compare this with automatic belief). Suspension gains its value from additional attitudes (such as meta-beliefs and interrogative attitudes) that are typically associated with suspension by philosophers but are not necessary conditions for the mental state of suspension itself. These additional components are not usually found with ordinary suspension (vanilla suspension), which is, most of the time, a fast, automatic, and non-reflective mental episode. Therefore, the added value of suspension comes from these further accidental properties, independent of CONSIDERATION  $\Omega$ .

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<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, as noted by Peter Carruthers (2008), “the state of being uncertain and the state of feeling uncertain are first-order states that humans and animals can share; nothing metacognitive need be involved.” Carruthers adds, “If a human says that he chose as he did because he was uncertain, or because he felt uncertain, then what he says can be true. In providing either of these explanations for his choice, the human will thereby utilize the concept of uncertainty (which therefore makes his report a metacognitive one). But the processes appealed to in the explanation that he provides can be entirely first-order in character” (Carruthers 2008).

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