Suspending judgment the correct way

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Abstract

In this paper I present reasons for us to accept the hypothesis that suspended judgment has correctness conditions, just like beliefs do. Roughly put, the idea is that suspended judgment about *p* is correct when both *p* and ¬*p* might be true in view of certain facts that characterize the subject's situation. The reasons to accept that hypothesis are broadly theoretical ones: it adds unifying power to our epistemological theories, it delivers good and conservative consequences, and it allows us to assess processes of reasoning involving attitudes of suspended judgment.

1 Belief at its epistemic best, suspended judgment at its epistemic best

One correctly believes that *p* if and only if one believes that *p* and *p* is true (the world is as the subject takes it to be).[1] When a belief is at its epistemic best—when it constitutes *knowledge*—its correctness is achieved in some non-accidental or non-arbitrary manner. A belief can be correct as a matter of sheer luck or accident, and knowledge is supposed to rule that out. Epistemologists have tried to make sense of the non-accidentality of a belief's correctness in a number of different ways: the subject's belief results from the exercise of cognitive skills or competence,[2] it is formed/maintained in a way that makes it safe from error,[3] the subject has conclusive reasons to believe what she does, or her evidence eliminates all the relevant alternatives,[4] etc.

If belief at its epistemic best is knowledge, then what is suspended judgment at its epistemic best? We might expect that suspended judgment is also at its epistemic best when it is held under conditions that establish a non-accidental connection to its own correctness. It is not clear what the correctness conditions for suspended judgment are

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[1]See Wedgwood (2002), Gibbard (2005).

[2]See Greco (2010), Miracchi (2015).

[3]See Williamson (2000), Pritchard (2009).

[4]See Dretske (1971) for the conclusive reasons account, and Lewis (1996) for a contextualist account of knowledge ascriptions that makes use of the notion of elimination of relevant alternatives.

supposed to be, however. A mind that has correct beliefs is a mind that *fits* reality.[5] But how could the mind fit reality by suspending judgment about something?

Perhaps there isn't a correctness condition for suspended judgment. If that is so, then it is wrong to think that suspended judgment is at its epistemic best when it establishes a non-accidental connection to *that condition* (because there simply isn't one). There are at least two considerations that one might deploy in support of this verdict. First, there doesn't seem to be an *alethic* value that makes suspended judgment correct. Even those who want to include *gaps* or *gluts* in addition to *true* and *false* to their sets of alethic values would presumably agree with that.[6] My suspended judgment about whether the defendant is innocent can be completely faultless *qua* suspension— even though the alethic value of 'the defendant is innocent' is neither a gap nor a glut. Second, suspended judgment is usually characterized as an attitude of *neutrality*.[7] When I suspend judgment about *p*, I do not take *p* to be true, I do not take it to be false: I have a neutral stance regarding whether *p* is true. On the basis of that, Wedgwood (2002, p. 272) concludes that suspended judgment isn't ever a correct attitude for one to have. The agnostic cannot possibly be correct, and that is precisely because she doesn't take any sides on the issue she is agnostic about.

These considerations suggest that perhaps the only thing we could say in response to the question I made above is that suspended judgment is at its epistemic best when it is *epistemically justified*. For suspended judgment cannot ever be a correct attitude and, therefore, it cannot be a non-accidentally correct attitude (it cannot be like belief when it is at its epistemic best). Suspended judgment at its epistemic best is disanalogous to belief at its epistemic best—and that is so despite the fact that these two attitudes are almost invariably lumped together in the traditional menu of doxastic options.[8]

In this paper I will explore an alternative route, however. I will first flesh out a proposal about what the correctness conditions for suspended judgment could be (Section 2). The hypothesis that suspended judgment has those correctness conditions has many desirable features. It is a *unifying* hypothesis, in that it allows us to say that both belief and suspended judgment are at their epistemic bests when their correctness is achieved in some non-accidental or non-arbitrary manner. Suspended judgment at its epistemic best is to the target correctness conditions what knowledge is to true belief. The target hypothesis is also a *conservative* one, in that it vindicates well-established epistemological claims about belief, knowledge and suspended judgment (Section 3). In fact, the correctness conditions for belief can be cashed out in the same theoretical

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[5]I will use the notions of *correctness* and *fittingness* interchangeably here. See McHugh and Way (2018) for the same linguistic practice. These authors, like many others, assume that belief is not the only attitude that has correctness/fittingness conditions. For example, one's intention to ϕ might be said to be correct or fitting when it is permissible for one to ϕ—see Shah (2008).

