

Suspensive Wronging

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FOR SUSPENSION OF JUDGMENT IN EPISTEMOLOGY AND BEYOND

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Abstract. According to the thesis of doxastic wronging, we can wrong people in virtue of bearing certain beliefs towards them. In this paper, I motivate and defend a similar view, the thesis of suspensive wronging, that we can wrong people in virtue of bearing an indecision attitude towards certain questions that bear on certain people. I explore the extent to which the thesis of suspensive wronging fits with certain prominent conceptions of suspension of judgement, including the sui generis attitude, higher-order, and credence views, and argue that it aligns with each of them. I then argue that reflection on cases of suspensive wronging reveals that the common characterization of suspension of judgement as a kind of ‘neutrality’ is nevertheless problematic, arguing that we should distinguish between attitudinal neutrality and property neutrality—i.e., neutrality on the truth of an answer to a question vs. the neutrality of the properties of the attitude that responds to a question. Finally, I consider whether widespread views about the involuntariness of belief and the right-kind of reasons for belief refutes the suspensive wronging thesis, arguing that it doesn’t, concluding with some reflections on the relationship between the suspensive wronging thesis and moral encroachment on suspension of judgment.

Keywords: suspension of judgement; suspensive wronging; doxastic wronging; neutrality; injustice.

1. Introduction

Common sense morality tells us that beliefs in addition to actions and intentions can be wrong. For example, the person who harbors sexist beliefs about his female colleagues, or the person who takes their spouse to be a lapsing alcoholic, despite consistently resisting their urge to drink, seems to wrong them in virtue of what they believe about them. This is clear from the fact that we morally criticize each other for what we believe; that we can be justified in expecting apologies or other kinds of compensation for what people believe about us; and that we can be justified in our feelings of woundedness, resent, or even anger towards others for their beliefs about us (Basu 2023).

I argue that, as much as having certain beliefs, lacking certain beliefs can be wrongful. In particular, I defend the **thesis of suspensive wronging**, that suspension of judgment is sometimes morally wrong. I don’t defend the thesis outright, since I think the thesis is highly

intuitive. I rather present cases which motivate the suspensive wronging thesis and then defend it from important objections. For those attracted to the view, I explain how it makes clear the source of the moral wrongness of doxastic wronging, untangle some of its more controversial commitments, addressing the extent to which there can be epistemically rational yet morally wrongful suspension of judgment, before arguing that the common characterization of suspension of judgment as a kind of ‘neutrality’ is ambiguous between problematic and unproblematic kinds of neutrality, cautioning philosophers against using the term ‘neutrality’ in connection with suspension of judgement outright.

This chapter is organized as follows. Section 2 presents the standard case for the doxastic wronging thesis, extending it to suspension of judgement, showing that however we fill in whatever suspension of judgment plausibly amounts to, the intuition favoring suspensive wronging remains. Section 3 argues that suspension of judgment is kind of attitudinal but not property neutrality, since it can be a neutral attitude vis-à-vis the truth about whether p , but fail to be morally neutral about whether p . Section 4 consider objections to the suspensive wronging thesis, specifically whether it accommodates widespread views about doxastic involuntariness and the wrong-kind of reasons for belief (and per force suspension of judgment), before closing with discussion of the relationship between suspensive wronging and moral encroachment on suspension of judgment.

2. From Doxastic to Suspensive Wronging

It is fairly common in ordinary life to think that people can wrong others by what they believe about them. Observe how this thought emerges from the following cases:

Recovering Alcoholic: Carver has struggled for many years with alcoholism, but has managed sobriety for one year straight. Recently, he attended an important dinner party where there would be lots of drinking, and safely resisted the temptation to drink. Unfortunately, another guest spilled a large vodka martini all

over Carver's shirt, and he had nothing else to change into. Upon returning home, Carver's wife smells the stench of booze all over him. He can see from her disappointed looks that she thinks he has been drinking again, and he's right.

Sexist Boss: Sam is a superior to Scully in the FBI, and he believes the sexist view that women should not be in high-ranking positions in federal law-enforcement agencies, because "women are too soft for law-enforcement". Scully considers Sam a mentor but is unaware of his sexist beliefs, as they are not manifest in his actions towards her or other women. From what she can see, he acts the same way to the men and women he presides over.

In these kinds of cases, there's a strong intuition to the effect that the person wrongs another because of their beliefs about them (Basu 2023). Consider how Carver might feel once he learns that his wife believes that he has lapsed in his battle with alcoholism. He is hurt because she didn't give him the benefit of the doubt; she didn't trust that he would resist drinking. Imagine he confronts her, revealing that it is just spilled vodka on his shirt. She owes him an apology (Basu & Schroeder 2019). If she doesn't trust him still, this would deepen the wound and provide further grounds for certain emotions, like resentment or anger: "I know how this looks, but I am telling the truth", he might plead.¹

What further motivates this idea is that, in the second kind of case where the belief is unknown to the target person, had it become known, the person would be warranted in feeling wounded by their belief about them. Scully would be hurt to learn that her boss, someone she considers a

¹ We might think however that what drives our intuition in the first kind of case is not quite that the belief wrongs but that, owing to the fact that the agent's belief is known to the target of their thinking, that this knowledge about their inner mental life is what enables their thinking to do its moral work. On this view, it is not the doxastic state alone which wrongs, but the fact that the doxastic state is known to target agent. For example, when we discover that someone holds racist, sexist, classist, or ableist beliefs, we tend to think that their beliefs influence their reasoning or actions, and this justifies a sort of suspicion about them with respect to their character and intentions—viz., "are they passing over my points because they aren't relevant, or because of their sexist views?" But the idea that only known beliefs about us can wrong us misplaces the wrong-making features of the situation. Knowledge might be necessary to ground certain emotions and judgments, but the key intuition is that the relevant agent ought not believe what they do, and not only that they ought not make the belief known.

mentor, thinks what he does about her and the other women in their field office. The thought is that it's not enough that Sam doesn't act on his sexist views, but that he shouldn't think those sexist thoughts in the first place. As Bommarito (2017) notes, it is "not enough that my friend simply refrains from making sexist comments; it is important to me that he actually lack a sexist outlook", which is what is missing in the Sexist Boss case (Bommarito 2017, 2).

