Normative relations between ignorance and suspension of judgement: a systematic investigation

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1. Introduction

In the recent epistemological literature much has been written about the nature of suspending judgement or agnosticism (see e.g. Friedman 2013, 2017; McGrath 2021; Palmira 2020; Raleigh 2021; Wagner 2022; Zinke 2021). There has also been a surge of recent interest in the nature of ignorance (see e.g. Le Morvan 2012, 2013, 2019; Meylan 2020, 2024; Peels 2011, 2012, 2023; Pritchard 2021a, 2021b; Silva and Siscoe 2024). But what is the relationship between these two epistemically significant states? Prima facie, both suspension and ignorance seem to involve the lack of a correct answer to a question. And, again prima facie, there may be some intuitive attraction to the idea that when one is ignorant whether p, one ought to suspend judgement whether p. In this paper we will explore a range of different possible normative connections between ignorance and suspension of judgement. We will also discuss how both ignorance and suspension are related to having inconclusive evidence. As we will see, the issues can be quite complex due to the fact that there are different, competing views about the nature of ignorance and also about the nature of suspension. Moreover, there are importantly different kinds of epistemic norms. Our overall aim then will be to systematically chart how these different choices will impact the possible normative connections between ignorance and suspension.

1.1 The Nature of Ignorance and the Nature of Suspension

But in this introductory section, our first task will be to briefly consider some of the main, relevant disagreements about the nature of ignorance and the nature of suspension. A second brief, initial clarification will concern two different senses of epistemic obligation.

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Let's start with the nature of ignorance. What is ignorance? The two main accounts of ignorance are as follows:

The (lack of) Knowledge Account

> A subject S is ignorant whether p iff S does not know that p (if p is true), nor does S know that not-p (if p is false) (Le Morvan 2012, 2013, 2019)

The (lack of) True Belief Account

> A subject S is ignorant whether p iff S does not hold the true belief that p (if p is true), nor does S hold the true belief that not-p (if p is false). (Peels 2010, 2011a, 2012)

In what follows we will use the abbreviations IG=not-K and IG=not-TB to refer to the Knowledge account and the True Belief account respectively. Notice that we have phrased these standard positions in terms of 'ignorance whether p', rather than 'ignorance of the fact that p'. The former phrase is, of course, non-factive whereas the latter phrase is explicitly factive. The rationale behind this preference is that the non-factive 'ignorance whether p' seems to match-up better with the (non-factive) notion of suspending judgement whether p.

We take no position here as to which of these two theories does a better job of capturing our linguistic intuitions concerning normal usage of the English-language term 'ignorance'. Our interest, rather, is in tracing how both a lack of knowledge and a lack of true belief connect with suspension of judgement. However, we acknowledge that the distinct normative implications associated with suspending judgment might give some theorists a reason to prefer either the Knowledge account or the True Belief account.

Whilst these are the two main, standard views on the nature of ignorance, there are various other theories in the literature. Just to mention two, firstly there is the 'normative account' of ignorance (Meylan 2020, 2024; Pritchard 2021a, 2021b). Very briefly, the normative account of ignorance claims that our concept of ignorance includes some form of negative evaluation, so that there must be something essentially bad or blameworthy about being ignorant. And, according to the normative account of ignorance, the classical views, i.e. IG=not-K and IG=not-K, are unable to account for this essential normative aspect. Secondly, an important recent paper due to Silva & Siscoe (2023) argues that ignorance should be understood in terms of the

lack of awareness and that this does better at capturing our intuitions about cases than either of the two main, standard views. Interesting as these latter theories are, we will ignore them in what follows – tracing the connections between suspension and the two main, standard views on ignorance will already provide enough of a task for the present occasion.

Let us now turn to suspension of judgement. Here the debate is even fiercer. There are various possible views as to the nature of mental state of suspending judgement whether p. Firstly, there is the merely privative or 'non-belief' view which treats suspending whether p as simply the lack of belief or disbelief that p (see e.g. Chisholm 1976; Zinke 2021). This might be supplemented with the requirement that the subject has at least considered the question whether p (Wedgwood 2002). Secondly, one might think of suspension of judgement as consisting in being (roughly) equally confident that p is true as that p is false – i.e. in having a credence that p of (around) 0.5 Thirdly, one might think of suspension as essentially requiring some kind of 'meta-belief' concerning one's own epistemic standing concerning whether p – e.g. a belief that one does not know or cannot currently tell whether p, or perhaps a belief about one's evidence whether p (Raleigh 2021). Fourthly, there is the view which holds that suspension essentially consists in a sui generis attitude that is not reducible to any kind of belief, partial belief or absence of belief. For example, Friedman (2013, 2017) argues that suspension essentially consists in having an inquiring attitude towards the question whether p. Perhaps there are yet other possible views here. Fortunately, for present purposes we need not decide or distinguish between these various theories concerning the nature of suspension.

However, another controversial issue regarding suspension will be important in what follows. This is the question of whether suspension of judgement whether p is compatible or not with believing that p. Some theorists (Conee & Feldman 2018; Lord 2020; Raleigh 2021; Rosa 2023) claim that the combination of believing that p (or believing that not-p) whilst also suspending whether p is impossible. Others (Friedman 2017; Archer 2024) maintain that though such a combination would be irrational, it is not impossible. Once more, we take no position here as to which of these views is correct. But at various points, below, this issue will be relevant to assessing the plausibility of candidate possible normative connections between suspension and ignorance.

1.2 Two Kinds of Epistemic Norms

It is a familiar point from the literature on the norms governing belief that there seem to be two different kinds of distinctively epistemic 'oughts'. On the one hand, it has seemed plausible to many theorists to say that beliefs ought to be true (Velleman & Shah, Wedgwood) or ought to be knowledge (Williamson 2000).

The Truth Norm for belief

> A subject ought to believe that p only if p is true.

The Knowledge Norm for belief

> A subject ought to believe that p only if S knows that p (or is in a position to know that p).