[6]See Priest (2008, Ch. 7) for propositional logics with gaps (neither true nor false) and gluts (both true and false).

[7]This characterization of suspended judgment is quite pervasive in the literature. See Sturgeon (2010), Friedman (2013a, 2017) and Raleigh (forthcoming) for some examples.

[8]Of course, beliefs can also be epistemically justified. But that a belief is justified does not mean that it is at its epistemic best: one can have justified beliefs that fail to constitute knowledge, say, because they are false or they are Gettierized. Though see Littlejohn (forthcoming, §4) and also Williamson (forthcoming) for alternative views on this.

framework that I use to establish the correctness conditions for suspended judgment (still Section 3). Finally, the hypothesis allows us to properly categorize transitions from/to attitudes of suspended judgment as being *good* or *bad*, depending on whether they preserve correctness (Section 4). That gives us a tool with which to assess modes of thinking/reasoning that lead to and depart from agnostic stances.

In presenting this proposal, I will not rely on any particular analysis of what suspended judgment *is* (just like much of the work on the normativity of belief goes through without relying on any particular analysis of belief). I will only rely on the minimal assumption that suspended judgment is an attitude of neutrality with respect to whether a given proposition is true. After discussing a bit more about the nature of *situations* (Section 5), however, I will briefly argue that this paper's hypothesis is compatible with different accounts of the nature of suspension (Section 6). Finally, I will address an objection based on the observation that, since any proposition whatsoever is either true or false, it is either correct for one to believe that proposition or correct for one to disbelieve it. That observation seems to be in conflict with the idea that suspended judgment also has correctness conditions (Section 7).

2   Correctness conditions for suspended judgment

I suggest that the correctness conditions for suspended judgment could be as follows:

(CS) A subject correctly suspends judgment about p if and only if (a) the subject suspends judgment about p and (b) in view of that subject's situation, it might be that p and it might be that $\neg p$.[9]

Where 'c' names or describes a given set of propositions, I take sentences of the form 'In view of c it might be that p' to mean roughly the following: that p is true is compatible with the fact that all propositions in c are true. The more complex construction 'In view of c, it might be that p and it might be that $\neg p$' is short for 'In view of c it might be that p, and in view of c it might be that $\neg p$'. According to (CS), then, a subject correctly suspends judgment about p if and only if (a) the subject suspends judgment about p, (b_1) that p is true is compatible with certain truths that characterize that subject's situation, and (b_2) that $\neg p$ is true (or that p is false) is also compatible with those same truths.

My interpretation of the relational 'might' follows the tradition of Kratzer (1977). It makes use of the notion of *possible worlds*. The meaning of 'the subject's situation' is a function f that restricts the set of possible worlds that modal operators quantify over. It does so by assigning a set of propositions to the world that the subject is in at a particular time. So $f(w)$ is a set of propositions $\{c_1, ..., c_n\}$ such that each c_i describes some aspect of the subject's situation in world w (I'm assuming w to be centered on a

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[9] I use '$\neg$' to express classical negation throughout: $\neg p$ is true if and only if p is false. Also, I am using 'The subject suspends judgment about p' as short for 'The subject suspends judgment about whether p'.

particular time).[10] The sentence 'In view of the subject's situation it might be that p' is true in w, then, when there is a possible world v such that the subject's situation in v is the same as in w—i.e., $(c_1 \wedge \cdots \wedge c_n)$ is true in v—and p is also true in v.[11]

Notice that (CS) is still a *schematic* claim. It makes room for different interpretations of the rather vague locution 'the subject's situation'. The only constraint on the meaning of that locution so far is: a subject's situation in w has to be constituted by propositions that are *true in w*. Otherwise those propositions would not be propositions that describe the subject's situation in w, and that is what they are supposed to do. Suspended judgment about p is correct only if both p and $\neg p$ might be true in view of certain facts. I will explore some suggestions as to which sorts of facts are relevant below.

