BEING NEUTRAL: AGNOSTICISM, INQUIRY AND THE SUSPENSION OF JUDGMENT

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Epistemologists generally agree that belief and disbelief do not exhaust one's doxastic options. Plausibly, there are also graded doxastic states of confidence in propositions. But even considering only "categorical" doxastic options, it's agreed that there is a third *neutral* option.[1] Many expressions are used for it, including 'suspension of judgment', 'agnosticism', 'withholding of judgment', 'withholding', etc. Despite the different nuances in meaning, epistemologists typically proceed as if these all pick out the same thing.[2] This supposedly common referent is not the mere absence of a doxastic attitude. Rocks do not believe, disbelieve, etc. but aren't in any sense neutral. To be neutral whether p, instead, is to be in a positive state on the question whether p, and in that sense to be an attitude.[3] Just as belief and disbelief are taken to be mutually exclusive, at least putting aside irrationality and fragmentation of mind, [4] the same is thought to hold for the triad of belief, disbelief and the neutral attitude. 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.*

It is often thought, further, that the epistemology of the neutral attitude is continuous with that of belief and disbelief in certain key ways. I will use the label **traditionalism** for the conjunction of the tripartite conception and two further epistemological claims. The first is that all three doxastic attitudes admit of justification, both ex ante justification (justification *to* have a doxastic attitude) and ex post (having a doxastic attitude justifiably). [5] The second is that the only factors that are relevant to the (ex ante) justification of doxastic attitudes are *epistemic* in the following narrow sense: whether they obtain or not helps fix how strong or weak one's current epistemic position is with respect to whether p.[6]

Epistemic factors include:

a. How strongly or weakly your evidence supports p (or not-p).
b. Whether you know or appreciate (a).

The obtaining of (a) and (b) helps fix the strength of your epistemic position with respect to whether p. By contrast, factors 1-4, even when known, do not:[7]

1. Whether you will later have better (worse) evidence concerning whether p than you now have.
2. Whether you will later be a better (worse) assessor of your evidence.
3. How valuable, or how much you value, knowing whether p.
4. How likely it is that, if you inquired further and acquired more evidence, you could come to know whether p.

1 and 2 concern comparisons between the present and future in terms of epistemic features (e.g., the quality of your evidence, your ability to assess one's evidence). Call these **future-**

comparative factors. 3 and 4, by contrast, bear on whether you should aim to answer the question at hand (e.g., the value of the goal, the availability of means to achieve it). Call these **goal-related factors**. Despite being *about* epistemic matters, neither of these sorts of factors, nor the knowledge that they obtain, is epistemic in the narrow sense we have defined. They do not help fix how strong or weak your epistemic position is with respect to whether p.

Like many philosophers, I find traditionalism attractive. But it faces challenges. Some are familiar from the literature on practical reasons for belief.[8] In this paper, I consider two less familiar challenges that target the neutral attitude. One focuses on future-comparative factors, the other on goal-related factors. I argue that the best response to these challenges on behalf of the traditionalist involves distinguishing several forms of neutrality a person can have with respect to a question.

However, this paper is not solely or even primarily a defense of traditionalism. Whether you adhere to traditionalism or not, I hope to show you that you ought to distinguish several ways of being neutral on questions. Distinguishing these forms of neutrality gives us not only a way of finding room for non-epistemic factors in traditionalist epistemology but also a richer picture of the relevance of agency and the conative to our doxastic lives.

1. Two Challenges to Traditionalism

Here are two examples, the first borrowed from Mark Schroeder (2012) and the second a variant of an example given by Joseph Raz (1975):

Clearer and better evidence. On several occasions you've had skin discolorations that seemed suspicious for cancer. Each time the relevant tests came back negative. So, you have good but not definitive reason to think the latest round of spots, too, are benign. Nevertheless, when your doctor notes the spots, she orders a test (it's standard practice), which will come back in a few days. The results of this test, you know, will be definitive.

Temporary impairment. You know your abilities to make sound judgments on subtle matters, such as whether which of two insurance plans is a better deal overall, are mildly impaired. (Perhaps it's 12am and you are tired, or you've had two drinks.) You also know that these impairments will be gone by tomorrow morning. There is no need to arrive at a conclusion until tomorrow evening, and you have time tomorrow to think it through.

In the "clearer and better evidence" case, it seems you have a good reason to suspend judgment on the question at hand, namely the fact that you will acquire clearer and better evidence a little later. In the "temporary impairment" case, again, it seems you have a good reason to suspend judgment, namely the fact that your powers of judgment will be better in the morning. In both cases, the good reason seems to bear on whether you are justified in suspending judgment. Assuming these appearances are trustworthy, and making the usual assumption that suspension of judgment is the neutral doxastic attitude, it follows that traditionalism is false.[9] The traditionalist needs to explain how this reasoning goes wrong.

That's the first challenge. The second concerns the *point* of the neutral attitude. Jane Friedman writes:

> "Why suspend judging? I take it that one sort of answer that people are initially tempted to give is something about one's deficient epistemic standing on some matter. Why suspend judgment? Because one is not in the position to know or because one's evidence fails to settle some matter or because one has insufficient reason to believe, and so on. But this sort of answer feels inadequate once we admit that suspending is a matter of taking up some attitude rather than merely not having some. Very plausibly, if my epistemic standing with respect to some propositions is deficient in the relevant senses, then I shouldn't believe those propositions. But if suspending is different from merely not believing, then the claim that I shouldn't believe those propositions is not equivalent to the claim that I should suspend judgment. Should I do this other thing, too? Why, as a rational subject whose epistemic circumstances are relevantly deficient, would I ever adopt this attitude of committed neutrality rather than simply not believe or stop believing?" (2017, 303-4)

If it is a fully proper response to epistemic deficiency on whether p simply to lack belief on whether p, what is the point of also doing something *positive,* like suspending?[10] Friedman's own answer connects suspension closely with inquiry. For her, suspension is the attitude the having of which is necessary and sufficient for inquiry. In having this "inquiring attitude," you are in a goal-directed state, the goal being to come to know the answer to the target question.[11] Merely lacking belief is not a goal-directed state at all, let alone a state that ensures inquiry. And there is of course a point to being in this goal-directed state: taking on a goal can help you attain it.

How good it would be to achieve a given goal, how much you care about achieving it, and the feasibility of means of achieving it all seem relevant to whether you are justified in taking on that goal. We regularly treat such factors as relevant to the justification of having a goal by taking on and giving up goals based on such factors. I might take on a goal of learning Italian because I think that it would be valuable to know it and that over time I can feasibly so. I might give up goal of completing the 2020 Boston Marathon because I realize it's very unlikely I could complete it even if I started training now (in late 2019). So, if suspension of judgment is a matter of having the goal of knowing the answer to a question, then goal-related factors should matter to its justification. How good it would be to know whether p, how much you value knowing whether p and the feasibility of obtaining the knowledge if you inquired further and gathered more evidence – these should help fix whether you are justified in having the neutral attitude. But as we've seen, traditionalism denies the relevance of such non-epistemic factors.

The second challenge, then, is to give a traditionalism-friendly explanation of the point of the neutral doxastic attitude, i.e., to explain its point without going over to a view like Friedman's which treats it as a goal-directed state, with the consequent relevance of non-epistemic factors.

Those are the challenges. I answer them on behalf of the traditionalist by arguing that there are several very different ways to be neutral on a question. I distinguish three: **suspension of judgment, the inquiring attitude,** and an attitude I call **agnosticism**. For the first two of these ways of being neutral, non-epistemic factors such as future-comparative and goal-related factors matter to their justification. But they are not genuine doxastic attitudes. There is

a genuinely doxastic neutral attitude, agnosticism, but I argue that we have no reason, from the two challenges at least, to think that any but epistemic factors matter to *its* justification. Traditionalism thus survives the challenges.

2. Suspension of Judgment

Consider the verb 'suspend' as it is used in "S suspended X," where X denotes an action or event. 'Suspend', used with that meaning, is a success verb. If a group suspends a planned protest, the group does not engage in the protest while it is suspended. Similarly, if I suspend judgment on whether p over a period of time, I do not, during that period, make a judgment on whether p, and so I neither judge that p nor that not-p. But in these cases, the *not X-ing* is something attributable to the relevant agent. It is *an omission of X-ing.* (Rocks don't omit meetings, decisions, etc., although they do not do those things.[12]) In general, omitting X is necessary but insufficient for suspending X. Consider someone who omits carrying out a planned protest because forgets about it. He doesn't thereby suspend the protest. The same goes for suspending judgment.