Now, to be clear, there are various further complications here.[2] But we don't need to worry about these details. All that matters for present purposes is that the 'ought' here is intended to specify something like an objective ideal or aim for our doxastic states by which they can be evaluated. Ideally, one should believe that p only if p is true. Ideally, one should believe that p only if one knows that p. We will refer to this sense of epistemic obligation as the 'ideal ought/obligation'.

On the other hand, one can also say that a subject ought to believe what her evidence indicates as true (and disbelieve what her evidence indicates as false).

The Evidential Norm

> A subject ought to believe that p only if her evidence indicates that p is true.

Once more we can ignore potential complications about how exactly to formulate this kind of norm. What matters for present purposes is simply that in this latter sense, the 'ought' is meant to specify the doxastic attitudes that the subject should have if she is to hold rational (or perhaps epistemically justified) doxastic attitudes. We will refer to this kind of epistemic obligation as the 'evidential ought/obligation'.

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[2] For instance, as to whether the ought should be wide or narrow scope, if the norm should be a biconditional or just a conditional claim, if the truth norm should be restricted to propositions that the subject has considered, etc.

It is clear that these two different kinds of epistemic norms can sometimes issue a subject with apparently conflicting directives. When one's evidence is misleading, strongly indicating that p is true, though it is in fact false, then one ought, in the evidential sense, to believe that p – but such a belief would not be as it ought to be in the former, ideal sense, since it would be false. There are various ways that this sort of apparent conflict between evidential and ideal obligations could be explained (or explained away). For instance, one might think that evidential and ideal oughts stand in a kind of means-to-end relationship: complying with the evidential norm is the only reliable means a subject has for satisfying the ideal norm.

In any case, and at the risk of stating the obvious, both the ideal and the evidential kinds of epistemic obligation are still distinctively *epistemic norms* and are thus distinct from any moral or prudential norms that apply to doxastic attitudes (if such norms exist).

With this distinction in hand we can ask: what kinds of ideal and/or evidential norms (if any) might apply to suspension and to ignorance? Clearly, the truth-value of a proposition cannot provide the ideal for when one ought to suspend judgement. That a proposition is true (or false) does not by itself impose any obligation to suspend judgement about that proposition[3]. Though of course a proposition's truth-value could create an ideal obligation to *not* suspend judgement: since according to the truth norm for belief, when p is true, the ideal doxastic state is *not* to suspend judgement whether p.

However, it might be possible to make sense of an ideal obligation to suspend judgement whether p whenever you are not in a position to know that p. Here, the idea would be that suspension of judgement is the next best doxastic state you can be in when you are not in a position to know that p. So in cases when you are not in a position to know that p because you have misleading evidence indicating that p (when in fact not-p), the idea would be that there is an epistemic ideal according to which you ought to suspend judgement, rather than either believing that p (which is what your evidence indicates you should do) or disbelieving that p (which is what the truth-value of the proposition would demand).

Now, we are not ourselves endorsing the idea that there really is any such ideal ought to suspend judgement. No doubt some theorists would want to reject such an idea.

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[3] There could be exceptions with self-referential normative propositions, e.g. the proposition: you ought to suspend judgement about all propositions (including this one).

Our claim is only that this sort of ideal aim for suspension of judgement is at least not immediately incoherent; and for those with externalist/knowledge-first sympathies it might make sense to accept that there is such an ideal ought to suspend judgement.

Of course, much less controversially, there seems to be a perfectly clear evidential sense of 'ought' on which we sometimes ought to suspend judgement – when our evidence does not clearly indicate either p or not-p.

What about obligations to be ignorant? Well, presumably we cannot make sense of an ideal obligation to be ignorant – as ignorance is just never plausibly any kind of epistemic aim or ideal. (Though we can presumably make sense of the idea of an ideal obligation to *not* be ignorant whether p.). What about *evidential* obligations to be ignorant? As we will see, there is a sense in which there can be evidential obligations to be ignorant (briefly put, this could be the case if suspension implies ignorance, and this by virtue of the fact that there is an evidential ought to suspend). However, the issues here are more complicated and so we will defer further discussion of these evidential obligations to be ignorant to section 3.3, below. For now the moral of this sub-section is simply that we will need to keep the distinction between some kind of ideal ought and an evidential ought clearly in mind when evaluating the plausibility of different candidate norms connecting suspension and ignorance.

2. Possible Connections Between Suspension and Ignorance

What are the possible normative relationships between suspension of judgement whether p and ignorance whether p?

Using 'S' to stand for 'suspending whether p' and 'IG' to stand for 'ignorance whether p', we obtain the following possible normative relationships between S and IG which we have classified into three groups:

Group A: Narrow scope, with two oughts
1. O(S) $\rightarrow$ O(IG)
P2. O(IG) $\rightarrow$ O(S)
1&2. O(S) iff O(IG)

Group B: Narrow Scope, with ought only on one side
I. S $\rightarrow$ O(IG)
II. O(IG) $\rightarrow$ S

I&II. S iff O(IG)

III. IG → O(S)
IV. O(S) → IG
III&IV. IG iff O(S)

Groupe C: Wide scope oughts
i. O(S → IG)
ii. O(IG → S)
i&ii. O(S iff IG)

In what follows we will consider each of these possibilities. In some cases the candidate norms can be dismissed fairly quickly; in other cases the issues are more complex and so longer discussion will be required. But before considering all of these possible candidate normative relations, we need briefly to consider the non-normative relationships between suspension and ignorance.

2.1 Non-Normative Relation between Suspension of Judgement and Ignorance

It is immediately clear that ignorance does not entail suspension – when one has a false belief that p, one is ignorant whether p but one does not thereby suspend judgement whether p. But does suspension entail ignorance? Here the specific theories as to the nature of ignorance and the nature of suspension become relevant. On the IG=not-K view it seems plausible that suspending does entail ignorance since suspending whether p plausibly entails not-knowing whether p. Even if it was possible to simultaneously suspend whether p and believe that p, the belief would certainly not amount to knowledge given the presence of the conflicting state of suspension. Suspension would here be a defeater for knowledge. On the IG=not-TB view, the question of whether it is possible to simultaneously suspend whether p and believe that p (or believe that not-p) becomes crucial. If suspension and belief are incompatible (as suggested by Raleigh 2021) then S→IG is on the IG=not-TB view too. But if it is possible, albeit irrationally, to both suspend and believe at the same time (as suggested by Friedman 2017) then suspension would not entail ignorance, since a suspending subject might still have a true belief that p and so (on the IG= not-TB view) fails to be ignorant whether p.