We can also motivate the intuition further by augmenting the case with self-discovery. Suppose that Sam considers himself a progressive thinker, participating in progressive causes, including certain feminist causes. He indeed believes that women are inferior to men in law-enforcement, but this belief is opaque to him; he can't just bring it before his mind through introspection. However, he discovers that he harbors sexist views after attending counselling, where the therapist reveals that he has long-standing resentment towards women because of his mistreatment throughout childhood from his mother and the lack of support from the other women in his life. Sam feels guilty for harboring these beliefs all along and he is warranted in his feelings (cf. Smith 2011). He can now see that he held sexist beliefs and wishes he hadn't believed as he did. He worries that these beliefs might have spilled over into his reasoning, intentions, and actions, even if no one noticed them. Intuitively, his regret and his guilt are fitting responses to his situation.

The **thesis of doxastic wrongdoing** tells us that in cases like these, the agent wrongs another in virtue of their beliefs about them (Basu & Schroeder 2019).² I now want to explain what the thesis of doxastic wrongdoing means more exactly.

First, the thesis of doxastic wrongdoing is committed to the claim that the wrong is directed, in the sense that it targets a particular individual or group. You don't just *do something wrong*, you wrong *someone*; it is tethered to a particular person or group. For example, in the Recovering Alcoholic case, it is Carver—rather than just any recovering alcoholic—who is wronged. Moreover, Carver's

² Of course, some cases seem worse than others. The sexist boss who, unlike Sam in the retold story, is well-aware of his sexist beliefs, seems blameworthy for his sexist beliefs in a way that Sam is not while his beliefs are opaque to him. He is less blameworthy than the more explicit sexist believer who feels no remorse for their sexist attitudes towards women. The thesis of doxastic wrongdoing is compatible with recognizing different degrees of wrongness as well as different degrees of blame and the severity of moral redress.

wife owes him an apology, rather than just any or every recovering alcoholic. In the Sexist Boss case, Sam's belief wounds Scully; it might also be injurious for all the women in his team, but then it follows that *each particular woman* in his team would be justified in feeling hurt or seeking an apology from Sam specifically, or, in the absence of an apology, of feeling resent or anger towards him in particular.

Second, the wrong can but need not be grounded in conditions upstream or downstream from the belief itself (Basu & Schroeder 2019, 181). For example, although a sexist belief might lead one to form sexist intentions or perform sexist actions, the thesis of doxastic wronging is not strictly committed to the further thesis that a person *A*'s belief that *p* wrongs some other person *S* only if their believing that *p* disposes them or makes them more likely to (intend to) perform actions that would do wrong to *S*.

Rather, proponents of the doxastic wronging thesis hold that, even if the believer is not so disposed, the belief would still be wrong. In this way, the thesis of doxastic wronging accepts a certain counterfactual claim: that even if believing that *p* had not motivated certain *prima facie* wrong actions or intentions towards *S*, it would still be a *prima facie* moral wrong towards *S* for *A* to believe that *p*. To see why, recall that Sam wasn't sexist in his actions towards Scully or the other women in his field office but there is still the lingering intuition that what he believed of them was wrong. It's not just actions or intentions; we don't want to be the subject of certain kinds of thoughts or beliefs. This is what bothers us.

Moreover, certain wrongful beliefs, like sexist beliefs, perhaps tend to come from biases or prejudices, like sexist prejudices or biases, which might then dispose the agent to form false beliefs about individuals or groups. If that's right, then there is a close connection between doxastic wrongs and what lies upstream from them, like prejudices or biases, tendencies to form sexist or other problematic beliefs, or to ignore or misevaluate the relevant evidence. But the proponent of the doxastic wronging thesis holds that, even if this were not true, the beliefs could still have the power to wrong others. This is perhaps more controversial than the absence of downstream affects

for the belief to be wrong, but it is nevertheless plausible because we want to count cases like Recovering Alcoholic—which doesn't appear to turn on any antecedent prejudice or generic bias (although in certain similar cases, it of course can)—as cases of doxastic wronging as well. One reason why Carver's wife's belief is so ripe for wounding is due to how personal it is, given her intimate relationship with her husband. Her belief might not depend on any generic stereotypes about alcoholics, or any prejudice against alcoholics either. The case doesn't become incoherent if we supposed that she tends to think fondly of alcoholics and wouldn't have 'jumped to conclusions' had some other recovering alcoholic, in a similar situation, smelled as strongly of alcohol as her husband (suppose it is her husband's good friend, a recovering alcoholic, who comes home that evening for a quick visit, smelling strongly of vodka instead).

Third, and most controversially, the thesis of doxastic wronging is not committed to the additional claim that the beliefs must have an epistemic defect, like a lack of epistemic justification, irrationality, or unreliability. They can but need not be epistemically defective (Basu 2018). Of course, many wrong beliefs will also be epistemically irrational, unjustified, or unreliable, sustained by prejudices, a lack of sufficient evidence, or a biased evaluation of the evidence. The point is not that this pairing is uncommon or that typical cases are not ones in which the person has an irrational belief as well, only that it is unnecessary for explaining the moral wrongdoing. Strictly speaking, the thesis of doxastic wronging is that beliefs can be morally wrong. What, more exactly, the wrong is grounded in would be a further development of the view. The claim that, for any A , their belief that p is a potential wrong towards some S only if and because A 's belief that p is epistemically defective—unjustified, irrational, unreliable, or against the evidence—is an additional claim, one not built into the view. Another counter-factual claim that proponents of doxastic wronging are at least *prima facie* committed to, then, is that there are some cases where, for some A 's belief that p which wrongs some person S , even if A 's believing that p had not been epistemically defective, it still would be (at least) *prima facie* morally wrong towards S .