Talk of "suspending judgment" conveys something beyond the omission of judgment, something future-directed. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* the first category of senses for 'suspend' is summarized as "to debar, postpone, defer, and related uses." I propose to take the notions of postponement and deferral – or *putting off* – as a basis for an account of suspending judgment.[13] These notions are particularly appropriate because suspending judgment is suspending something *that is not yet underway.* (Of course, you are *judging* in a process sense, but you have made no judgment. More later on this distinction.) When we talk of suspending something already underway – suspending a political campaign, someone's participation a tax saving plan, or train service to a certain station – the notion of debarring or "temporarily stopping" may capture our meaning. But actions or events not yet underway cannot be stopped; rather, in suspending them one is putting them off. To suspend a meeting that hasn't started is to put it off; to suspend a decision not yet already made is to put off the decision. In this vein I propose:

To **suspend judgment** on a question is to **put off judgment** on it.

The account is of course more useful if supplemented with more information about what it is to put off judgment. I suggest it is a matter of omitting judgment because one is pursuing an aim about judgment. Let me say something about the 'because' and about the aim. First, not just any explanatory connection, not just any *because*, is sufficient. The sort of connection needed is found in humdrum cases such as that of a child omitting eating her cake now because she is saving it for later. The child is pursuing the aim of eating it later (and not before), and this explains in a rationalizing way why she omits eating it now. The child is in effect taking means to an end. The means here is constitutive – omitting eating it now is a *part* of eating it only later. Second, the aim involved could be as simple as an aim to judge on the question later (and not before). But, more generally, one put off judgment insofar as one is pursuing a conditional aim – an aim to judge when and only when certain conditions obtain

(which one does not yet believe obtain). For instance, you might aim to judge when you have strong evidence on the question, when you learn how to reason better about these sorts of issues, when you rid yourself of a certain bias, etc. These aims are ones the attainment of which improves the chances of making an epistemically high-quality judgment; but this is not strictly unnecessary. You might put off judgment until the cult leader gives you the "okay," until you are able to consider the question without becoming angry, or until you "feel like" judging the matter. Your judgment-related aim, finally, needn't be a full-blown intention to judge. You might have the aim by intending only to try.[14]

Given this account of suspension, there is a readily available account of refraining.[15] Suspending and refraining from judgment are obviously related, though talk of "refraining" does not convey postponement or deferral in the way talk of "suspending" does. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives as the current meaning for the verb 'refrain', "to stop oneself from doing something; to abstain, forbear." Refraining, abstaining, forbearing, all seem closely related to intentional omission.[16] Thus, I propose:

To **refrain from judgment** on a question is intentionally to omit judgment on it.

It is clear enough that intentionally omitting judgment implies refraining from judgment. The converse is plausible, too, given a broad view of intentional omission. Suppose your faucet is leaky. You take a look at the problem. Suppose you realize your tools are insufficient for the job, and so you don't try to fix it yourself. Alternatively, maybe you've been trying to fix it but come to realize that your tools are insufficient and so stop trying for that reason. In such cases, it's plausible that you intentionally omit further repair-related activities. Many cases of refraining from judgment on a question are similar. Suppose you are asked a question by a friend. You might know that you don't know the answer and for that reason not even try to answer it. Or, perhaps you think about the question for a moment, consult your memory or consider your evidence, but upon concluding you don't know, stop your attempts. In such cases, plausibly you intentionally omit judgment.

Given my accounts, it is plausible that if you suspend judgment, you also refrain from judgment. This is because if you put off something, plausibly you *intentionally* omit it. The child who puts off eating her cake until later intentionally omits eating it. She might or might not have the specific aim of not eating it now (*aiming* at this as a means to eating it later).[17] However, the converse implication fails: refraining from judgment doesn't imply suspending it – you can intentionally omit judgment without putting it off. Suppose that the question your friend asks you is one you don't care about in the least. After thinking about it for a moment, you conclude you don't know and stop deliberation. In a case like this you probably won't be putting off judgment. You won't be aiming to judge the matter later or when your evidence is better, etc. You thus won't suspend judgment, only refrain from it. A few minutes later, you may well not be refraining any more either.

One might look askance at dictionary-inspired accounts of suspending and refraining from judgment. But part of what I hope to show over the course of this paper is that these core meanings in ordinary English point us to philosophically important but neglected differences in ways of being neutral on questions.

Refraining from and suspending judgment are ways of exercising control over one's judgment and, since judgment is a way of coming to have beliefs, over one's beliefs. One can be responsible for how one exercises this control. If you suspend judgment for bad reasons or motivations, and you lack an excuse, you can be blameworthy for your suspension. For instance, a politician may suspend judgment on climate-change in an effort, perhaps unconscious, to avoid feeling pressure to act in ways that run contrary to the wishes of donors, or an employer may suspend judgment on whether an outgroup job candidate is suitable for prejudiced reasons.

My accounts of suspension and refraining also fits well with the practice of the Pyrrhonian skeptics, who did not merely omit judgment but did so intentionally. Many of the modes of suspension Sextus Empiricus discusses are strategies for refraining from judgment in the face of some temptation to judge – constructing arguments for contrary sides on a question, recalling differences of opinion of experts, etc. Moreover, the Pyrrhonians approved of refraining from judgment because they were putting it off until epistemically acceptable conditions were met and while inquiring further in an effort to achieve these conditions.

I now turn to two main objections to my accounts. The first is that my accounts fail to respect the fact that, irrationality and fragmentation aside, belief that p excludes refraining from judgment on whether p. One way to develop this objection is to appeal to an agential theory of judgment. Some have argued that judgment is itself a kind of *action*, e.g., a sincere affirmation that p, or an affirmation that p made with the aim of affirming truly and/or reliably (Shah and Velleman, 2005; Sosa, 2015). If some such theory is correct, it would seem that you could be rational in intentionally omitting judgment on whether p even if you already believed that p (and even if your mind was in no sense fragmented). You might know that the food you're eating at a dinner party is bland but intentionally fail to sincerely affirm that it is. You might put the question of its blandness out of your mind so that you can better enjoy the conversation. According to my account, this would be a case of refraining from judgment on whether the food was bland. But, so the objection goes, that's the wrong result.

The core of this objection does not depend on assuming an agential theory of judgment. Plausibly, whatever the right account of judgment is, it is possible for someone to believe that p at a time but not judge that p at that time (without irrationality or fragmentation).[18] Moreover, if this is possible, it ought to be possible, further, to believe that p at a time while intentionally not judging on whether p at that time (again without irrationality or fragmentation). For instance, maybe judgment that p consists in the non-agential but occurrent *taking* of p to be the case. You could intentionally omit such takings while believing that p. Intuitively, again, this doesn't seem like suspension of judgment.

(Side note: this objection is a curious one. If you are intentionally omitting X, then it seems plausible that you are refraining from X, and similarly if you are intentionally omitting X because you are pursuing suitable aims concerning X-ing, it seems you are suspending X. The problem seems to be with figuring out what judgment is, not what refraining or suspension are.)

I consider two possible replies to the objection, one that upholds my original accounts while trying to thread the judgment-belief needle and another that imputes a kind of error to our talk and thought about suspending judgment.

The first reply asserts a close relationship between judgment and belief. To judge that p is to *make* up your mind that p, whereas to believe that p is to have your mind *made up* that p. You could have your mind up that p at a time, of course, without *then* making it up that p. Plausibly, you might never have made it up. Perhaps this happens when we acquire beliefs just walking around town (e.g., the belief that you're walking across Main Street, or that it's cold outside). So, although belief doesn't entail judgment, judgment does entail belief – judgment is the formation of a belief through making up your mind.