2.2 Group A: Narrow Scope Norms with Two Oughts

Let us now examine the plausibility of the normative relations of group A, the narrow scope norms which feature oughts on both sides of the conditional. As a reminder, they are as follows:

1. O(S) → O(IG)

2. O(IG) → O(S)

1&2. O(S) iff O(IG)

The discussion in section 2.1, above, as to whether suspension entails ignorance is immediately relevant for how we should view the first candidate in Group A: O(S) → O(IG). Let us suppose for a moment that suspending whether p *does* entail ignorance whether p: S → IG. This could, via the rules of standard deontic logic, potentially establish O(S) → O(IG) as follows:

Argument supporting O(S) → O(IG)

1. S is evidentially obliged to suspend judgement;

2. Suspending judgement entails being ignorant;

SO: S is evidentially obliged to be ignorant.

In standard deontic logic, if |– p→q then |– O(p) → O(q). And so, assuming that premise 2 is correct (that S → IG), O(S) would entail O(IG), vindicating the above line of reasoning. However, the relevant rule of standard deontic logic is controversial insofar as it has often been said to lead to "Ross's Paradox" (Ross 1941). This (alleged) paradox, starts from the simple logical fact that for any p, p → (p ∨ q) for any arbitrary q. But so then given the rule: if |– p → q then |– O(p) → O(q), this means that for any intuitively 'genuine' obligation O(p) there will also be an Obligation O(p ∨ q) for any arbitrary q. Which in turn means that one will always be fulfilling an obligation by bringing about any arbitrary q. In Ross's original example: suppose that I ought to deliver the letter. By the rule of deontic logic in question, this intuitively genuine obligation would entail that there is also an obligation to [deliver the letter or burn the letter]. But this is intuitively a spurious obligation. If I were to burn the letter, I would deserve no praise for having fulfilled an obligation. (We will return to discussing the issues surrounding Ross's paradox in section 3.3, below.)

Of course, even if we don't endorse the fully general rule of deontic logic, it still might be true (for other reasons) that O(S) → O(IG). If we contrapose this conditional we get:

¬O(IG) → ¬O(S). And if we then endorse the view of ignorance that IG=¬K we get: ¬O(¬K) → ¬O(S), which is equivalent to: P(K) → ¬O(S), i.e. P(K)→ P(¬S). Now, it is surely extremely plausible that if one is permitted to know whether p then one is permitted to not suspend judgement whether p. Alternatively, if we endorse the view of ignorance that IG=¬TB, we get: P(TB) → ¬O(S), i.e. P(TB) → P(¬S), which looks equally plausible. Indeed, these both look like special cases of a more general plausible principle that:

P(B) → ¬O(S), i.e. P(B) → P(¬S).

So on either view of ignorance it seems plausible that O(S) → O(IG).

What about the second candidate norm of group A, O(IG) → O(S)? Here we need to remember the distinction between the two types of ought or obligation that we discussed in section 1.2, above. If we are thinking of the evidential ought, then this second norm cannot be correct. For respecting one's evidence sometimes obliges one to have a false belief, as when one's evidence misleadingly indicates that p is true when in fact p is false. Thus your evidence can oblige you to be ignorant whether p (by obliging you to have a false belief). But when your evidence misleadingly indicates that p is true, they do not oblige you to suspend judgement whether p. As just said, they rather oblige you to have a false belief. And whilst there may be a reasonable ideal interpretation of an obligation to suspend, it seems impossible (as already said) to make sense of an ideal obligation to be ignorant.

So then it seems that whilst the first candidate norm is plausible, the second is not – and so of course, the biconditional will also be implausible in the right-to-left direction.

Note, furthermore, that even if candidate 1 of group A is plausible, it does not unconditionally assert the existence of any obligation. It merely states that if there is one obligation then there is another. This might seem to be somewhat weak or uninteresting since one might reasonably hope for a conditional statement where the antecedent states something non-normative and the consequent states something normative (i.e. being in this mental state has this normative consequence). Let's turn

then to the next group of possible norms where the ought operator features on only one side of the conditional.

2.3 Group B: Narrow Scope Norms with only one Ought

There are six possibilities here, three of which have the obligation attaching to ignorance and the other three have the obligation attached to suspension.

Group B

I. S → O(IG)

II. O(IG) → S

I&II. S iff O(IG)

III. IG → O(S)

IV. O(S) → IG

III&IV. IG iff O(S)

The first three norms here (where the obligation is to be ignorant) can be dismissed pretty swiftly.

Norm I claims that suspending whether p entails an obligation to be ignorant whether p. It faces the problem that a subject might suspend irrationally, going against what her evidence indicates. The subject's evidence might manifestly indicate that p but the subject irrationally suspends judgement whether p. According to the Evidential Norm, it is thus not true that the suspending subject ought to be ignorant. On the contrary, she ought to form a true belief that p or to know that p. And, to repeat, it is hard to make sense of an ideal obligation to be ignorant. So there's no point in considering whether Norm I would work better with an ideal interpretation of the ought in question.

According to Norm II, if you ought to be ignorant then you suspend judgement. This is even less plausible. For having evidence that obliges one to be ignorant whether p clearly does not entail that one actually does suspend judgement about p! One might believe or disbelieve or simply have no attitude whatsoever. More generally, having evidence that obliges you to be in some doxastic state does not normally entail anything much about one's actual doxastic state since one could always violate the

Evidential Norm, i.e. be in a doxastic state that is not the one required by it. The biconditional claim, S iff O(IG), inherits both of these problems.