Although this is the most controversial aspect of the doxastic wronging thesis, it is not implausible.³ Consider the fact that, owing to features of one’s social-epistemic environment, the available evidence might favor believing something we qualify as wrong despite the fact that the agent couldn’t have done better given the deficiencies of their social-epistemic environment. For example, the person raised in an echo chamber-like environment, one which supplies evidence for in-group beliefs and preempts them from trusting the counter-evidence, or even, as with epistemic bubbles, prevents them from accessing the counter-evidence, might then have evidence which supports their wrongful belief while at the same time lacking the independent evidence to trust the counter-evidence. For example, it might be part of the group’s core commitments to hold certain sexist beliefs about the roles and abilities of women, such as that women are inferior to men, as we see with certain ‘tradwife’ and religious fundamentalist communities. In these kinds of cases, the thought is that certain group members will have sexist—and thus wrongful—beliefs about particular women but it looks more like it is due to their responsiveness to the available evidence rather than their disregard of it. As Nguyen (2020) puts it, this is part of the trouble with echo chambers, because “earnest attempts at good epistemic practices are transformed into something epistemically harmful by the social structure into which [group members] have been embedded” (Nguyen 2020, 155). Consider:

Fundamentalist: Jordan is a religious fundamentalist who believes that his wife is inferior to him, that his daughter is inferior to his son, and so forth for the other women in his community, owing to his broader belief that women are inferior to men, which is part of his community’s religious creed, grounded in their interpretation of their religious texts and tradition. Unfortunately, Jordan and his family are within a

³ Some distinguish between modest and ambitious views about doxastic wronging (Enoch & Spectre 2022). Modest views say that all cases of doxastic wrongs are also cases of unjustified beliefs, whereas ambitious views say that at least some cases of doxastic wrongs are not cases of unjustified beliefs. See, for example, Basu (2018) for a defense of this view in the case of racist beliefs. What I’m arguing is that proponents of doxastic wronging thesis, even the modest version, should say that the wrong-making feature of the wrongful belief is not due to the fact that the belief is unjustified. It might also be, and its being arrived at in a certain way that made it unjustified, say, might be morally wrong as well, but it would be an additional moral wrong.

closed religious community, whereby there are high exist costs for anyone attempting to the leave or even questioning the group's commitments, including exile from the community and seperation from one's family and friends. His beliefs, like the others group member's, are corroborated by his peers and those he considers his epistemic superiors—i.e., those more experienced with reading and interpretating the relevant texts. Other interpretations of their religious texts are prevented from reaching most members and those which counter their interpretations are met with suspicion, since it is part of their interpretation of their religious texts that outsiders will counter their views and try to undermine their credibility, a kind of evidential pre-emption (Begby 2021).

In these social epistemic conditions, we are hard pressed to charge Jordan and the others with flagrant irrationality—that their beliefs somehow fail to fit or aren't even sensitive to the available evidence. Quite the contrary. After all, their sexist beliefs makes sense from his and his community's perspective, enjoys corroboration, and lacks any clear defeaters, and perhaps this is enough for evaluating their beliefs as epistemically rational (Rinard 2022). Still, Jordan's beliefs *are* sexist; what he believes *wrongs* his wife and his daughter, among others. Although it remains controversial whether these beliefs, even in these conditions, can ever be epistemically rational, it is enough to motivate the thought that it's not at all obvious that cases of doxastic wronging are thereby cases of epistemically irrational beliefs.

At first glance, doxastic wronging might look like a psychologically unique phenomenon, something peculiar to belief and other doxastic attitudes (like judging that p , having a high credence in p , or certainty that p). The reason is that to believe that p is, according to some philosophers, to manifest a **strong settled commitment** about what the world is like (Singh forthcoming)—and, in our case, what some particular person is like—but that such a strong settled commitment about a person's battle with alcoholism, or their alleged inferiority owing to their sex, say, seems to wrong

them in part because of the nature of harboring that kind of commitment towards individuals with whom one enjoys personal ties or even a certain authority over.

I'll flesh out this idea more fully by focusing on an example. Consider again Carver's wife, who believes that her husband lapsed in his battle with alcoholism. If belief is a strong settled commitment towards the truth of a proposition p , then she is committed to her husband's having lapsed in his battle with alcoholism; she is thus committed to regarding him as a failure in his recovery, at least for the time being, but this is precisely what seems so injurious to him given his efforts. If she were merely *somewhat confident* about this, say, .52 confident that he was drinking again, or if she believed that he *might* have been drinking again, but didn't go all the way to having a settled commitment about its being true, then it is unclear that the intuition of doxastic wronging would stick. Rather, the force of the intuition partly comes from the kind of committal attitude the person takes towards the other. Or so the thought goes.

We can also zoom in on this case to further bring out a point about the relationship between belief *qua* strong settled commitment to p 's being true and the special responsibilities agents owe to certain people given their roles or commitments to them. Ceteris paribus, partners give each other the benefit of the doubt, but Carver's wife just doubts her husband with respect to drinking. Yes, he is an alcoholic, but absent strong evidence to the contrary bearing on our partner's situation or abilities in particular, we should believe in their ability to overcome certain personal obstacles, like alcoholism, even when success is against the odds. Some say this reflects a kind of epistemic partiality (Stroud 2006), but we don't have to go as far as to say that it is epistemically rational to display such partiality. Rather, the claim is just that, as a matter of what we prima facie owe to our partners, we are sometimes justified in giving them the benefit of the doubt—i.e., in trusting them or their ability to overcome personal obstacles, despite our appreciation of the more fungible evidence to the contrary, evidence bearing on any agent's success rate. When Carver's wife rather settles her view on her husband having failed in his recovery efforts on the basis of currently smelling like a drunkard, she isn't giving him the benefit of the doubt, resisting the urge to follow

the present evidence, when, prima facie at least, such a partner is otherwise entitled to this epistemic benefit.⁴

If this explanation is on the right track, then doxastic wronging starts to look like a phenomenon unique to belief and belief-like attitudes, in that there is something distinctive about belief and belief-like attitudes which have the power to wrong others in virtue of being settled, committed attitudes about what's true or false. However, there are equally compelling cases where it is not the presence of belief but, as we will see, a certain kind of lack of belief which seems just as injurious to an individual as the corresponding belief would be. Consider variations on our original cases:

Indecisive Recovering Alcoholic: Carver has struggled for many years with alcoholism, but has managed sobriety for one year straight. Recently, he attended an important dinner party where there would be lots of drinking, and safely resisted the temptation to drink. Unfortunately, another guest spilled a large vodka martini all over Carver's shirt, and he had nothing else to change into. He texts his wife, Margaret, that someone spilled a glass of wine on his shirt and that he has nothing else to change into, forgetting that it vodka and not wine, due to all of the commotion. Upon returning home, Carver's wife smells the stench of vodka all over him; "how could this be wine?", she thinks to herself. He can see from her uncertain and suspicious looks that she is undecided about whether he has been drinking again, and he's right: Margaret suspends judgment about whether Carver was drinking.