How does this help with the objection? There is something peculiar about a situation in which your mind is already made up that p and yet at the same time you are refraining from making up your mind on whether p. There may be no strict incompatibility here, but to be in such a situation without irrationality you would need to be self-blind in respect of your belief that p. For, if you knew your mind was already made up that p, you would be irrational to refrain from making it up that p, i.e., to intentionally not making it up. Compare: if I know I am at the company picnic, it seems irrational for me to have the sorts of mental states I would need to intentionally not *arrive* at the company picnic. The aim of not now arriving at the picnic would seem irrational because pointless: you know you're there, so of course you know you won't be *arriving* there, regardless of what you do. But the same goes for aims such as *aiming to go to the picnic later and not before,* or *aiming to go to the picnic when and only when it stops raining*. Finally, given that a mind that is self-blind about one of its beliefs is fragmented, we have the result that belief excludes refraining from judgment (and so suspending judgment), barring irrationality and fragmentation.

The second reply does not identify judgment with making up one's mind. It concedes to the objector that it's possible to judge that p, without irrationality or fragmentation, even when you already believe that p and know that you do. But it claims that when we ordinarily (and in philosophy) talk of "suspending judgment," what we really have in mind is suspending not just any old judgment but *belief-forming* judgment (and similarly for talk of refraining from judgment). So, my above accounts need a small revision – we must insert 'belief-forming' before 'judgment' in the right-hand side. The final part of this second reply piggybacks off the first reply: absent fragmentation and irrationality, believing that p excludes intentionally not going in for belief-forming judgment. Belief implies having one's mind made up, and belief-forming judgment is a way of making up one's mind.

There are costs to both replies. The first reply requires a controversial view of judgment. On this view, surprisingly, if I already believe that snow is white, I cannot judge that it is. This view may not fit very well with certain strands of ordinary thought and talk about judgment, though it *does* fit well with talk of suspending and refraining from judgment.[19] The second imputes a mismatch between what we're wanting to talk and think about and the tools we use to do this. We want to talk and think about suspension of belief-forming judgment but we end up using the term 'judgment' (and concept of *judgment*) without any qualification.

In order to make room for views of judgment on which it isn't necessarily a way of coming to believe, I rely on the second reply to the objection. Thus, I revise my accounts as follows:

To **suspend judgment** on a question is to put off belief-forming judgment, that is, to omit it because one aims to have it later (and not before) or when and only when certain conditions obtain (which one does not yet believe obtain).

To **refrain from judgment** on a question is intentionally to omit belief-forming judgment on it.

I want to make one final observation as I wrap up my answer to this first objection. Given that we have the general notion of suspension as putting off and the general notion of refraining as intentionally omitting, we can apply them directly to belief itself. Whereas we must be careful in stating how belief excludes suspending and refraining from judgment, by noting qualifications about irrationality and fragmentation, we can say without qualification that belief excludes suspending and refraining from belief. (As noted above, these are success notions: if you suspend X, you don't X, and similarly for refraining.) Moreover, these notions applied to belief are every bit as important to epistemology as they are when applied to judgment. The *point* of suspending or refraining from judgment in any normal case is to suspend or refrain from belief itself. We want to put off judgment on whether p because we want to put off belief on whether p, and similarly for refraining from judgment and refraining from belief. It is not an accident, of course, that we very often speak of suspending and refraining from judgment rather than belief, because as mentioned above one of our chief ways of exerting control over our beliefs is through exerting control over whether we judge on a question.[20]

The second objection is that my accounts go too far in a voluntarist direction. If one can intentionally omit judgment, then won't there be cases in which one omits judgment *at will*? And if so, it seems it is only be a short step to conceding that it is possible to make propositional judgments at will, i.e., to judge that p at will? If so, then given that one way of coming to believe something is by judging it to be so, it might seem we are only one further short step from *doxastic voluntarism,* namely the thesis that one can in some cases believe propositions at will.[21]

In discussing judgment at will, it's useful to begin by noting a process/product ambiguity in talk of "judging" or "judgment," an ambiguity under the surface in much of the above discussion. When we say, for example, that someone should "judge an issue carefully" or should "use critical judgment" on the issue, we have in mind a process or activity. This activity can stretch over time and is marked linguistically by the use of progressive verb aspect (e.g., "they are judging the matter carefully"). It is more naturally referred to as "deliberation" and consists, roughly, in trying to answer a question with one's current resources (evidence, memory). By contrast, when we say that someone "made a reasonable judgment," we have in mind the product of this process when it is successfully completed, which is not something that stretches over time. If you made a judgment on a question, you propositionally judged on the question, i.e., you judged that p for some candidate answer p to the target question. In discussions of suspending and refraining from judgment, it is the refraining of the product that it is primarily at issue. Typically, though, we omit the product by omitting or stopping the process. You try to answer a question, conclude you don't have good enough evidence, and so stop trying, with the result that you don't make a judgment either way. This is not omitting judgment at will, since one is omitting it indirectly, by omitting the process. Can we ever omit

judgment (the product) at will – that is, just by deciding to omit it and executing that decision directly? I don't know. But, as I will try to show, it's not necessary to answer this question in order to answer the "involuntarist" objection to my account.

Suppose the answer is that, yes, we can omit judgment at will. Still, there is no short step to the possibility of (belief-forming) judgment that p at will. Audi (1999) observes that it doesn't follow from the fact that one can omit X-ing at will that one can X at will. Consider sneezing. One cannot sneeze at will. But presumably one can in some cases omit – suppress – a sneeze at will. In fact, it is independently more plausible, at least in the case of *belief-forming* judgment, that one can omit judgment at will than that one can judge and therein come to believe that p at will. One way we can see this difference in plausibility is to compare how natural it seems to voice the relevant proximal intentions, even privately. If we can X at will, we would expect that we sometimes do X at will and that the avowal of the proximal intention to X should seem natural. Compare two possible avowals from jurors: 1) "I hereby decide not to a form a belief right now on whether the defendant was at the scene of the accident" with 2)"I hereby decide to come to believe right now that the defendant was at the scene of the accident." To my ears, (1) seems natural and (2) does not, or at least seems much less natural. There is clearly much more to say on these issues, but I hope to have shown that there is no simple and straightforward argument from the possibility of omitting judgment at will to the possibility of belief at will. [22]

3. Suspension, Refraining and Agnosticism

If my account of suspending judgment is correct, then future-comparative factors, such as the fact that you would have clearer and better evidence later, or the fact that you would be a better judge later, can be relevant to whether you are justified in suspending judgment, even though those factors don't help fix your strength of epistemic position. Someone suspending judgment might reason, quite appropriately, as follows: "I will do better to wait to form a belief on whether p; for, if I form it now, the belief I form might well be true and perhaps justified and even knowledge, but if I form it later, my belief will more likely be true, justified and a case of knowledge. This speaks in favor of waiting to form a belief – of suspending judgment."[23]

So far it might seem like I'm helping to bury traditionalism. My account of suspending judgment and the intuitions I've marshalled about the relevance of future-comparative factors to its justification seem to comprise mutually supporting strands of evidence against traditionalism. But this appearance is misleading, as I hope to show in the next two sections. There is a neutral doxastic attitude of which traditionalism is true, but it is not suspension. I will call it 'agnosticism'. Suspension, even the state of being suspended, is not a *doxastic* attitude at all, nor is refraining. In this section, I argue that suspension (and refraining) are distinct from agnosticism. In the next, I use the results to answer the first challenge to traditionalism.

Let me explain how I will understand 'agnosticism'. In many cases, we are too unsure/uncertain on a question to have a belief. I am (now in 2019) too uncertain on whether Trump will win reelection to have a belief either way. The uncertainty involved in such cases is not the mere absence of certainty or confidence. A rock is not uncertain about anything. I am in some state of confidence with respect to p; the rock isn't. Ordinary talk of "being agnostic" is a

fairly good, if imperfect[24], approximation to the notion of being too uncertain to have a belief (or disbelief) on the matter. So, I will recruit it for my purposes:

I will use 'being **agnostic** whether p' to mean having an *intermediate* state of confidence concerning whether p, i.e., having states of confidence for p and for not-p such that one's state of confidence for p is neither strong enough for belief that p nor low enough for disbelief (and similarly, mutatis mutandis, for one's state of confidence for not-p).[25]

What do I mean by "states of confidence"? I rely on an intuitive notion, making a few assumptions. I assume that a state of confidence concerning whether p consists of states of confidence for p and for not-p. And I assume as well that the latter sorts of states – states of confidence for particular propositions – are mental states that collectively ground comparative facts of the form *S is more confident in p than S is in q*. For instance, I have a state of confidence about whether the coin in my hand will come up heads when I flip it. I am not confident *that* heads will come up, nor that tails will. But I am *more* confident that heads will come up than I am of various other things, such as that neither heads nor tails will come up. Plausibly, I need to have a state of confidence for the proposition that heads will come up in order to help ground these comparative facts.