Turning now to *norms III, IV, III* and *IV*, where the obligation is to suspend judgement, *norm III* claims that being ignorant whether p entails an obligation to suspend whether p. This faces the obvious problem that I can be ignorant (in either the sense of lacking knowledge or lacking true belief) despite having evidence which does not oblige suspension – e.g. which evidentially obliges belief that p. So this norm is not plausible when the ought is understood in the evidential sense. Now, as discussed above, it is perhaps possible to make sense of an ideal ought for suspension. To recall, the idea is that you (ideally) ought to suspend judgement when you are not in a position to know that p in virtue of you having misleading evidence indicating that p (when in fact not-p).

However, even on this supposed ideal ought, *Norm III*, IG $\rightarrow$ O(S), still looks implausible. For one can be ignorant whether p despite being in a position to know whether p. For example, I might irrationally believe that not-p despite being in a position to know that p. In which case I would count as ignorant whether p, but it is not the case, even on the supposed ideal sense of ought, that I ought to suspend judgement whether p.

There is also the issue that I am always ignorant about infinitely many propositions totally outside my ken – including propositions that are too complex for me to possibly entertain in my finite mind – and it is implausible that I am epistemically obliged to actively suspend judgement about all these propositions. Indeed, if suspension is a positive mental state of some kind (Friedman 2017)—and not, as has sometimes been argued, the mere absence of belief or disbelief—then it is presumably impossible to actively suspend judgement about all the infinitely many propositions about which I am ignorant. Norm III would violate the "ought implies can" principle.

The biconditional (*III&IV*) will of course inherit any problems with the *norm III* in the left-to-right direction.

However, *Norm IV*, which claims that an obligation to suspend whether p entails that one is ignorant whether p, is potentially more defensible and requires more discussion. Let us start by supposing the truth of the IG=¬K view of ignorance. Then, we have: O(Sp) $\rightarrow$ ¬Kp, which looks quite plausible. If the Evidential Norm says that one ought to suspend judgement whether p, then one does not know that p.

Notice that this is similar to the position of Friedman (2017) who is committed to the thesis that P(Sp) → ¬Kp, though of course with obligation rather than permission. Friedman (2017: 311) claims: "Necessarily, if one knows Q at t, then one ought not have an IA [interrogative attitude like suspension] towards Q at t." She also states: "One is inquiring into some matter if and only if one is suspended on the matter" (2017:302). Thus it seems that Friedman is committed to the view that Kp → O(¬Sp). If we contrapose we get: ¬O(¬Sp) → ¬Kp, which is equivalent to P(Sp) → ¬Kp.

One possible kind of counterexample to both O(Sp) → ¬Kp and P(Sp) → ¬Kp might come from cases where a subject lacks introspective access to her own knowledge. In such a case where the Kp is (through no rational fault) reflectively inaccessible, it could be that there is an evidential sense of permission or obligation in which the subject is permitted to/ought to suspend judgement whether p, in light of whatever is reflectively accessible to her, despite the inaccessible knowledge that p. Note that this does not necessarily require the somewhat implausible assumption that suspension is compatible with knowledge, only that knowledge is compatible with being evidentially obliged/permitted to suspend.

Now let's suppose that the IG=¬TB view of ignorance is correct. Then, the claim O(S) → IG faces counterexamples where a subject's evidence obliges her to suspend judgement whether p but she has a lucky, irrational true belief that p and so (on this view of ignorance) fails to be ignorant whether p.

In summary then: of the 6 possible narrow scope norms included in Group B, only *norm IV*, O(S) → IG, looks at all plausible. However, it will only be plausible on the IG=¬K view of Ignorance, not on the IG=¬TB view.

Notice finally that O(S) → IG does not actually state that there is ever any obligation to suspend judgement, it merely states a conditional claim about what follows if there is an obligation to suspend. Once more then, as with O(S) → O(IG), there is a worry that this is at best a fairly weak normative claim. The hope that there might be a narrow-scope norm connecting suspension and ignorance where the antecedent states a *non*-normative condition and the consequent an obligation has now been dashed. Neither S → O(IG) nor IG → O(S) turned out to be at all plausible.

2.4 Group C: Wide Scope Oughts

Let's turn now to considering the possible wide scope norms connecting ignorance and suspension. There are three possibilities here:

(i) O(IG → S)   equivalent to O(¬IG ∨ S)

(ii) O(S → IG)   equivalent to O(¬S ∨ IG)

(i&ii) O(IG iff S)

These wide scope norms at least do not suffer from any worries about not actually stating an unconditional obligation. For they all state an unconditional obligation to make the conditional (or bi-conditional) claim true. Another general point about these wide scope norms is that they may need an additional restriction to something like: "for any proposition, p, which the subject has actively considered", so as to avoid issues with being obliged to form positive doxastic states about infinitely many propositions, inhumanly complex propositions, propositions about particulars one could not possibly refer to in thought, etc.

The *first norm* here, O(IG → S), effectively says that there is an obligation to not be ignorant or to suspend if you are ignorant. An obvious issue here is that, whatever one's view about the nature of ignorance, one could obey this first wide-scope norm by simply always suspending judgement no matter what. And it might seem bad that one can obey this norm by suspending even when one is manifestly in a position to know. This is perhaps not necessarily a crippling defect, since one might reasonably think that it is the job of some other norm (e.g. a norm governing belief formation or about evidence) to tell us when we are positively obliged to form beliefs rather than remaining neutral. Moreover, there are perhaps some theorists who hold that there are no positive epistemic duties (Nelson 2010) to believe who might welcome the result that one can meet one's cognitive obligations by always suspending.