Undecided Boss: Sam is a superior to Scully in the FBI, and his co-director of their field office believes the sexist view that women should not be in high-ranking

⁴ If the norm to 'hold off' rather than heed the incoming evidence is (however we spell this out more formally; I set this aside here) part of the explanation of how she wrongs her husband, then perhaps it not her belief qua strong committed attitude as such which is responsible for the wronging. I think this view is plausible, but complicated because it doesn't rule out that both the activity of (a) not holding off on factoring in the incoming evidence *and* (b) using that new evidence to form that particular belief about whether her husband has been drinking again is something that, working in concert, wrongs her husband.

positions in federal law-enforcement agencies, because “women are too soft for law-enforcement”. Sam doesn’t believe that are ‘too soft’ for high-level positions in law-enforcement, but also doesn’t deny it. He rather suspends judgment about this, unwilling to think about the matter more carefully to reach a more settled opinion. “For all I know”, he thinks to himself, “my co-director is right, and Scully is just too soft for promotion, since she’s a woman”. Scully considers Sam a mentor but is unaware of the fact that he is undecided either way about whether she should not be promoted to a higher-rank owing to the fact that she is a woman, as it is not manifest in his actions towards her or the other women he and the co-director preside over. From what she can see, he acts the same way to the men and women he presides over.

There is at least as strong an intuition as there is in the original cases that the person wrongs another because of their *indecision* or *suspension of judgment* about the relevant question that bears on the target individual in each case.

Consider first Margaret’s suspension of judgement about whether her husband was drinking again. Her suspensive attitude is connected to the question about whether he was being honest with her; she not only fails to give him the benefit of the doubt vis-à-vis how he smells, but she doesn’t place sufficient trust in what he said either. Sure, he made a mistake in *what* drink was spilled on him, and this is what led to her increased suspicion, but shouldn’t she rather trust that he was careful to avoid drinking rather than remain undecided about this? Isn’t *that* what she ought to do?

As before, we can test this verdict against certain expectations about moral repair and reactive attitudes. Suppose Carver were to become aware that Margaret was all along suspending judgement about whether he was being honest with her. If we want to say that he was right to expect an apology from her for her belief that he was drinking again, shouldn’t we also say that he would be right to expect an apology from her for her suspension of judgement about his honesty? Moreover, wouldn’t Carver be justified in feeling wounded by Margaret’s indecision; by her consideration of

the question “is my husband being honest about his drinking tonight?” and falling on the side of commitment to indecision about that question? If Carver feels hurt here, we are not confused about what the source of his feelings might be; we naturally trace it to his wife’s indecision attitude, her suspension of judgment about whether he was being honest with her.

Now consider the Undecided Boss case. Intuitively, Scully would be hurt to learn that her boss, again, someone she considers a mentor and looks to for guidance and support in her career, is undecided about whether she is inferior in her work because she’s a woman. Again, it is not enough that her boss Sam doesn’t act on his indecision, but that he shouldn’t be undecided in the first place—he should rather take a stand for Scully, and believe that she is just as capable as her male colleagues. Extending Bommarito’s (2017) comment, it’s not just that we want those with whom we are close to lack certain beliefs about us, but we also don’t want them to be undecided about certain questions that bear on us. There’s something perverse about suspending judgment on certain questions, like whether a colleague is inferior in her work because she is a woman. It’s not just disbelief but indecision which manifests a form of disrespect toward them here.

Finally, as before, we can reimagine the Undecided Boss case so that Sam is unaware that he suspends judgment about whether Scully (and per force the other women he presides over) are inferior in their work because they are women. While Sam considers himself a progressive thinker, he doesn’t have a settled opinion about whether women are inferior to men in law-enforcement positions, even though this fact about his psychology is introspectively opaque to him. However, after speaking with his therapist, he discovers that he indeed is undecided about whether the sexist view or the liberal view about the equality of women is correct. The therapist reveals that he has long-standing resentment towards women because of his mistreatment from his mother during childhood, but that other women in his life during childhood counter-balanced this impression, acting as strong role models. Sam might feel guilty here for having all along being unconvinced that women are equal to men, going as far as to be undecided on various questions about the equality

of women, like “are women inferior to men in traditionally ‘male’ profession because of their gender?”

In turn, I submit that to the extent that we are attracted to the thesis of doxastic wrongdoing, we should extend our sympathies to the **thesis of suspensive wrongdoing**, that an agent’s suspension of judgement on a question bearing on some individual can wrong them as well. It is not only belief and disbelief but a certain way of lacking belief and disbelief which can wrong others, namely, those cases where the person suspends judgment with respect to certain questions bearing on certain individuals in particular.

I now want to turn our attention to two questions which will help further clarify the thesis of suspensive wrongdoing. The first, more complex question, is about the nature of the suspensive attitude in cases of suspensive wrongdoing. Since suspension of judgment is theorized in different ways, it will be interesting to see to what extent the strength of the intuition surrounding suspensive wrongdoing is retained once we unpack the attitude of suspension of judgment. The thought is that, to the extent that the intuition for suspensive wrongdoing is robust, it would affect our theory choice vis-à-vis our theory of suspension of judgement.⁵ Fortunately, as we will see, none of the major theories of suspension of judgement render the intuition any less robust or are inconsistent with the thesis of suspensive wrongdoing.