On the other hand, I take no stand on familiar controversies over the nature of states of confidence and their relations to belief. I do not claim that states of confidence are *credences* of the sort familiar from Bayesian epistemology.[26] Nor, relatedly, do I claim that all rational states of confidence must be measurable by a probability function.[27] I stay neutral as well on questions of reduction, such as whether belief and disbelief are reducible to facts about confidences, or the converse, or neither.[28] Although I am working with a rough and ready intuitive notion, I think the arguments below will not for the most part depend on the details of how the notion is explicated or refined. Where the details might matter, I indicate as much in the endnotes.

Is suspending judgment the same as agnosticism, so understood? Note, for starters, that there are different connotations in talk of "suspending" and talk of "being agnostic" (either used in my stipulated way or in the ordinary way). Talk of "suspending judgment" suggests something about the future, whereas talk of "being agnostic" doesn't. Talk of "refraining from" as well as "suspending" judgment also suggests something agential – refusal, intentional omission – in a way that "being agnostic" doesn't. However, I want to go beyond the connotations of these terms. I will argue that there are both normative and non-normative differences between suspension of judgment and agnosticism, understood as having an intermediate state of confidence. These are two distinct phenomena. In fact, they come apart in numerous ways that it is useful to chart. I'll make similar arguments afterward for refraining from judgment.

Two methodological points are worth making before turning to the arguments. The arguments below are more forceful assuming the accounts of suspending and refraining from judgment defended in the previous section. But they retain force even if we do not assume those accounts. Thus, I see those accounts and the arguments below as mutually supportive. The second point is that even should my accounts of suspending and refraining from judgment be incorrect, I may still be right in claiming that the *phenomena* I take those ordinary notions to

get at come apart from agnosticism. I of course think my accounts in the section 2 are right. But as I will explain further in section 4, the crucial point for the defense of traditionalism is that the phenomena of putting off judgment and intentionally omitting judgment are different from agnosticism.

I'll start with normative differences. I claim that something can be a reason for you to suspend judgment but not a reason for you to be agnostic, and vice versa.[29] If you want to make up your mind but haven't done so yet, so that you neither believe nor disbelieve, the fact that clearer and better evidence will come in later can be a reason for you to suspend judgment, as illustrated in Schroeder's case above. But can this fact be a reason for you to be agnostic? It doesn't seem so. If there are genuine reasons here, it ought to be reasonable to acquire or continue to hold the relevant attitudes *for* the purported reason. But it doesn't seem reasonable to acquire or remain in a state of intermediate confidence for the reason that better evidence is coming in. By contrast, it clearly can be reasonable for someone to suspend or continue to suspend judgment for this reason.[30]

Similar arguments are available concerning other reasons. For instance, the fact that tomorrow morning, when you are more alert, you will be a better assessor of your evidence on an important issue can be a reason for you to suspend judgment on the question, but not a reason for you to be agnostic about it. Consider again the case of the two health insurance plans your employer offers. It's a complex matter whether Plan A or Plan B is a better deal overall. You might well be able to come to a reasonable conclusion about which is best now, but you're quite tired. You know that in the morning you'll be better assessor of this evidence. Here the future-comparative fact that you'll be a better assessor of the evidence and so better judge of the matter seems to be a reason for you to wait till then to make up your mind on this important question. But this same comparative fact does not seem to be a reason for you to be agnostic, to be in a state of intermediate confidence. One might try to argue that your current impairment is reason for you to be in such a state, but it's far less plausible to think the comparative fact is.

Correspondingly, there are cases in which comparative facts that place the future in a poorer light than the present are reasons for one not to suspend judgment without being reasons for one to be agnostic. These are cases of "epistemic worsening." For instance, suppose you know that you will never be better placed to believe the truth on whether p than you are now – you know that the only evidence that will ever be available on whether p is going to be destroyed in just a moment. Suppose, for vividness, the question is whether a certain political leader ordered the torture of a certain prisoner. You know that an official is coming in a few minutes to destroy the document you're relying on, which is the only record there is. You know that everyone who knows about whether the leader ordered the torture is either dead or would never risk the consequences of revealing the answer. Such facts seem to constitute a reason for you not to suspend judgment. But they clearly don't constitute a reason for you not to be agnostic. Indeed, it may be that, despite the dramatic situation, the evidence you have from the document makes it about 50% likely that the politician ordered the torture. This seems to be a reason for you to be in a state of intermediate confidence on the question.

Something can also be a reason for you to be agnostic without being a reason for you to suspend judgment. Consider "don't care" cases like the following. Take some question that does not interest you in the slightest, say (for certain Americans) whether the Manchester

United or Chelsea football team has a better starting goalie. Suppose your UK friend is asking you about it, pushing you to give your opinion. Here it seems you have a reason to be agnostic, namely the fact that the evidence you have doesn't weigh in favor of either answer about whose goalie is better; but this fact isn't a reason for you to be suspend judgment, because it isn't a reason for you to try to get back to the question later (or under certain conditions). Epistemic worsening cases are similar. The fact that your evidence makes a proposition, p, 50% likely is a reason for you to be agnostic about whether p, but it doesn't seem like a reason for you to suspend judgment, because you know your judgment isn't going to be any better later, only worse.

Agnosticism and suspending judgment can come apart non-normatively as well. From our examples above, we can see how you might be agnostic without suspending judgment if you are agnostic but know that your evidence and/or power of judgment will never be as good as they are currently, or if you are agnostic but don't care about getting back to the question or knowing the answer later. You might well not suspend judgment in these cases.

Could the converse happen as well? Could you suspend judgment without being agnostic? This is less clear. But it could happen if you could ever intentionally omit judgment as well as all states of confidence. I adopt the following stipulation:

'**Opinion'** will be used inclusively to pick out belief, disbelief as well as states of confidence.

Are there cases in which someone intentionally fails not only to judge but to have any opinion? I think examples make this at least plausible. In the American legal system, judges often instruct jurors to suspend judgment on the defendant's guilt until all the evidence has been presented. Suppose a juror complies with this instruction – as no doubt some do – by putting the question of the defendant's guilt firmly out of her mind until the end of the trial. This juror seems not only to suspend judgment but to suspend "opinion" on the matter, so that she is not even agnostic. Here is similar case. Suppose a college freshman, flipping open the textbook on Day 1 of Intro to Neuroscience, reads a question about which neurotransmitters play certain roles in certain forms of depression. He doesn't know the relevant evidence, and he can see that the question is given a detailed chapter-length treatment. In situations like this, a person might feel rather silly in having any state of confidence at all. Suspension of opinion might seem to make more sense until you have a much better sense of the lay of the land in this field. I take it this idea is familiar to novices in a field. True, the novice freshman and juror might have dispositions to bet certain amounts on various answers to the question on which they're suspending judgment and opinion. But these dispositions, arguably, reflect dispositions to have attitudes (including states of confidence) which they currently lack.[31] [32]

Suspension is not the same as agnosticism. Might refraining from judgment be the same as agnosticism? Here I will be brief. Refraining and agnosticism come apart non-normatively. If one is in a state of being agnostic about something, one need not be refraining. A few minutes ago, I wasn't considering many "don't care" questions about which I have a stored agnosticism, e.g., the publication date of various articles, the middle name of some colleague, who won the Mexico Open, etc. I may not have wanted to have these attitudes, but sometimes we have them nevertheless. I wasn't refraining from judgment on these matters, intentionally not judging them. It is a harder question whether one could refrain from judgment without being

agnostic. As in the freshman and juror cases above, it is at least plausible that someone could suspend and so refrain from judgment it while not having any "opinion" and so not even agnostic attitudes. Normatively, agnosticism and refraining come apart as well. Consider again the case in which your powers of judgment on an important matter are temporarily impaired, and you know it. Suppose we add that you are also impaired with respect to your capacity to have justified agnostic attitudes. Suppose, for instance, that your current condition makes it likely that you will arrive at unjustified states of confidence on the matter. If you can't avoid "opinion," then your situation will be an epistemic tragedy. In such a situation, the fact that both your powers of judgment and your powers to have justified agnostic attitudes are impaired is a reason for you to refrain from judgment, but it is not a reason for you to be agnostic. "Don't cares" also give us cases in which something is a reason for one to be agnostic but not to refrain from judgment. Consider also those boring questions on which I was agnostic a few minutes ago. The fact that my (stored) evidence was roughly equally balanced was a reason for me to be agnostic about the relevant questions. But plausibly it wasn't a reason for me to refrain from judgment on them. Perhaps it would have been a reason for me to refrain if the question came up (say if someone asked me the question). But that didn't happen.