Let's suppose firstly that the IG=¬K view of ignorance is correct. Then, *Norm (i)* of group C is an obligation either to know whether p or to suspend whether p if you are ignorant (here there seems to be no possibility of doing both insofar as suspension and knowledge are incompatible). Now, if we were then to understand this obligation in the evidential sense of 'ought', wide-scope *Norm (i)* faces clear counterexamples in cases where a subject has strong misleading evidence that p is true. Here the subject does not know that p but nor (in the evidential sense of 'ought') ought she to suspend judgement whether p (since all her evidence indicates that p). This worry might be

avoided if we can interpret the norm in terms of an ideal ought to suspend. Recall: this would be a sense of ought in which I ought to suspend whether p because I am not in a position to know that p, *even if my evidence rationalizes believing that p*. So, according to this supposed ideal sense of ought to suspend, when my evidence misleadingly indicates that not-p (hence I am not in a position to know), I ought to suspend – as suggested by wide-scope *Norm (i)*.

Let's suppose now instead that the IG=¬TB view of ignorance is correct. The first wide-scope norm would then effectively say that: one ought to either have a true belief or to suspend (or both, if that's possible). A first, obvious issue with this is that one could obey this norm by forming an irrational, lucky true belief that is not based on one's evidence. So again, the ought here could not plausibly be understood as the evidential ought, which tracks how one should respond to evidence. However, again, perhaps there is an ideal reading of *Norm (i)* on which it states the following ideal aim: for any question whether p (that you actively consider), you should either believe the true answer (i.e. avoid ignorance, on the IG=¬TB view) or suspend judgement. A second issue, still supposing the correctness of the IG=¬TB view, is as follows: if it is possible to both suspend and believe about the same proposition then one could obey this norm by both having a true belief that p and suspending whether p. Whilst such a combination (if it is even possible) would be clearly irrational, it is somewhat tricky to evaluate how much of a defect this would be for the norm. One could perhaps just add an extra clause ruling such a combination out. Or one could perhaps reasonably think that such a combination would be ruled out by some *other* kind of epistemic norms, e.g. something like a norm of coherence. After all, we should not expect a norm that connects suspension and ignorance to cover every aspect of or doxastic lives all by itself.

The *second wide scope norm* here, O(S → IG), looks pretty plausible at first glance: you should make sure that if you suspend judgement whether p then you don't also have a true belief/know that p. However, if we think of this norm in the disjunctive formulation O(¬S ∨ IG) it becomes more apparent that one could obey this norm by never suspending judgement, i.e. one could form random irrational/false beliefs in answer to every question one considers. Or one could obey this norm by deliberately making oneself ignorant. Now again, perhaps this sort of worry can be evaded by appealing to some other epistemic norms that would rule out these intuitively bad

ways of obeying O(S → IG) (e.g. perhaps a norm in which one should never throw away knowledge or information). But there is another potential worry with this second wide scope norm. As discussed in the section on non-normative connections between S and IG (above), many theorists will want to endorse the non-normative claim that S → IG. Recall: this clearly follows from the IG=¬K view on the plausible assumption that S and K are incompatible; on the IG=¬TB view we need the potentially controversial assumption that S and TB are incompatible. But if we do grant that suspension necessarily entails ignorance, then the worry arises that the norm O(S → IG), though true, becomes trivial or empty. It would be an obligation that is automatically obeyed no matter what. And perhaps, even if we reject S → IG (on the grounds that it is possible to both suspend and have a true belief), one might still worry that the norm O(S → IG), is extremely *easy* to obey insofar as the only thing to avoid is the (presumably very rare) combination of suspension and true belief about the same proposition.

Turning finally to *the wide-scope biconditional (i&ii)*, O(IG iff S), this norm has the nice and interesting feature that when the two directions of conditional are combined they each seem to mitigate a problem with the other direction considered on its own. As discussed above, a potential problem with the left to right direction, O(IG → S), is that on the IG=¬TB view one way of obeying this norm is by both suspending and having a true belief (i.e. not being ignorant), assuming that such a combination is possible. But as we just saw, the right to left direction, O(S → IG), rules this out (indeed it is the only thing it rules out!). Conversely, a potential problem with the right to left direction, O(S → IG), was that it could be obeyed by simply never suspending, e.g. by always forming false beliefs in answer to any question one considers. But this is ruled out by the left to right direction, O(IG → S), which effectively says that you must either know/believe the correct answer or suspend judgement.

Of course, the biconditional, just like the two wide-scope conditionals, does not look at all plausible if the ought is interpreted as an evidential norm. For it effectively says that you must either: suspend and be ignorant, or, not suspend and not be ignorant. And this could be obeyed by suspending against one's evidence. And on the IG=¬TB view it could be obeyed by having a lucky true belief unsupported by the evidence. But if this wide-scope biconditional can be interpreted as stating a kind of ideal

standard for our doxastic states then the foregoing discussion suggests that it has at least some plausibility.

To summarize, it seems that wide-scope norms are not faring much better than the narrow-scope ones. They also have difficulty in accounting for the normative relationship between ignorance and suspension of judgement. Only the wide-scope biconditional, O(IG iff S), seems acceptable and this only under the "ideal aim" interpretation of the obligation. Furthermore, if we admit that suspension implies ignorance, then the right-left direction seems to state an obligation that is trivially fulfilled.

3. Inconclusive Evidence

So far, we have examined candidate norms that directly link ignorance to the suspension of judgement. In this section, the approach is different. We consider individually whether ignorance, or suspension of judgement, has a specific normative relationship with the possession of *inconclusive evidence* (which we will abbreviate by writing "IE"). By "inconclusive" evidence, we simply mean evidence that does not justify either outright belief that p or outright disbelief that p, but which might justify suspension. We will then discuss whether such connections with inconclusive evidence allow us to establish an additional, more *indirect*, relationship between ignorance and suspension. We will suggest that this is indeed the case.

3.1 Group D: narrow-scope norms connecting inconclusive evidence and suspension of judgement

We assume that there are no epistemic obligations to have inconclusive evidence. So then there are just three possible narrow scope norms connecting inconclusive evidence and suspension of judgement:

1. IE $\rightarrow$ O(S)
2. O(S) $\rightarrow$ IE
1&2. IE iff O(S)

The first of these, IE $\rightarrow$ O(S), surely looks extremely plausible. All parties will regard it as virtually a truism that when your evidence does not clearly indicate either that p

or that not-p, then you ought to suspend judgement whether p[4]. Indeed, one might think that the very idea of inconclusive evidence is simply that which does not rationally permit belief or disbelief. And so then on the assumption that for any proposition one considers one ought to either believe, disbelieve or suspend, inconclusive evidence will entail that one ought to suspend.