The second question is whether the attitude in our cases of suspensive wrongdoing is properly described as ‘suspension of judgment’. I argue that it is for two reasons. First, the agents in these cases are not merely in a condition of “de facto indecision” (Friedman 2013, 177), merely neither believing nor disbelieving, but have a more committed attitude to certain answers to particular questions bearing on the relevant individual. Indeed, this helps to unify the theses of doxastic and suspensive wrongdoing: both involve committed attitudes, albeit of different kinds.

⁵ If a theory of suspension of judgment were wholly inconsistent with the intuition, rendering it incoherent, for example, this would be a prima facie challenge for the theory; everything else being equal, revising our independent normative intuitions is problematic.

The second reason is that, once we substitute the ascribed suspensive attitude in our cases with the relevant theory-driven intensions paired with ‘suspension of judgment’, the intuition of wronging remains. To be sure, the intuition remains for similar states or conditions that fall short of suspension of judgment as well, such as principled non-belief and a principled resistance to belief and disbelief, but since there are different ways of realizing these conditions it will turn on facts about the particular cases in which the agent satisfies those conditions.⁶

I start with the view that suspension of judgment is essentially a *sui generis* indecision-representing attitude, one connected to inquiry (Friedman 2013). Here, I bracket why Friedman argues that suspension of judgment is a *sui generis* indecision-representing attitude, and just assume that it is correct for the purposes of addressing our first question. I’ll do this again later with other theories of suspension of judgment.

Friedman distinguishes suspending judgment and suspended judgment. The former is a process, a way of terminating the process of inquiry about whether p , whereas the latter is a certain attitude, a particular ‘neutral’ way of being settled: a commitment to opening the question to further deliberation, to “continued efforts to judge” (Friedman 2017, 317). If one suspends judgment about whether p , then one is *committed to continuing inquiry* into whether p , in the sense that the agent keeps the question “open in thought” (ibid), still wondering whether p , being curious about which of p or $\sim p$ is true, and so forth.

Here, I think the intuition of suspensive wronging remains in our cases. Consider again the Indecisive Recovering Alcoholic case. Upon receiving Carver’s text, the question “has Carver been drinking?” remains an open question for her, despite his display of honesty. Once he returns home, the strong smell on his shirt together with her knowledge that he said someone only spilled some wine on him moves her to an “explicit state of uncertainty” about whether Carver was drinking, and thus whether he was being honest with her (Friedman 2017, 118). But surely Carver

⁶ For example, a person might lack belief and disbelief because of their intellectual and moral vices, like stubbornness or cowardice. A person might also be, in principle, resistance to belief and disbelief about certain issues because of their religious or ideological commitments.

would be right to feel wounded by her continued openness to these questions, since continued openness towards them means that she doesn't trust his testimony, that she doesn't believe that he was being honest. An apology is something which Carver would be right to expect or at least to hope for. These are rational, fitting expectations and emotions. This suggests that Margaret's suspension of judgment *qua sui generis* indecision-representing attitude is a good candidate for what wronged him.

Consider next the view that suspension of judgment is a credal attitude, namely the attitude of being .5 confident that p , or perhaps being somewhere within the area below the threshold for believing and above the threshold for disbelieving that p , a middling-strength credence. Imagine now that Margaret is no more confident that Carver had not been drinking, and so was being honest, than that he had been drinking, and so was being dishonest. She has reached a verdict on the questions "Was Carver drinking?" and "Was he being honest?", with her middling-strength credence; not enough to qualify as believing, nor enough for disbelieving. In turn, she is no more willing to bet that he was being honest than that he was being dishonest.

Clearly, Carver would have grounds for feeling hurt here as well. If Carver were upset and his friend asked him "What's the matter—is everything alright?" and Carver responded with the fact that his wife failed to trust him about not having anything to drink, that she wouldn't any more bet on his achievement than on his failure that night, it wouldn't be inexplicable to them why Carver feels wounded. Although outright disbelief might indeed be even worse, there is something about just being 'in the middle' that, absent a sincere apology, threatens to sow the seeds of resentment, resentment that would be rational. Hence, if suspension of judgement were a middling credence, we could still account for suspensive wronging.

Finally, consider the idea the suspension of judgment is a particular sort of metacognitive attitude. While this view goes back to at least Russell (1913), who held that suspension of judgment is a matter of one's believing that one doesn't know whether p or $\sim p$, the most developed version of view comes from Raleigh (2021), who argues that suspension of judgment is a matter of not

being able to tell whether or not p on one's evidence, coupled with one's neither believing nor disbelieving that p .

This metacognitive view puts the most strain on the suspensive wronging thesis. According to the suspensive wronging thesis, suspended judgment can wrong individuals, but it's initially harder to see how believing that one is unable to tell on one's evidence whether p or not p has the same wrong-making power as the other candidates. After all, if Margaret simply believed that, for all the evidence she's got, she can't tell which of 'my husband is telling the truth' and 'my husband is not telling the truth' is true, this would be consistent with her displaying epistemic partiality, giving Carver the benefit of the doubt, trusting her husband's testimony anyway. Fortunately, the metacognitive view doesn't say only that, since it adds that one must be in a state of "doxastic neutrality" as well, whereby one neither believes nor disbelieves that p (Raleigh 2021).

We thus need to reimagine Margaret as not believing that her husband had been drinking, and so not believing that her husband was being honest with her, but also as not disbelieving these propositions either. The questions about whether he was drinking remain open for her because she doesn't take a stand on them. More clearly here, we can see how Carver would be right to feel wounded, since *ipso facto* his wife doesn't trust him—for he offers her his assurance but she doesn't give him her trust on this matter. Sure enough, she doesn't distrust him either—she doesn't think "He was lying, he was drinking last night", but the failure to trust on its own can be an insult, especially when one was indeed honest and did one's best to avoid personal disaster that would likely strain the relationship.

Similarly, in the Undecided Boss case, were Scully to find out that Sam neither believes nor disbelieves that Scully is inferior to her male colleagues owing to her being a woman, and believes that he just can't tell, on his evidence—including the evidence he has about Scully, evidence which would include his own experiences with her—whether she is inferior or not because she's a woman, Scully would be right to feel wounded and demand an apology. It is not only rationally explicable, but something we would expect from any person with integrity.