4. Response to the First Challenge

Suspending from judgment is not the same as agnosticism, and nor is refraining. [33] In light of these distinctions, let's return to the first challenge to traditionalism. Traditionalism is in good shape regarding the neutral attitude of agnosticism. Unlike suspension, whether you are justified in being agnostic about whether p does not seem to be sensitive to future-comparative factors. Nor do goal-related factors seem relevant: you can justifiably be agnostic about whether Manchester United or Chelsea has the better goalie, regardless of such factors. Agnosticism has a good claim to being a genuinely doxastic attitude, unlike suspension. For one thing, like belief and disbelief and unlike suspension, its justification is unaffected by non-epistemic factors. There is thus a normative similarity between agnosticism, belief and disbelief, and a dissimilarity with suspension (and refraining). But, in addition, agnosticism also appears no more agential than belief or disbelief. Suspension of judgment, by contrast, involves not judging because of the pursuit of a judgment-related aim (aiming to judge in the future, or under certain conditions). As with belief and disbelief, being agnostic does not seem to require any such aim. Nor do any of these three plausibly require any *intentional* action or omission, even on a generous view of these notions, whereas refraining and suspension do. The latter are therefore agential in a way that agnosticism, belief, and disbelief are not. Finally, while agnosticism is clearly an attitude, like belief and disbelief; this is not true of suspension or refraining. Putting off attitudes isn't an attitude; intentionally omitting attitudes isn't an attitude.

Finally, I return to the methodological point from earlier. What is at issue in the cases from Schroeder and Raz is putting off judgment. I have given an account which, if correct, would explain why it is fitting to apply the concept of suspending judgment in connection with those cases. But what ultimately matters to the defense of traditionalism, in the face of the first challenge, are two things: first, future-comparative factors matter to the justification for putting off judgment but don't matter to the justification of the very different phenomenon of

having an intermediate state of confidence; and second, having an intermediate state of confidence is a neutral *doxastic* attitude, while putting off judgment is not. Even if a traditionalist rejects my general account of suspending judgment, she could avail herself of this answer to the challenge.

5. Response to the Second Challenge

The second challenge to traditionalism, which draws on work by Friedman, is that there must be some point to adopting the neutral attitude as opposed to merely lacking belief and disbelief, but that as far as adequate responses to epistemic deficiencies are concerned, lacking belief seems just as good as taking some neutral attitude. Friedman proposes that we can explain the point of taking the neutral attitude once we identify it with the "inquiring attitude" of aiming to know the answer to a question: the point of the neutral attitude is to bring about the goal of acquiring the knowledge. But traditionalism is not amenable to such a tight connection between any doxastic attitude and goal-directed states, because it would imply that goal-related factors are relevant to the justification of the neutral attitude.

I will give a rather flatfooted response to this challenge on behalf of the traditionalist. Agnosticism, a genuine doxastic attitude, serves functions that the mere lack of belief and disbelief cannot. I will mention two. First, agnosticism can exert rational pressure on other states, which lack of belief cannot. For instance, if I am agnostic about whether supernatural beings exist and I know that if God exists there are supernatural beings, then I cannot, without irrationality, believe that God exists.[34] By contrast, lacking an attitude about whether supernatural beings exist can exert no such pressure. Second, unlike the absence of attitudes, one can be more or less agnostic on a question, insofar as one can be more or less confident of answers to it. I may be agnostic about whether candidate A, B or C will win the election, but if I have more confidence in A winning than in B or C, I am less agnostic than I am if I have equal confidence in each winning. In this way, states of agnosticism in a good epistemic agent can be a way of keeping track over time of comparative facts about evidential support, whereas merely lacking belief and disbelief cannot. Even the state of being agnostic *simpliciter* in a good epistemic agent can reflect the fact that one's evidence at the time did not sufficiently support any of the answers to the question.

So, I think the traditionalist is in good shape as far as the second challenge goes. But in light of the distinction between agnosticism and suspension of judgment, an intriguing possibility opens up. Perhaps Friedman is right about suspension of judgment. Suppose the traditionalist is right about agnosticism, i.e., that it is a neutral doxastic attitude whose job is to respect and track certain sorts of epistemic factors. Suspension of judgment is distinct from that attitude; so, what's *its* point? It is natural to wonder whether it is exactly what Friedman says it is: to direct us, in the way a goal-directed state does, to the attainment of knowledge. Given that this paper attempts not merely to defend traditionalism but to distinguish different ways of being neutral on questions, I will examine the relation between suspension and inquiry.

6. Suspension of Judgment and Inquiry

In the discussion below, I will speak of "inquiry," but, like Friedman, I mean this term to refer not to the actions sometimes involved in inquiring but to the state of mind that makes one an inquirer, the inquiring state of mind. Like Friedman, I understand this state of mind to be that of "aiming to figure out/know the answer to a question," and I take it to be closely related to "having a question on one's research agenda." My goal is to show that suspension of judgment comes apart from such phenomena. Like these phenomena, suspension involves the subject's having aims but not in the same way that inquiry does. I start by comparing inquiry with refraining from judgment.

6.1. Refraining from Judgment and Inquiry

Refraining from judgment is distinct from inquiry. There are normative differences between them. Something can be a reason for you to refrain from judgment but not a reason for you to inquire, e.g., the fact that your powers of judgment are compromised. That fact (if known) is a reason for you to refrain from judgment, but it doesn't seem to be a reason for you to put a question on your research agenda, or aim to figure out the answer to the question, etc. This is especially clear if we enrich this reason by adding that your abilities in this respect are permanently compromised. For instance, you might know you have a powerful bias that you will never overcome.[35]

Something can also be a reason for you to inquire without being a reason for you to refrain from judgment. When known, the fact that it would highly desirable to learn the answer to a question and a very easy achievement – you could just think about it for a couple seconds and come to know the answer – seems like a reason for you to inquire into it, but does not seem like a reason for you to refrain from judgment on it. One might protest that you'd have to refrain from judgment in order to inquire. I will dispute this claim in a moment, but even if it were true, in principle something could be a reason for a person to φ without being a reason for the person to ψ, where ψ-ing is a precondition for φ-ing. Consider Maya, a Wyoming resident in a voting booth looking at the list of candidates for US Senate. Plausibly, the fact that Jones, although not an excellent candidate, is the best candidate running for senate in Wyoming is a reason for Maya to vote for Jones, but it doesn't seem like a reason for her to be (or continue being) a resident of Wyoming.

Refraining from judgment and inquiry also differ non-normatively. One can refrain from judgment while also refraining from inquiry, i.e., while intentionally not inquiring.[36] Again, if I know I'm biased on a question, I might refuse to go in for either judgment or inquiry. Or, looking back to "epistemic worsening" cases discussed above, suppose I know that I won't have any better evidence in the future than I now have but also that the evidence I have now is equally balanced between p and not-p. Because of the fact that my evidence will only get worse, I might give up inquiry on whether p and take the question off my research agenda. But, especially if I'm tempted by one of the answers, say p, which confirms my pet theory, I might need to fight off temptation by refraining – and indeed "withholding" – judgment on the question. In such a case, I would refrain from judgment but not inquire.

It is a trickier question whether it's possible to inquire without refraining from judgment.[37] I want to look into this in some detail. Consider two examples:

Example 1. You have taken a brief glance at two insurance plans, A and B, and A looks a bit better. But your glance was quite brief. You suspend judgment about which is better while you inquire into the matter further, e.g., by considering their advantages and disadvantages under various circumstances. Having done all this research, you return to the question whether A or B is better, believing you now have good enough evidence, but now with an aim of making a judgment on the matter *without delay*. You haven't quite yet made a judgment, though. At this time, you are still inquiring, still "mentally asking" whether A or B is better, but you are no longer refraining from judgment.