Nothing so far prevents us from taking the subject's situation to be her total evidence, thereby interpreting the 'might' of (CS) as an epistemic modal. Or at least that is an option for those who take the subject's total evidence to be constituted by true propositions only (as E=K epistemologists would have it).[12] Alternatively, the subject's situation could include truths that are not part of her total evidence, in which case the 'might' of (CS) will be interpreted as a non-epistemic, purely alethic modal. The latter option seems to be preferable. After all, the correctness conditions for belief feature an alethic value, namely, truth. When both belief and suspended judgment are concerned, then, correctness is a function of what is true *independently* of what the subject's total evidence is. Furthermore, if the 'might' of (CS) is interpreted as an epistemic modal, the correctness of suspended judgment might entail its epistemic justification (it will do so according to some evidentialist theories of epistemic justification). But that a belief is correct does not entail that it is justified. That correctness and justification are kept apart for *both* attitudes—belief and suspended judgment—seems to make for a more unified epistemological theory. Given these considerations, then, I am more inclined to think that the purely alethic, non-epistemic reading of 'might' is the best option here. But I am open to revising this in the future while preserving (CS) in its schematic form (more on this in Section 5).

In what sense can the agnostic mind *fit* reality, according to this proposal? Suppose that Nina suspends judgment about whether it is going to rain tomorrow. From Nina's own perspective, it might rain tomorrow, but it might also not rain tomorrow.[13] If Nina's situation doesn't indeed rule out either possibility—that is, if both p and $\neg p$ might be true relative to her situation—then her attitude of suspended judgment towards p fits reality. Just like in the belief case, the fit with reality is only *partial* (the content of a true belief need not be equivalent to the conjunction of *all* truths). Nina's situation

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[10] For the sake of simplicity, I will mostly omit reference to time. Thus, for example, I will talk of 'the actual world' meaning the actual world at a particular time t.

[11] Since $f(w)$ will only contain propositions that are true in w, there is no need to worry about what happens to that sentence when the modal basis is constituted by mutually inconsistent propositions, or when the restrictor set is the empty set—see Kratzer's amendments in her (1977, §1.3–1.4).

[12] See Williamson (2000), and also Rysiew (2018) for discussion.

[13] Accordingly, one can express one's suspended judgment about p by saying 'It might be that p and it might be that $\neg p$' or 'It may be that p and it may be that $\neg p$'—see Sorensen (2009) and also Huemer (2011).

doesn't amount to everything that is true in the possible world she is in. The fittingness relation is not supposed to take place between her agnostic attitude towards p and the modal status of p and $\neg p$ *given everything that is true* in the world she is in—in which case her agnostic attitude would *never* fit reality.[14] Rather, the fit is supposed to take place between her agnostic attitude towards p and the modal status of p *given some but not all of the things that are true* in the world she is in. I have pointed out above that suspended judgment is an attitude of neutrality with respect to whether something is true. Suspended judgment about p fits reality when some relevant part of reality that constitutes the subject's situation is equally neutral regarding p: it leaves open both the possibility that p is true and the possibility that p is false (in contrast, when belief toward p fits reality, the subject's situation does not leave open the possibility that p is false—see below).

As pointed out by an anonymous referee for *Inquiry*, (CS) has the consequence that one can never correctly suspend judgment about logical truths. Let t be any logical truth, let w be any possible world. Where $f(w)$ represents the subject's situation in w, $f(w)$ entails that t. So it is not the case that, in view of that subject's situation, it might be that t and it might be that $\neg t$. Some might feel a little discomfort with this verdict, and suggest that the theory should make room for the possibility of one's correctly suspending judgment about logical truths. But I suspect that this observation is motivated by thoughts about the *justification* or *rationality* of doxastic attitudes. Again, however, the correctness- and the justification-conditions for a doxastic attitude should be kept apart. One can never be correct in suspending judgment about things that are *true no matter what*.[15] One correctly suspends judgment only about things that could be true but could also be false in an objective sense of 'could' (as in logical or metaphysical possibility—as opposed to 'could be either true or false *as far as the subject herself can tell*').