Hence, I submit that, if we unpack suspension of judgment as a *sui generis* indecision attitude, as a middling credence, or as a metacognitive attitude, there is no trouble accounting for the intuition of suspensive wronging, that in cases like Indecisive Recovering Alcoholic, or Undecided Boss, we experience a sense of unease from their ‘neutral’ attitudes, ones which rationalize certain emotions and the need for moral redress.

3. Suspension of Judgement and Neutrality

A standard characterization of suspension of judgment is that it is a kind of neutrality. For example, Friedman urges that “the sort of neutrality” at issue in suspension of judgment is something that any adequate of theory should accommodate (Friedman 2013, 167). Sturgeon (2020) argues that suspension of judgment is a kind of “committed neutrality”, while Raleigh (2021) says that suspension of judgment is a “neutral attitude”. That suspension of judgment manifests some kind of neutrality is part of the core of what suspension of judgement is supposed to be.

The sense in which suspension of judgment is neutral, however, becomes unclear once we accept the thesis of suspensive wronging, since if an attitude or state, like suspension of judgment, can have the property of being wrong, then insofar as it has that property, it is hard to see in what sense, if any, it still manifests neutrality. After all, how could a morally wrong attitude be a *neutral* attitude—isn’t the qualification that it is morally wrong simply a way of saying that it is *not* neutral?

Some social commentators express a similar worry in the context of political injustice. Desmond Tutu, for instance, pressed that “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor” (Desmond Tutu 1986; Ratcliffe 2017). Similarly, Elie Wiesel urged that: “We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim” (Wiesel 1986). On their view, it is confused or even propagandic to characterize one’s stance as ‘being neutral’ in situations of injustice since, from a practical point of view, not taking a side—which ‘being neutral’ is thought to instantiate—can do as much harm as those who take the wrong side, i.e., the ones whose actions instantiate injustice.

Extending their point to the case of suspension of judgment, the worry is this: let's reimagine the Undecide Boss case, where the main question (WQ) 'Should women have senior positions within law-enforcement?', and three disputants, Scully, who believes that (WP) women should be in senior positions within law-enforcement; the co-director, Jordan, who believes that (\sim WP), that women should not be in senior positions within law-enforcement, and then Sam, who suspends judgment about whether women should or should not be in senior positions within law-enforcement. Let's stipulate that Jordan is sexist, and that his sexist prejudice is what motivates him to believe \sim WP. Moreover, as a co-director, he has some influence over whether junior agents can become senior agents within their law-enforcement agency; thus, there is reason to believe that his sexist prejudice might influence his relevant decision-making.

Let's also assume (plausibly) that Jordan's side in the debate aligns with the side of injustice, whereas Scully's side in the debate aligns with the side of justice, since Jordan believes that women, owing to his sexist prejudice, shouldn't be in senior law-enforcement positions, which is what would be unjust to enact. Tutu and Wiesel's view, then, suggests that Sam's side in the debate vis-à-vis his suspension of judgment—the one he would characterize as 'being neutral'—is to side with the unjust, i.e., the side that is against equality for women in law-enforcement. If that's right, then Sam's instance of suspension of judgement is, in a certain morally significant sense, *non-neutral*, since it is sufficient for taking a highly controversial side in a dispute, namely the side we would characterize as unjust. Or so the argument goes.

However, I think the worry about neutrality here, and so suspension of judgment *qua* a kind of neutrality, as normatively pairing with the side of injustice is a mistake. To see why, we need to distinguish between *attitudinal neutrality* towards a proposition, which is neutrality with respect to one's attitude A towards an answer p , or set of answers, $\{p, \sim p\}$ to a question Q , and *property neutrality*, which is a further fact about whether the relevant attitude A has neutral or non-neutral normative properties, like being epistemically irrational or being morally wrong.

For example, for any question Q , one's suspension of judgment towards propositions $\{p, \sim p\}$ which seek to answer Q is attitudinally neutral in the sense that their attitude does not commit them to settling on any of the prospective answers to Q ; they are not committed to p and they are not committed to $\sim p$. They don't take a stand on which proposition is true or false, and they are not committed to regarding either proposition as true or as false. The question is open for them. Here, I remain agnostic about whether suspension of judgment itself reflects a kind of commitment—perhaps the commitment to be neutral in this regard, or the commitment to open inquiry—since the thought is that suspension of judgment is a neutral attitude vis-à-vis truth, or more specifically the truth of the set of prospective answers to a question.

However, it doesn't follow from the fact that if one manifests attitudinal neutrality then their attitude is normatively neutral. Clearly, suspension of judgment, like belief and disbelief, is sometimes epistemically irrational, and if we characterize an instance of suspension of judgment as epistemically irrational, we are taking a stand—and so not being neutral—about its epistemic normativity. As Parfit reminds us, we “use the word ‘irrational’ to express the kind of criticism that we express with words like ‘senseless’, ‘stupid’, ‘idiotic’, and ‘crazy’” (Parfit 2011, 33). Whether one characterizes the attitude as epistemically rational or irrational, one gives a normatively non-neutral characterization of the attitude. The same is true of ethical characterizations. To characterize an instance of suspension of judgment as morally wrong is to take a stand on its moral normativity; one gives a normatively non-neutral characterization of the attitude in that case.

With this distinction in play, we can accommodate Tutu and Wiesel's intuitive insight about neutrality and injustice without revising the traditional characterization of suspension of judgment as a kind of neutrality. What motivates their view is something like the following principle:

NEUTRALITY IS A SIDE: In situations of political injustice, where believing p aligns with the politically just side, and believing $\sim p$ aligns with the politically unjust side, if one suspends judgment about whether p , one thereby takes the side of the politically unjust.