Example 2. You're an umpire in baseball. A pitch has just been thrown and the batter did not swing. You haven't yet judged whether it was a ball or strike. But you're trying to judge without delay whether it was a strike or a ball, and so you're not refraining from judgment. You're inquiring insofar as you're mentally asking whether the pitch was a ball or strike, aiming to get it right, reliably. [38]

The guiding idea behind these examples is that if you are trying to make a judgment without delay on a question – as opposed to planning to try to make a judgment after finishing some related sub-inquiry, or after reading another paper, or hearing another counterargument, etc. – then you are not refraining from judgment on the question. This fits with the account of offered in section 2: although the agent fails to judge in these cases, the agent is not *intentionally* failing to judge, and so is not refraining from judgment. Nevertheless, the agent is inquiring and so has whatever attitudes are necessary for inquiry. Thus, having those pro-attitudes cannot be the same as refraining from judgment.[39]

One might object that this argument equivocates on *what* one refrains from in refraining from "judgment." The objection is this: in my cases above, the agent isn't refraining from the process of judgment but is refraining from propositional judgment (the product), and so my cases are not ones in which a person fails to refrain from judgment while inquiring. Thus, for all I've argued, Friedman could be right that inquiry requires refraining from judgment.

What could it mean, though, to refrain from judgment (the product) while engaging in an activity (judgment as process) the aim of which is to bring about the product without delay? Generally, if you are engaged in an activity with an aim to bring about X-ing without delay, you are not *refraining from* the product. If I am engaged in the process of throwing a dart at the bullseye, I am not refraining from hitting the bullseye. The same holds if anything more clearly for suspending: if you are trying there and then to X, you are not suspending X-ing – not putting it off.[40]

Consider also: would the Pyrrhonian skeptics, practicing their modes of suspension, ever find themselves in positions like the ones you're occupying in those examples? Would a Pyrrhonian try right away – with no further delay – to make a judgment on a question? I think the answer is no. This fits well with the claim that in going in for making a judgment without delay one is not refraining from – and not suspending – judgment. Insofar as the Pyrrhonian refrains from and suspends judgment in the product sense, she does not go in for judgment in the process sense.

Perhaps there is a better way to press a related objection to my claims about the examples. One might claim that in those cases you are *not* aiming to judge without delay. You

are still putting off judgment insofar as you are aiming to judge on the question only when a certain condition is met, e.g., only when you are satisfied with an answer, and you are not so satisfied yet. The putting off will end as soon as you are satisfied. So, you are refraining from judgment in the product sense as well as in the process sense, but you are still inquiring. Perhaps even a Pyrrhonian could do what you are doing, if it meets this description.

The trouble with this objection is that it treats a judgment that p too much like an action one performs based on a judgment that p. Compare a contestant in a game show, who in response to a question "Is p true?" has 30 seconds to push one or neither of two buttons – a "yes, p is true" button and a "no, p is false" button. If she pushes the button corresponding to the truth on whether p, she wins $1000; if she pushes the button corresponding to the false answer on whether p, she's out of the game and loses. If she omits button-pushing, she'll be able to keep playing for another round. The seconds are ticking away but she still has a few left. She may well be putting off button-pushing until she determines which answer is correct. Once she determines the correct answer, she will push the corresponding button. In the case of judgment, by contrast, the "determination" involved is not something that precedes and rationalizes judgment as it does button-pushing in the game show case; the determination *is* the judgment. The objector's talk of "being satisfied of an answer," similarly, is itself talk of judgment. I will explain this worry further.

Although judgment is an event rather than a state, and although it is something one *does* and usually does for reasons, there is a danger in assimilating judgments to ordinary actions. We shouldn't think of judgment that p in normal cases as something one does for instrumental reasons, even instrumental reasons concerning the goal of judging truly on a question. To think of judgment that p in that way is to think of it as motivated not only by pro-attitude (a desire or intention) to judge/affirm the truth on a question but also by a cognition to the effect that p is the truth on the question, a cognition that is itself based on (or partially constituted by) a cognition that p. Without the cognition, there is no rationalizing explanation of why one affirmed that p rather than that not-p. But what is this cognition that p? It is tempting to use language similar to that of 'judgment' for it – it is your *taking* p to be the case, your *assenting* to p, your *accepting* that p. But then we are explaining judgment that p as motivated in part by judgment that p. We can avoid this consequence by taking the cognition not to be a judgment but instead a cognitive state, most likely a belief. But even on this view, judgment in the normal case is no longer itself something one does on the basis of evidence. It's rather belief that is based on evidence, with judgment rationalized by belief + a pro-attitude. But this seems wrong: judgment at least in normal cases is based on evidence. Moreover, if judgment in normal cases is merely an action based on a belief that p, then judgment is not a way of forming a belief in those cases. But that is implausible: in many (if not all) cases, judgment is a way of forming a belief.

The examples of inquiry without refraining from judgment stand. I conclude that not only is refraining from judgment distinct from inquiry (and distinct from the desire-like attitudes involved in inquiry), but neither implies the other: one can refrain from judgment without inquiring and vice versa. [41]

6.2. A One-Way Implication?

Given that suspending requires refraining, the previous section shows that suspending judgment is distinct from inquiry. But it remains to be seen whether suspending requires inquiry. It is not enough to have shown that refraining from judgment doesn't require inquiry, nor that something could be a reason for a person to refrain but not a reason for the person to inquire. Suspending essentially involves aims concerning judgment, aims that might seem to require inquiry.

I concede that suspension is much more commonly accompanied by "aiming to know the answer" and "putting the question on one's research agenda" than mere refraining is.[42] Still, I think there are reasons (related to some points made earlier) to deny that suspending requires such attitudes. If there is very little chance of learning the answer to a question, or even improving your epistemic standing on it, you might move it off your research agenda. There are only so many issues you can put on your research agenda. Thus, you might well suspend judgment on the issue, deferring judgment to a later time, if there is one, when your prospects for epistemic improvement on the question are better. Here a conditional aim about future judgment seems reasonable in a way that an unconditional aim to figure out the answer (or improve your standing on the issue) doesn't.

I do not deny that suspension is closely related to attitudes such as *wishing one could know the answer,* or *hoping to someday be in a position to know the answer* or *being curious.* (Even if it doesn't require them, it is normally accompanied by them.[43]) But such weak pro-attitudes are not sufficient for inquiry. Inquirers must at least aim for epistemic improvement on the target question. Wishing and hoping for such improvement do not guarantee aiming for it.

7. Conclusion

According to traditionalism, there are three doxastic attitudes – belief, disbelief and a neutral attitude – and each is justified exclusively in virtue of epistemic factors. Traditionalism is apparently threatened by the relevance of certain non-epistemic facts – e.g., about obtaining better evidence in the future – to the justification of suspending judgment. And it is threatened, as well, by the argument that there must be some point to suspension of judgment as opposed to merely lacking belief, and the best account of its point – an account that identifies it with "the inquiring attitude," a goal-directed state of aiming to know the answer to a question – commits one to thinking that other non-epistemic factors – e.g., about the value of the goal – are relevant to its justification. In my defense of traditionalism, I did not dispute the relevance of these factors to the justification of suspending judgment and inquiry, respectively. But I denied that the latter are doxastic attitudes. Agnosticism understood as having an intermediate state of confidence, by contrast, *is*. The challenges to traditionalism therefore leave it unscathed, because it is a view about doxastic attitudes.

In addition to defending traditionalism, I distinguished ways in which we can be neutral on questions.[44] I argued that, unlike agnosticism, both suspension and inquiry involve desire-like aiming at cognitive goals (judging later or under certain conditions in the case of suspension and knowing the answer to a question in the case of inquiry) , and thus enable us to control what we believe and their quality. There remained, though, a question about the relationship

between suspension and inquiry. I argued that these are distinct as well, and that neither implies the other. Suspending, first, involves intentionally not judging, whereas inquiry does not; and second, suspending involves a weaker aim – a suspender need not *aim* at getting knowledge in the future. A suspender may even take a question off her research agenda. By suspending, she may only ready herself to acquire such future knowledge should the opportunity present itself, however unlikely that may be.