If suspension can be correct, then it can be something analogous to *knowledge* when it is at its epistemic best: suspended judgment at its epistemic best is suspended judgment under conditions that establish a non-accidental connection to its own correctness. What condition needs to be satisfied in order for the success of suspension to be earned in a non-accidental manner? The answer could be: whatever condition that is analogous to the one that is needed for a true belief to constitute knowledge. For example, perhaps one's suspended judgment is at its epistemic best when it is *safe*. One safely suspends judgment about p if and only if: if the subject were to suspend judgment about p on the same basis, then she would be in a situation relative to which both p and $\neg p$ might be true.

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[14] For any proposition p, either it *must* be that p given all the facts, or it *must* be that $\neg p$ given all the facts.

[15] Similarly, one can never be correct in suspending judgment about things that are *false no matter what*. That is, what I am saying now about logical truths applies as well to logical falsehoods.

3 A rule for constructing situations, good consequences of (CS) and the correctness conditions for belief in the same framework

According to (CS), suspended judgment about p is a correct attitude if and only if both p and $\neg p$ might be true *in view of certain facts*. But which kinds of facts could be relevant here? The following rule for counting propositions as part of a subject's situation will prove to be well-motivated: if the subject correctly believes that p, then p is part of the set of truths that characterize her situation. Call that the 'True Belief Rule'.[16] Even though the subject's situation possibly includes *more* than what she correctly believes, this rule already gives us relevant information to go about assessing agnostic attitudes as to their correctness and drawing relevant consequences from (CS).[17]

Suppose that Nina correctly believes that p at a particular time in the actual world (henceforth a). Using (CS) and the semantics from above, we can then say: for any proposition q, it is correct for Nina to suspend judgment about q in a only if there are both q- and $\neg q$-worlds in the set of worlds where all the propositions in $f(a)$ are true. $f(a)$ is just the set of truths that characterize Nina's situation in the actual world at that particular time. Since Nina correctly believes that p, the True Belief Rule tells us that p is a member of $f(a)$. All the worlds where Nina's situation is the same as in a are worlds where p is true. Therefore, it is not the case that there are both p- and $\neg p$-worlds in the set of worlds where all the propositions in $f(a)$ are true. In other words, it is not the case that both p and $\neg p$ might be true in view of Nina's situation. It follows from our initial assumption, then, that it is not correct for Nina to suspend judgment about whether p is true.

This is a desirable outcome. After all, the attitude of suspending judgment about p seems to *conflict* with the attitude of believing that p.[18] That there is such a conflict can be expressed through sentences such as 'One is rationally required not to believe that p and suspend judgment about p at the same time', 'It is incoherent for one to believe that p while suspending judgment about p', etc. Armed with the True Belief Rule, (CS) allows us to explain the target conflict as follows: for any proposition p, subject S and possible world w (centered on a particular time), it is *impossible* for S to correctly believe that p and correctly suspend judgment about p at w. The normative conflict between believing and suspending on the same proposition can be explained by the fact that it is impossible for both attitudes to be correctly held by the same subject

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[16] More formally, the rule is: if the subject believes that p at w and p is true at w, then $p \in f(w)$.

[17] I use 'agnostic attitude' and 'suspended judgment' interchangeably throughout the paper. Rosenkranz (2007, p. 61) rejects the view that agnostics merely suspend judgment on the things they are agnostic about—but he thinks of suspending judgment as *failing to take any view* on a given matter. This is not how I am thinking of it here, however. At a very general level, the way I characterize the attitude of suspended judgment is roughly the way Rosenkranz characterizes agnosticism: a 'genuine third stance besides endorsement and denial' (Rosenkranz 2007, p. 58). See McGrath (forthcoming) for more fine-grained distinctions, where 'suspending', 'withholding', and 'inquiring' are assigned different meanings.

[18] Let alone whether these attitudes can even coexist in the same mind at the same time.

at the same time.