Now, recall the revised Undecided Boss case, where Scully, Sam, and Jordan disagree about the equality of women in law-enforcement, taking different sides in an imagined debate about whether women should be in senior law-enforcement positions. I stipulated that Scully's side is the just side, whereas Jordan's side—reflecting his sexist prejudices—is the unjust side. Sam thinks of his stance as the 'neutral' stance, because he suspends judgment about whether Scully or Jordan's positions are true: "I don't know who's right. I can't tell whose position represents the just or unjust side here. I'm undecided".

Here, we can see the mistake more clearly. NEUTRALITY IS A SIDE implies that Sam takes the side of the unjust, and thus sides with Jordan, but this is clearly a mistake. After all, if one suspends judgment about certain questions concerning the equality of women in law-enforcement, for example, one is not on the same side as the critic of the equality of women in law-enforcement since one's suspension of judgment commits them to not believing, accepting, or regarding as true the propositions for which the critic (like Jordan), who denies those propositions, would be epistemically or morally criticizeable for denying.

Nevertheless, this does not imply that the person who suspends judgment (like Sam) is not epistemically or morally criticizeable for their suspension of judgment either. Again, one can be at fault for not taking the right side in a debate (Scully's side) without the fault being grounded in facts about taking the wrong side (Jordan's side). The thought is that if one suspends judgment in certain morally charged cases, one helps to legitimize the unjust side in the debate. Moreover, the action that suspension of judgment, unlike belief and disbelief, tends to pair with is inaction or omission, which can manifest as complicity when those who occupy the wrong side wield power to enact unjust actions.⁷

⁷ For example, abstaining from a vote to represent one's indecision, can sometimes facilitate votes in favor of an unjust policy. A clear case of this is one in which the abstaining vote would have been the difference-maker, preventing the unjust policy from becoming law.

Of course, there is still some bite to the initial worry about the standard characterization of suspension of judgement as a kind of neutrality. However, the worry might work more effectively as a reflection on our linguistic practices. If we publicly use ‘neutrality’-talk to represent suspension of judgment, or to characterize our own suspension of judgment, we risk misleadingly communicating that we are thereby normatively neutral, that our attitude just isn’t in the market for epistemic or moral criticism. Clearly, this is mistaken. We can be epistemically and morally blameworthy for improperly processing the evidence, which is what happens with biased evaluation of the evidence, like myside biased evaluations, but also for ignoring or omitting evidence, which is what happens when one cherry picks statistics, or ignores someone’s testimony because it is inconvenient. If I’m right about the suspensive wronging thesis, however, certain instances of suspension of judgment can be morally wrong as well, even independently—at least *prima facie*—of any improper processing, evaluation, or omissions of evidence. What matters is whether the attitude wrongs, and indirectly whether it rationalizes moral redress.⁸

4. Objections and Replies

The thesis of suspensive wronging is compelling, but many will say that it is implausible. Here, I will consider a number of key objections and reply.

Perhaps the major reason for being suspicious of suspensive wronging is that, even granting the initial intuitions, reflection suggests that our thinking generally cannot be morally right or wrong unless we have the kind of control over our ϕ -ing necessary for such moral appraisal, but that we lack the requisite control when it comes to our thinking.

⁸ See Basu (2018) especially for this kind of claim in the case of racist beliefs. However, proponents of the doxastic and suspensive wronging theses can be agnostic about whether the relevant attitudinal wronging must be traceable to either (a) some blameworthy epistemic error or omission *upstream* from the attitude or (b) to some morally or epistemically wrongful actions *downstream* from the attitude, because the doxastic and suspensive wronging theses are just categorical claims that certain states or attitude can wrong, and not explanations of how or why they do.

While many have taken issue with the idea that we lack sufficient control over our beliefs for responsibility, it is harder to see how the kinds of cases that motivate doxastic involuntarism, the thesis that our beliefs are involuntary, translate seamlessly to suspension of judgment. The kinds of case which motivate doxastic involuntarism are cases in which (i) the agent has excellent evidence for p and thereby unable to refrain from believing that p , as with the person who sees that it's raining outside and can't help but believe that it is, and (ii) brings to mind a proposition, but is unable to simply believe it, like an (unproven) mathematical conjecture one has never heard before. The former suggests that evidence, or possessing evidence of a certain high quality, determines belief whereas the latter suggests that belief is not volitional, unlike imagination, which is paradigmatically under our voluntary control.

However, it is difficult to create a strong analogy between suspension of judgement and determined belief on excellent evidence. For example, consider Zinke's (2021) case of a detective who needs to interview 10 suspects for a crime. After interviewing the first suspect, the detective gets evidence for believing that p . Intuitively, it would be irrational to believe that p or to believe $\sim p$ at this stage. Rather, "suspension still seems to be a rational doxastic response" (Zinke 2021, 1054). But imagine that the detective favors this suspect's testimony anyway, believing that p , in turn resisting suspension of judgment (perhaps the detective just has a hunch that she can't easily shake off). This doesn't seem as unimaginable as the case where the agent has excellent evidence which supports that p but then refrains from believing that p .

Even in the more analogous condition, where one's total evidence is perfectly balanced, it's still not as clear that the evidential balance determines that one suspends judgment as it does in the case where one's excellent evidence for p compels them to align their belief with the evidence. If one is biased against a particular outcome—say, one thinks it would be beautiful if a certain mathematical conjecture is true and ugly if not—one's balanced evidence still strictly favors suspension of judgment, but it's imaginable that their aesthetic sentiment is enough to produce some greater confidence in the conjecture, away from suspension of judgment.

Similarly, it is difficult to make a strong analogy with suspension of judgment and belief when it comes to volition. If you just bring, say, a mathematical conjecture before your mind, you can't just will that you believe or disbelieve it, but it's not obvious that you can't will that you suspend judgment. After all, suspending judgment was not simply there, prior to the imaginative act, since suspension goes beyond the mere lack of belief and disbelief. You also need to *commit* to leaving questions about the conjecture's truth-value open, to *continue inquiring* into whether the conjecture is true, or to *actively withhold* one's judging about whether the conjecture is true or false. Commitment to doing something, to continue inquiry, and to actively withhold judgment all seem *prima facie* under your voluntary control.