Let me conclude by flagging an important issue for future work. Suppose I am right that non-epistemic factors bear on the justification of suspension of judgment. Can we still characterize a sort *epistemic* deontology for suspension, a deontology of special relevance to epistemology? We after all do easily reason from "you ought to believe p" to "you ought not suspend judgment on whether p." Can we explain the force of such reasoning? Appealing to notion of "right kinds of reasons" seems an unpromising avenue. As Schroeder (2012) points out, the two main earmarks for distinguishing right from of wrong kinds of reasons for an attitude are motivational asymmetry and rationality asymmetry. But, by these earmarks, the fact that in a certain case someone will give me $1000 for suspending seems to be a right kind of reason to suspend: I can suspend for this reason, at least for the right sort of question, and it would not be irrational for me to do so.[45] There are other alternatives, though. Perhaps we could think of epistemic deontology for suspension as simply *derivative* from the deontology for doxastic attitudes: roughly, one epistemically ought to suspend iff in all the relevant worlds in which one's doxastic states are as they ought to be one suspends, and mutatis mutandis for epistemic permissibility of suspension. Alternatively, we might approach epistemic deontology for suspension directly and not merely as derivative from that of doxastic attitudes, understanding, for instance, it in terms of the promotion of or respect for certain epistemic values. Given the agential elements involved in suspending judgment, a decision-theoretical approach, such as expected epistemic utility theory, seems worth exploring – considerably more so, I think, than it would be to understanding the deontology for belief and other doxastic attitudes.[46]

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[1] See, for instance Goldman (2010), Conee and Feldman (2004, 2010), Matheson (2015), Smithies (2011), and Sosa (2015).

[2] Friedman (2017) takes philosophers using these terms to be talking about the same thing. In some of her earlier papers, she uses 'agnosticism' (2013a and 2013b).

[3] For arguments against non-attitude views of neutrality, see Friedman (2013a). The point about rocks comes from Wedgwood (2002). For the most part, I focus on *whether*-questions, but one may of course suspend judgment on other sorts of questions.

[4] If one's mind is fragmented (Lewis, 1996; Egan, 2008), one might count as both believing that p and being neutral on whether p (perhaps even rationally). Lewis suggests an existential account in the case of knowledge: the whole fragmented person knows that p iff some fragment knows that p.

[5] I use 'justified in believing' to imply permissibility but not obligation (and not that one ought to believe).

[6] Some clarifications here. The notion of strength of epistemic position comes from discussions of contextualism (cf. Cohen, 2005; Fantl and McGrath, 2009) and may be glossed in terms of meeting stricter or laxer epistemic standards. In the contextualist literature, philosophers typically give either an internalistic (e.g., in terms of evidence) or externalistic (e.g., in terms of reliability or truth-tracking) interpretation of these standards. In fact, rather than seeing the these construals as competitors we might do better to posit multiple dimensions in which epistemic positions can be stronger or worse. Epistemic factors would be those that help fix one's position on at least one of these dimensions. Traditionalists will still disagree among themselves about which of these dimensions, and so which of these sorts of epistemic factors, matter for justification. To keep things simple, I will mainly focus on *evidentialist* traditionalism, which takes the epistemic factors to be evidential, i.e., to be evidence bearing positively or negatively on whether p. Finally, to make traditionalism inclusive, we might allow epistemic factors to include those factors determinative of whether or not one's strength of epistemic position reaches certain thresholds, thereby allowing moderate forms of pragmatic and moral encroachment to count as traditionalist.

[7] This statement is not true in full generality. Let p be *I will live past today.* Then clearly knowing that I will gain decisive evidence on p tomorrow can help fix how strong my epistemic position today on whether p. Putting aside these special exceptions in which the getting of evidence on p is evidence for or against p, factors 1-4 do not help fix how strong one's current epistemic position is on whether p. Thanks to Chris Willard-Kyle for discussion.

[8] For recent defenses of practical reasons for belief, see Reisner (2009) and Rinard (2019).

[9] Schroeder (2012) draws a slightly different lesson. He claims that in the "clearer and better evidence" case you have a non-evidential reason not to believe p, but one of the "right kind" rather than the "wrong kind," where Pascalian reasons to believe are paradigms of the latter. I think the putative reasons are more plausibly taken as reasons to suspend judgment on whether p. He does consider the possibility that future-comparative facts are reasons to withhold, rejecting it on the grounds that even in cases of this sort when you are not deliberating, you have reasons not to believe/intend. He assumes, I think implausibly, that withholding requires deliberation. The accounts I present in section 2 do not make deliberation a requirement for suspending or refraining from judgment.

[10] I'll often abbreviate 'suspending judgment' as 'suspending' and similarly for 'refraining from judgment'.

[11] In some cases, it might seem that inquiry aims not at knowing the answer but at less impressive outcomes such as having a true belief or perhaps a justified true belief. In my discussions of inquiry, following Friedman, I will speak of aiming at knowledge, but the reader should recall the possible weaker aims.

[12] Thanks here to Christopher Willard-Kyle.

[13] See Friedman (2017) for similar claims about suspending judgment. Friedman takes these remarks to support the identification of it with the inquiring attitude. I consider her account in section 6.

[14] In addition to Friedman and myself, Sosa and Masny take aims to be importantly related to suspension. For Sosa (forthcoming) takes suspension of judging to be the intentional omission of judgment. For Sosa, there is no future-directedness to suspension, as there is for me. Masny (forthcoming) takes it to require intending to judge, whereas I think it requires conditional aims rather than unconditional ones. I follow Ludwig (2015) in thinking of conditional intentions (and aims) as being commitments to contingency plans, and so (roughly) commitments about "what to do upon (learning of) a certain contingency," whereas unconditional intentions are commitments about what to do are that are not "contingent on finding out some condition obtains." (32)

[15] I choose to use the term 'refrain' rather than 'withhold' to avoid the latter's stronger association with *holding back* and *resistance*. These associations make it doubtful that suspending implies withholding.

[16] Clarke (2014) treats talk of 'refraining' and 'intentional omission' as getting at the same core phenomenon of someone intentionally not doing a certain thing.

[17] In general, intentionally omitting X-ing does not require intending or aiming not to X. See Clarke (2014) for discussion.

[18] This is true even for views on which judgment that p entails belief that p (cf. Roeber, 2019).

[19] For illuminating discussions of the relations between belief and judgment relevant to the discussion below, see Cassam (2010), Roeber (2019) and Sosa (2015).

[20] Thanks to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to explain how belief excludes refraining from judgment exclude and for recommending that I discuss the notions of suspending and refraining from belief.

[21] See Feldman (2001) for an argument against believing at will and Steup (2017) for a contrary view. See also Audi (1999) for a limited defense of doxastic involuntarism. Following Steup (2017), I don't build into my account of doing X at will that the intention to do X is voluntary. The key thing is the directness of X-ing based on an intention to do X. Thanks to Vierkant Tillman for discussion on this point.

[22] This section only scratches the surface of the issue of control over our beliefs. Even if we can't believe at will, we may still have voluntary control over our beliefs in a certain sense of the word. As Weatherson (2008) points out, we often form beliefs when we had the capacity to hold off doing so: we could have stopped to think about other hypotheses or to evaluate the evidence more closely, and doing so may well have comported better with our own values. See also Smith (2015).

[23] I am not alone in thinking that the prospect of future evidence can matter to the justification of suspension. See Chris Willard-Kyle (manuscript) for an argument ignorance is sometimes epistemically valuable.

[24] Talk of "being agnostic" may connote that one could in some sense "go either way." Of course, one might be too uncertain to have a belief on whether p despite being so confident in p that one could not "go for" not-p.

[25] If states of confidence can be inexact or "mushy," we might prefer an alternative and more demanding conception of agnosticism, according to which one is agnostic on whether p iff one has an intermediate state of confidence concerning whether p all of the sharpenings of which are themselves intermediate states of confidence whether p. This conception might capture the idea of a kind of "committed agnosticism." For, if one is agnostic in this sense, then no matter how one sharpens one's mushy states of confidence, one's confidences would not be strong enough either for belief or disbelief. Uncommitted agnosticism would amount to having a mushy state of confidence which could be sharpened in such a way as to support belief. Suppose your state of confidence whether p ranges, intuitively, from thinking p is *morally certain* to thinking it is merely *slightly more likely than not.* This state could be sharpened by dropping the lower range entirely, leaving a state of confidence that could support belief.

[26] See Friedman (2013b) for an argument that suspension of judgment is not reducible to having a standard credence in a certain range.