The acceptability of the *second of these narrow scope norms*, O(S) → IE, is somewhat less obvious. For when it comes to a priori necessary truths, e.g. truths of mathematics, it is generally accepted that we always have conclusive evidence for/against these propositions insofar as we could reason our way to proving/disproving them. But there is perhaps a plausible sense of ought on which one sometimes rationally ought to suspend judgement about complicated mathematical questions – even though one theoretically always has conclusive evidence for the correct answer. This worry might be avoided by specifying that the ought in question here concerns how an ideally rational agent should respond to her evidence. Or perhaps one could come up with a notion of evidence according to which one does not automatically have conclusive evidence for a priori truths when you are not yet able to actually perform the a priori proof/deduction required. This second narrow scope norm also faces issues with cases of higher-order defeat. In such cases a subject has evidence which conclusively indicates that p, but also has higher-order evidence that they cannot competently/reliably respond to this first-order evidence. What the rational response is in such scenarios is controversial, but it is at least quite plausible that sometimes one ought to suspend judgement whether p despite having conclusive first-order evidence that p[5].

The biconditional will, of course, inherit any problems with the second norm here in the right-to-left direction.

3.2 Group E: wide-scope norms connecting inconclusive evidence and suspension of judgement

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[4] See Raleigh 2021 for an argument that this truism can nevertheless tell us something substantial about the mental nature of suspension: that it involves a kind of belief.

[5] Perhaps it can be replied here that the subject's total evidence, including both 1st-order evidence and higher-order evidence makes it inconclusive whether p, at least from the subject's own point of view. However this would require substantial argument and would perhaps require making sense of a subjective sense of inconclusive that somehow incorporates higher-order evidence even though it does not directly bear on the first-order question whether p

There are also three possible wide-scope norms linking inconclusive evidence and suspension of judgement:

(i) O(IE → S)   equivalent to O(¬IE ∨ S)
(ii) O(S → IE)   equivalent to O(¬S ∨ IE)
(iii) O(IE iff S)

Prima facie, *the first wide-scope norm* here, O(IE → Sp), has some plausibility: one ought to make it the case that whenever one has inconclusive evidence, then one suspends judgement. It also has the nice feature that one can obey this norm either by improving one's evidence or by suspending judgement – or both! And it might well be thought attractive for a norm to encourage both evidence-gathering and also appropriate suspension. However, the inclusive disjunction formulation also points to a potential problem since this norm can be obeyed by having conclusive evidence and yet still also suspending judgement. Indeed this norm can be obeyed by having conclusive evidence, no matter what crazy or irrational attitude one forms in response (or no attitude whatever). It could also be obeyed by just always suspending judgement, no matter what the state of one's evidence.

Once more, perhaps a friend of this first wide-scope norm could reply that it is the job of other evidential norms to rule-out these sorts of irrational responses – e.g. norms that say something about how you ought to believe when you have conclusive evidence.

The second wide-scope norm, O(S → IE), would seem to face the same potential counterexamples discussed above, which afflicted the narrow scope norm O(S) → IE, concerning complex mathematical propositions and also cases of higher-order defeat, both of which threaten to be cases where one ought to suspend but one's evidence is not inconclusive. This second wide-scope norm also faces the potential problem that I could obey it by deliberately making my evidence inconclusive. Or I could obey it by irrationally failing to suspend – by forming an irrational belief/disbelief about p – whatever my evidence happens to be (or by forming no attitude whatsoever). As before, perhaps these latter problems could be ruled out by some other norm, e.g., a norm stating that one ought to never throw away evidence.

The biconditional norm, O(IE iff S), once more, has the potentially nice feature that combining both directions of conditional mitigates some problems with either conditional on its own. So a potential problem for the norm O(IE $\rightarrow$ S) was that it can be obeyed by simply always suspending no matter what one's evidence is. But this will be ruled out by the opposite right-to-left direction, O(S $\rightarrow$ IE), which requires that you must have inconclusive evidence when you suspend. Conversely, the right-to-left direction, O(S$\rightarrow$IE), faced the potential problem that it can be obeyed by never suspending, even when one's evidence is inconclusive. But this will be ruled out by the left-to-right direction, O(IE$\rightarrow$S), which requires that you must suspend when you have inconclusive evidence. However, the biconditional wide-scope norm will still face the problem that it can be obeyed by deliberately making one's evidence inconclusive so long as one also suspends judgement. And it could also be obeyed by a subject who has conclusive evidence that p but who (irrationally) disbelieves that p. To repeat yet again: perhaps these possibilities will be ruled out by some other fundamental evidential norms concerning belief/suspension. Finally, the biconditional will, of course, inherit the same problems about complicated mathematical propositions and higher-order defeat with its right-to-left direction, O(S $\rightarrow$ IE).

3.3 Group F: narrow-scope norms connecting inconclusive evidence and ignorance

What about possible norms connecting having inconclusive evidence with ignorance? Here, once more, there are three possible narrow scope norms:

1. IE $\rightarrow$ O(IG)
2. O(IG) $\rightarrow$ IE
3. IE iff O(IG)

Let's begin with the *first norm* in group F: IE $\rightarrow$ O(IG). Back in section 1.2., above, we mentioned that there seems, prima facie, to be a reasonable sense of 'ought' on which having inconclusive evidence means that you ought to be ignorant – since you are (evidentially) obliged to suspend judgement. However, as we flagged up, this line of thought potentially relies on a controversial rule of deontic logic that has been held to lead to 'Ross's paradox'. In this section we will discuss this issue in more detail.