Maybe we can control our suspension of judgment to a greater degree than we can our beliefs, then—or at least our suspension of judgment is not similarly undermined by the examples which leads some to embrace doxastic involuntarism. However, this matters here only if we are attracted to the principle that our thoughts are subject to moral appraisal to the extent that they are under our voluntary control. Perhaps 'voluntary control' is the wrong condition. For example, some argue that what's necessary for responsibility, and per force moral appraisal, is answerability for what one believes (Hieronymi 2006), responsiveness to reasons for and against what one believes (McHugh 2015), or indirect influence over what one goes on to believe (McCormick 2015, Peels 2017). These conditions naturally extend to suspension of judgment. Clearly sometimes you can be answerable for whether you suspend judgment or not. Clearly sometimes you are responsive to reasons for and against suspending judgment and clearly sometimes you can influence whether you go on to suspend judgment on a particular question or not. There's no deep mystery here.

A similar challenge is that moral reasons are the wrong kind of reasons for belief, so that even if we could believe (disbelieve) for moral reasons, it would not be fitting to do so. By extension, how could there be moral reasons for or against suspending judgment? At base, the challenge is to explain how there could be anything besides evidence, i.e., epistemic reasons, for belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment.

Here, I think the psychological and normative profile of suspension of judgment makes it easier to see how the right-kind of reasons for suspension might include non-epistemic reasons. For example, suppose a couple want to make a bid on a house, it's Friday morning but the deposit needs to be in by Monday. Then it is extremely important for them to check with the bank about whether such a large sum of money will arrive on time.⁹ It is a good reason for them to inquire, to leave the relevant questions open, to think that they can't quite tell on their present evidence whether the money will get there on time, and so forth (cf. Lord 2020). In short, the high-stakes provide them with a good reason to suspend judgment about whether the deposit will arrive on time, but stake considerations aren't epistemic.

It's easy to infuse this kind of high-stakes case with moral content. Imagine the couple are considering whether to put their deposit down on a house in a certain neighborhood, one with a large density of schools and childcare services, but they have a special needs child who requires certain kinds of care and educational facilities to flourish. Intuitively, they should suspend judgment about whether there is a suitable school and care facility for their child nearby, despite how likely it is, given the distribution of school and care service facilities. They have good reason to inquire here, to keep the question open until they gather more evidence that definitively settles the question. Importantly, it would be intuitively wrong of them—a wrong specifically to their child—*not* to continue inquiring, *not* to keep the question open, *not* to hold that they don't have to tell just yet, and so forth. So, it looks as if there can be moral reasons to suspend judgment.

One clarification: while cases like this are often used to highlight how the practical (or moral) encroaches on the epistemic, specifically affecting how much evidence we need to qualify as justifying belief, I'm only arguing that, contra the thesis that only epistemic *qua* evidential reasons are the right-kinds of reasons for suspension of judgment, there are also moral reasons for suspension of judgment. It is optional whether one employs this kind of case to argue that the

⁹ This case is adapted from Lord (2020).

moral encroaches on the epistemic. After all, it is consistent with what I argued from the case that it is epistemically rational for the parents to believe that there will be suitable facilities for their child nearby whilst having a strong moral reason to suspend judgment. This of course makes their normative condition messier, but the point is just that the argument doesn't preclude favoring moral encroachment over a bit of normative messiness.

This takes us to the relationship between suspensive wronging and moral encroachment. The proponent of moral encroachment can argue that, contra the suspensive wronging thesis, that the moral stakes of the Indecisive Recovering Alcoholism case is one in which the moral stakes affect the standard of justification. On this view, perhaps Margaret didn't have enough evidence based on the smell of booze on her husband's shirt, his texts, and her husband's history with alcoholism to suspend judgment about whether he was back to drinking again. Maybe that's why her suspension of judgment was wrong. Perhaps, however, even just a small, additional piece of evidence—maybe another incriminating text message—would have been enough to cross the threshold. The proponent of moral encroachment doesn't need to say that her suspension wronged her husband in that case, as then it would be well-supported by the evidence. Perhaps what was explanatory of what she did that was wrong before was the epistemic failure, then—i.e., jumping to conclusions.¹⁰ In turn, we can see how moral encroachment is compatible with the suspensive wronging thesis or its denial.

5. Conclusion

I've argued that there are cases of suspensive wronging, drawing on analogous cases of doxastic wronging, ones which prompt the sense of wrongdoing along with legitimate claims to moral redress for their suspension of judgment.

¹⁰ The proponent of moral encroachment doesn't need to hold that her belief wronged her husband *before* acquiring the additional evidence either, since it might not have been the belief as such that wronged him, but the fact that, in keeping with Cliffordian evidentialism, she believed what she did on insufficient evidence.

I also argued we should think of the relevant attitude as suspension of judgment. In particular, that no matter if we understand suspension of judgement as a sui generis interrogative attitude, a metacognitive attitude, or middling credence, we can still account for cases of suspensive wronging (even if not all of them to the same degree, or with the same force).

I then considered the standard characterization of suspension of judgment as an instance of ‘neutrality’ or being ‘neutral’ and argued that we should refrain from unqualifyingly representing suspension of judgement as instantiating ‘neutrality’. The reason why is that it risks misleading us into thinking that such attitudes are morally unproblematic even when they are. Importantly, while suspension of judgment is a bona fide neutral state or attitude vis-à-vis truth, it is not thereby normatively neutral.

Finally, I responded to objections against the suspensive wronging thesis, namely that it is inconsistent with doxastic involuntarism, permits the wrong-kind of reasons for suspension of judgment, and weds suspensive wronging to moral encroachment. Against these criticisms, I argued that suspension of judgment might be a better candidate for fulfilling voluntary control conditions on the mental than belief, that suspension of judgment is likewise a better candidate for being subject to moral reasons than belief, and that both proponents of the suspensive wronging thesis and moral encroachment may, but need not, accept each other’s views.

If I’m right, the suspensive wronging thesis is a plausible view that gets hold of how lack of belief coupled with indecision and continuous question raising and evidence seeking, is not only sometimes annoying but downright wrong.¹¹

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