[27] Consider the imaginary case of throwing a dart with a point-sized tip at a normal dartboard (cf. Easwaran, 2014). Suppose one assigns some probability to there being an uncountably many equally probable outcomes here. One must assign probability less than 1/n for any natural number n to the proposition that the dart hits the exact center, and arguably one must assign it probability 0. It is at least intuitive, nevertheless, that once one sees where the dart hits (say a good distance from the center) one can (rationally) become more confident that it didn't hit the center.

[28] Although I make no claims on these matters in this paper, see Fantl and McGrath (2009) for a proposal about the relations between belief, confidence and reasons.

[29]Two points here. First, I use the locution 'reason for you to φ' to mean *reason you have to φ*. Thus, I have in mind reasons possessed by the subject, where possession requires meeting an epistemic condition, plausibly

justification or knowledge. Second, I say '*can* be a reason for you' rather than '*is* a reason for you'. This is for two reasons. First, the reason must be *possessed*. Second, even if it is possessed, whether it is a reason for *you* to suspend judgment depends on how things stand with you, such as whether you do or should value knowing or having a true belief on the matter.

[30] In conversation, I have encountered the following argument that future-comparative factors are *not* reasons to suspend judgment. Pick your favorite version of Schroeder's case. Either one's current evidence is good enough for justified belief that p or it isn't. Suppose it is. Then one ought to believe that p. But if one ought to believe that p, then one doesn't have a reason to suspend judgment about whether p. Suppose, on the other hand, one's evidence isn't good enough for justified belief that p. Then *that fact* is the real reason for one to suspend judgment, not any future-comparative fact. Either way, the future comparative fact is not serving as a reason. I reject several steps of this argument. First, even if one's evidence is good enough for justified belief, it doesn't follow that one lacks reasons to suspend judgment. As explained in endnote 5, I use 'justified' to pick out a permissive notion, not an "ought." Cases like the Schroeder case can be spelled out so that they are plausible examples of being justified in believing that p despite it not being the case that one ought to believe that p. (One's evidence is good enough, but it's a close call, and one may lack a full appreciation of the force of the evidence.) In such a case, future-comparative facts, at least when one cares or has reason to care about the question, can plausibly be good reasons for one to put off judgment on the question. Second, suppose one's evidence isn't good enough for justified belief that p. If one doesn't know this (or isn't justified in believing it), we might doubt that it is a reason that one *S has* to be agnostic (see the previous endnote). But even supposing one knows it, the mere fact that the evidence isn't good enough isn't a reason for one to suspend judgment *if one doesn't care and has no reason to care about knowing/having a true belief whether p.* (I develop this sort of point later in section 3.)

[31] Might the freshman or the juror have a mushy state of confidence? This is of course possible, but I don't see why it must be the case. If you put a question out of your mind, I don't see why you must move into a state of confidence concerning it. If we work with the more demanding notion of agnosticism described in note 25, then it becomes much more plausible that the freshman or juror might suspend judgment while not being agnostic: if they have mushy states of confidence, those states likely will admit of belief-friendly sharpenings.

[32] A second possible sort of case of suspension of judgment without agnosticism, which I will not attempt to explore further here, is one in which a subject has a state of confidence that is strong enough for belief but still lacks belief. Such a subject would not believe but not be agnostic either. Whether such a case is possible depends on the details of what it takes for a state of confidence to be strong enough for belief. For some discussion of this, see Fantl and McGrath (2009). Thanks to Chris Willard-Kyle for discussion.

[33] Rosenkrantz (2007) distinguishes agnosticism from suspension of judgment. He is interested in agnosticism as a position – a claim that one can put forth about a subject matter. He distinguishes two forms of agnosticism, both of which are claims about lack of knowability. I reject the identification of what I call "agnosticism" with belief in such claims. A person might believe that neither p nor not-p is knowable while also failing to be in an intermediate state of confidence on the question whether p. This combination might be irrational but it is not impossible. The same considerations, I think, raise problems for the theory of

[34] Cf. Rosa (forthcoming)

[35] For similar points, see Archer (forthcoming).

[36] Thanks to John Hawthorne for a helpful discussion on refraining from and suspending inquiry.

[37] But aren't there clear cases of inquiry without refraining? Can't you inquire and believe? The matter deserves extended discussion. Briefly, though, I follow Friedman (2017) in thinking that any such cases involve peculiarities (such as irrationality or fragmentation). This is mainly because to believe that p is to be settled on an answer, p, to the question whether p. Thus, simultaneously to believe that p and inquire into whether p is – to borrow a way of putting it suggested by Chris Willard-Kyle – simultaneously to ask and answer the same question.

[38] Compare Friedman (2013a) on mid-wondering cases. I agree that cases in which one is in the midst of wondering whether p are not cases of suspension of judgment. (Friedman is now committed to giving a different verdict, given her recent equation of suspension of judgment and the inquiring attitude, at least in cases of mid-wondering that are also cases of inquiry.)

[39] Another interesting sort of case is that of a subject with high need-for-closure in sense of Kruglanski and colleagues (1996). Suppose a person very much wants to answer the question whether p as soon as possible, e.g., because he has been told by an experimentalist that the speed of the correct answer correlates with intelligence. He jumps on the first piece of evidence he thinks of which even vaguely supports p. Consider this person just

before he thinks about this piece of evidence. He's trying as soon as possible to judge and so isn't refraining from judgment. But it might be less clear that this is genuine inquiry – perhaps the person's aim is really just to judge, rather than to get it right, let alone know.

[40] Remarking on a case from Robert Moore (1979), Clarke (2014) draws on a similar intuition in his claim that Ulysses does not refrain from jumping in the water when he hears the Sirens' song. Since he is trying to jump in he is not refraining from doing it.

[41] An anonymous referee asks about a more occurrent notion of inquiry: mentally asking a question. One can mentally ask a question without caring to know the answer, for instance, if a friend verbally asks it of you and waits for your answer (as in the don't care cases considered above). Even this notion of inquiry comes apart from refraining from judgment, though. The two examples above of inquiry without refraining are cases in which one is mentally asking the question but not refraining from judgment. Conversely, there are also cases of refraining from judgment but not mentally asking the question. Certainly, a half-hour after receiving the instruction from the judge, a juror might continue to refrain from judgment about the defendant's guilt. But the juror is not at that time mentally asking whether the defendant is guilty. Could someone who is just then *coming to* refrain from judgment on a question not be asking the question? I think so. The juror may not *ask* the question of guilt at all, upon hearing the judge's instructions: the juror might immediately put the question out of mind without asking it.

[42] Conee and Feldman (2018) argue that if one doesn't care about whether p, one might suspend judgment but not inquire. However, I think that suspending judgment involves a constitutive aim concerning judgment, and so usually involves cares in the neighborhood, such as caring to know whether p (though see the following endnote.) Matters are different for agnosticism. It is not at all abnormal to be agnostic about whether p despite not caring about whether p or about knowing whether p.

[43] One could suspend judgment without caring about knowing whether p at all, without being curious, etc. if an authority told you to do so or if someone is going to reward you for doing so.

[44] I am not alone in distinguishing various ways to be neutral on questions. Friedman (2013b) distinguishes suspension from having a standard credence in a certain range. After writing this paper, I learned of Lord's (forthcoming), which contains a valuable discussion of different ways of being neutral on questions and of which ways are within the reach of epistemic rationality.

[45] Compare agnosticism. The fact I'm offered a reward to have an intermediate state of confidence on a question doesn't seem like the sort of thing that can be my basis for moving into or being in such a state, not in a fully conscious and direct way, as it can for suspending, and it would also be irrational to adopt an intermediate state of confidence on such a basis.

[46] I am grateful to audiences at the 2019 Midwest Epistemology Workshop at the University of Nebraska, the Penn Reasons and Foundations in Epistemology Conference, the University of Oklahoma, Ohio State University, the University of St. Andrews, the University of Edinburgh and the International Colloquium in Analytic Epistemology in Santa Maria, Brazil. I thank John Bengson, Jessica Brown, David Enoch, Jane Friedman, Errol Lord, Wayne Riggs, Luis Rosa, Lewis Ross, Mark Schroeder, Declan Smithies, Martin Smith, Vierkant Tillman, as well as members of the 2018 and 2019 graduate seminars in epistemology at Rutgers. Special thanks go to John Hawthorne, Ernest Sosa and Chris Willard-Kyle for hours of discussion on the main ideas of the paper.