Firstly, we must consider the possible *non*-normative connection between inconclusive evidence and ignorance. On the IG=¬K view of ignorance it seems plausible that IE → IG, since one cannot know anything on the basis of inconclusive evidence (set aside possible counterexamples from innate knowledge). Notice that if this entailment holds, then it seems that the candidate norm IE → O(IG) would be somewhat trivial/empty (even supposing it is true): inconclusive evidence would oblige something that it necessitates anyway. Likewise, if the entailment IE → IG holds, then by standard deontic logic we would get the wide-scope norm O(IE → IG), since necessary truths are automatically obliged.

However, on the IG=¬TB view, there is no entailment of the kind IE → IG, since one can have a lucky, irrational true belief (and thus not be ignorant, on this view of ignorance) despite having inconclusive evidence. So the possible candidate norms IE → O(IG) and O(IE → IG), will then be more substantial/non-trivial – which is not to say that they will be plausible. Let's take a closer look at the three possible narrow-scope norms linking inconclusive evidence and ignorance (when ignorance is identified to the lack of true belief).

One possible route to endorsing the first of these narrow-scope norms, IE → O(IG) is as follows: in section 2.2, above, we suggested that there was some plausibility to the norm O(S) → O(IG). And we have also suggested that it is extremely plausible, virtually a truism, that IE → O(S). So then by simple transitivity of entailments, we would get that IE → O(IG).

However, this first norm faces the following problem: one can obey this norm when one has inconclusive evidence by forming an irrational false belief. Concerning the second possibility, O(IG) → IE, a first point to make is that this does not actually assert the existence of any norm. It merely states that if there is a norm obliging ignorance, then one has inconclusive evidence. But more importantly, this second norm does not seem to capture the case when one has strong but misleading evidence that p. Here, one evidentially ought to form the false belief that p so there is a sense in which one 'ought to be ignorant', even though one's evidence is not inconclusive. The biconditional will, of course, inherit the problems with each direction of conditional.

The problems with the narrow scope norms of group F can be traced to a common issue: having inconclusive evidence obliges a *specific kind* of ignorance: that of being ignorant in virtue of suspending judgement. But inconclusive evidence does not create

a "genuine" obligation to be generically ignorant (or ignorant *simpliciter*), i.e. a requirement which could be fulfilled by being ignorant in virtue of having an irrational false belief, or by being ignorant in virtue of having no attitude whatsoever. Conversely, having strong misleading evidence that p obliges another specific kind of ignorance: that of being ignorant in virtue of having a (rational) false belief. But strong misleading evidence does not create a genuine epistemic obligation to be generically ignorant, something that could be fulfilled by suspending judgement (or by having no attitude whatsoever).

The link to Ross's paradox becomes apparent if we think of generic ignorance as a kind of disjunctive condition that consists either in suspending judgement, or having a false belief, or having no attitude whatsoever (or having a lucky true belief on the IG=¬K view), etc. Ross's paradox, recall, turned on the simple logical fact that for any p, p $\rightarrow$ (p $\vee$ q) for any arbitrary q. But so then if we endorse the rule: if $\vdash$ p $\rightarrow$ q then $\vdash$ O(p) $\rightarrow$ O(q), this means that for any 'genuine' obligation O(p) there will also be an obligation O(p $\vee$ q) for any arbitrary q. And this means that one will always fulfil an obligation by bringing about any arbitrary q. But intuitively, such an "obligation" is spurious – or at least something that is not in itself at all praiseworthy to comply with. Even if it is true that, in order for everything to be normatively as it ought to be, then it ought to be true that (p $\vee$ q), this latter obligation is dependent on the non-spurious obligation that p. When we think about inconclusive evidence it seems clear that such evidence creates a genuine obligation to suspend judgement, O(S). And, of course, suspending judgement entails: suspending judgement OR having a false belief OR having no attitude whatsoever.... So according to the rule of deontic logic, there is an obligation to [suspend judgement OR have a false belief OR have no attitude whatever...], which is effectively an obligation to be generically ignorant. But this obligation to be generically ignorant is spurious in the sense that it is dependent on the genuine obligation to suspend. If one satisfies the requirement to be generically ignorant by having a false belief, or having no attitude at all, then one has not complied with the genuine obligation, one has only satisfied an irrelevant disjunct. Likewise, if a subject has strong but misleading evidence that p, there is an obligation to be generically ignorant, but only in virtue of the genuine evidential obligation to (falsely) believe that p. If one satisfies the requirement to be generically ignorant here by suspending, or by having no attitude at all, then again one has only

satisfied an irrelevant disjunct. Compare: assuming that physicalism is true, suspending judgement entails that one is in some or other brain state. So there is a sense in which having inconclusive evidence obliges one to be in some or other brain state. But just as the norms governing inconclusive evidence do not "care" about you being in some or other brain state, except insofar as this brain state is suspension, likewise the norms governing inconclusive evidence do not "care" about you being ignorant except insofar as this ignorance is specifically an instance of suspending judgement. This is why the candidate narrow scope norms listed above, connecting O(IG) with IE, don't work. The expression "ought to be ignorant", O(IG), does not by itself specify any specific way in which the evidence demands that the subject be ignorant: it does not say whether one ought to be ignorant in the suspending way or in the false belief way, or... It calls only for generic ignorance.

3.4 Group G: Wide-scope norms connecting inconclusive evidence and ignorance

There are three possible wide-scope norms linking inconclusive evidence and ignorance:

$O(IE \rightarrow IG)$ equivalent to: $O(\neg IE \lor IG)$

$O(IG \rightarrow IE)$ equivalent to: $O(\neg IG \lor IE)$

$O(IE \text{ iff } IG)$ equivalent to: $O[(IE \& IG) \lor (\neg IE \& \neg IG)]$

As mentioned above, if inconclusive evidence entails ignorance (as on the $IG = \neg K$ view) the rules of standard deontic logic will give us the *first wide-scope norm*: $O(IE \rightarrow IG)$, since all necessary truths are obliged. But then the norm would seem to be pretty trivial or empty insofar as it is always automatically obeyed.

Another problem with the first norm is that it can be obeyed by deliberately making oneself ignorant. If we think of the norm in the disjunctive formulation, since the disjunction is inclusive, one can both have conclusive evidence and be ignorant. For instance, even when one has conclusive evidence that p, one can obey this norm by forming an irrational false belief that not-p, or by irrationally suspending judgement. Put differently, according to this norm, you could deliberately throw away your conclusive evidence so long as doing so rendered you ignorant.

Similar issues afflict the second wide-scope norm, O(IG → Ev Inc). One could obey this norm by making it the case that one's evidence is inconclusive (for example, by avoiding a simple enquiry that would provide us with conclusive evidence). Notice also, on the IG=¬TB view, one can always obey this norm by forming an irrational true belief that p, even when all one's evidence (misleadingly) indicates that p is false. This is not compatible with the Evidential Norm. The biconditional norm also faces the problem that it can be obeyed by making one's evidence inconclusive, so long as this also results in ignorance. And given the IG=¬TB view, it will also inherit the problem that in a case where all the evidence conclusively but misleadingly indicates that p is false, you can obey the norm by forming an irrational, lucky true belief that p. For then you will neither have inconclusive evidence nor will you be ignorant.

In summary then: none of the possible norms linking inconclusive evidence with (generic) ignorance look very plausible. In the narrow scope case, the problem was that the norms were framed in terms of an obligation to be generically ignorant, which is something that does not capture the ethos of the Evidential Norm. With the wide-scope norms, the problem was that they allow a subject to obey them by deliberately making their evidence inconclusive thereby rendering themselves ignorant.

3.5 Norms Connecting Inconclusive Evidence to Suspension and Ignorance

Above we have examined different relations that might link the possession of inconclusive evidence to suspension of judgement and ignorance, respectively. These considerations will now allow us to draw further, though more indirect, connections between suspension of judgement and ignorance.

As we have seen, on the IG=¬K view of ignorance it seems clear that inconclusive evidence will entail ignorance: IE → IG. And in our discussion of the evidential norms on suspension we suggested that it is extremely plausible that IE → O(S). And so it seems that even if one is not persuaded that there is any entailment in either direction between (generic) ignorance and an obligation to suspend, one might still accept a kind of "indirect" connection insofar as both (generic) ignorance and an obligation to suspend are entailed by having inconclusive evidence: IE → [IG & O(S)]. Here, the state of ignorance and the obligation to suspend judgement are something like joint effects of a common cause: having inconclusive evidence.

On the IG=¬TB view of ignorance, there is no entailment from IE to IG. Besides, as we discussed in section 3.3, while there is a sense in which having inconclusive evidence obliges generic ignorance, IE → O(IG), inconclusive evidence only obliges generic ignorance *in virtue of* the more "genuine" obligation to suspend judgement. If so, even on the IG=¬TB view, one could accept that inconclusive evidence entails an obligation to suspend *and* an obligation to be (generically) ignorant: IE → [O(IG) & O(S)]. Notice that this narrow-scope norm, unlike the simpler narrow scope norm IE → O(IG), cannot be obeyed by forming an irrational false belief or by having no attitude whatsoever. So whilst we have seen that there are reasons to be suspicious of the following line of thought:

1. IE → O(S)
2. O(S) → O(IG)

SO: IE → O(IG)

It seems that we can endorse a different, less problematic line of reasoning:

1. IE → O(S)
2. O(S) → O(IG)

SO: IE → [O(S) & O(IG)]

4. Summary & Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has been somewhat intricate, so let us now try to take stock of which candidate normative connections between suspension and ignorance seem to be at least somewhat plausible and potentially defensible.

- From *Group A*, the *first norm*: O(S) → O(IG) looked very plausible – though there remains the issue that this conditional claim does not actually assert the existence of any obligation.

- From *Group B*, the only norm that looked at all defensible was the *fourth*: O(S) → IG, though any such defence would seem to depend on accepting the IG=¬K view of ignorance. (And again, this conditional does not actually assert the existence of any obligation.)

- The *three wide-scope norms in Group C*: O(S→IG), O(IG→ S) and especially the biconditional O(S iff IG), all could be potentially defensible, but only if we

can make sense of the obligation in the ideal sense of ought (rather than the evidential sense).

- *From Group D, the first norm*, IE $\rightarrow$ O(S) looks to be clearly correct, but is perhaps just an obvious truism. The other direction O(S) $\rightarrow$ IE (and so also the biconditional, IE iff O(S)) will be more controversial, though perhaps a defence could be mounted.

- The *wide-scope candidate norms in Group E* also seem to face a number of difficulties – though again perhaps there are ways that they could be defended (especially if other epistemic norms are in play which can rule out intuitively bad ways of conforming with them).

- *None of the candidate norms in Group F or Group G*, connecting inconclusive evidence (IE) with ignorance (IG), looked at all promising.

- Finally, in section 3.5, we identified two *plausible* norms that indirectly connect suspension and ignorance insofar as they are both the upshots of a "common cause" in having inconclusive evidence: IE $\rightarrow$ [O(S) & IG], IE $\rightarrow$ [O(S) & O(IG)]

The aim of this article was to explore systematically the various normative relationships that can link suspension of judgement to ignorance.

A priori, we have reason to believe that such normative relationships exist. After all, if knowledge has normative implications for cognitive attitudes that are permissible (as evidenced by the fact that it would be inappropriate to know that p but not to believe it), why shouldn't ignorance also have such normative implications? After all, ignorance seems to be a normatively (negatively) loaded cognitive state as well. What the systematic review above shows is that things are not as obvious as we might think a priori. Zooming out, the overall picture then is that there are only a few plausible normative connections between suspension of judgement and ignorance (and possessing inconclusive evidence). Besides, the details are complex and turn on various choice-points concerning the nature of suspension and of ignorance and concerning the kind of epistemic obligation (evidential vs. ideal) that one is working with.

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first paper to consider the topic of possible norms connecting suspension and ignorance. Whilst we have tried to be reasonably

systematic, no doubt there will be further possibilities and considerations that we have not covered or have overlooked. But we hope that we have at least provided a useful starting point for any future investigations in this area.

Acknowledgements

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