Under the natural assumption that knowledge requires true belief, it obviously follows from (CS) and the True Belief Rule that it is never correct for one to suspend judgment about p when one already knows that p. Friedman (2017) uses her thesis that suspended judgment is an *interrogative attitude* in order to explain why one ought not suspend judgment about p when one already knows that p (more on Friedman's account below). If you know that p, then you already have the answer to the question whether p is true—and so you should not be treating that as an *open question* anymore. But here we have yet another explanation why one ought not suspend judgment about p when one already knows that p: it cannot be correct for one to suspend judgment about p when one already knows that p. For if one knows that p, then one correctly believes that p—and so it is not the case that $\neg p$ might be true in view of one's situation. So, again, the True Belief Rule seems to be well-motivated. In conjunction with (CS), its deliverances are conservative with respect to well-established, basic truths about the relationship between suspended judgment and belief/knowledge. These deliverances give us a reason to adopt that rule, and that is what I will do here (at least provisionally).

(CS) also has conservative consequences all by itself, even independently of the True Belief Rule. When one suspends judgment about whether p is true, one is as agnostic about whether p as one is about whether $\neg p$ (these are just two ways of describing the same doxastic stance).[19] The agnostic can't be neutral about whether *God exists* without thereby being neutral about whether *God does not exist*, and vice-versa. So (CS) better allow us to say that the subject correctly suspends judgment about p if and only if she correctly suspends judgment about $\neg p$. And (CS) does allow us to say that, since 'in view of the subject's situation, it might be that p and it might be that $\neg p$' is equivalent to 'in view of the subject's situation, it might be that $\neg p$ and it might be that $\neg\neg p$' ($\neg\neg p$ is equivalent to p).[20]

Notice, furthermore, that we can cash out the correctness conditions for belief using the very same framework that underlies (CS):

(CB) A subject correctly believes that p if and only if (a') the subject believes that p and (b') in view of that subject's situation, it *must be* that p.

If it *must be* that p in view of the subject's situation then, since that situation is only constituted by propositions that are true in the world that the subject is in, p is true in that very world. So (CB) entails the standard correctness condition for belief, namely: a subject correctly believes that p if and only if (a') the subject believes that p and (b'') p is true. Conversely—assuming again that situations are individuated by means of (perhaps among other things) the True Belief Rule—the usual correctness conditions for

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[19]And so Friedman (2013a, Fn. 4): 'In this paper when I say that S suspends about p, I mean that she suspends about both p and $\neg p$'. This comes with the very way in which we make suspended judgment reports, or the way in which we ascribe agnostic attitudes to subjects: we use whether-clauses, as opposed to that-clauses (the former goes with interrogative complements, the latter with declarative complements)'.

[20]Here is (CS) again: A subject correctly suspends judgment about p if and only if (a) the subject suspends judgment about p, and (b) in view of that subject's situation, it might be that p and it might be that $\neg p$.

belief entail (CB). For, according to that rule, if the subject believes that p in w and p is true in w, then p counts as part of her situation set $f(w)$ and, therefore, p is true in all possible worlds where her situation is the same as in w—including w itself. So if the subject satisfies the usual correctness condition for belief, then p must be true in view of that subject's situation. As a result, (CB) and the standard correctness conditions for belief come out as equivalent. This confers yet more unifying power to the hypothesis that suspension has correctness conditions in the form of (CS) (with the semantics I'm adopting for the relational modalities).

4   Good transitions from/to agnostic attitudes

We sometimes transition from attitudes of suspended judgment to other attitudes of suspended judgment. Some of these transitions look like they are reasoning processes of a certain kind. Here is an example. I am told that *the skateboarding contest will be cancelled if and only if it rains tomorrow*. Unfortunately, I can't decide whether *it is going to rain tomorrow*: I suspend judgment on this issue (the weather has been quite unpredictable lately). On that basis, I come to suspend judgment about whether *the skateboarding contest will be cancelled as well*.

In this example, I transition from a state where I suspend judgment about q and I believe that $(p \equiv q)$ to a state where I also suspend judgment about p ('$\equiv$' is the symbol for material equivalence). This seems to be a good transition of thought. And we can use (CS) to explain why it is a good transition as follows: it *preserves correctness of attitudes*.[21] For suppose that (A) I correctly believe that $(p \equiv q)$, and (B) I correctly suspend judgment about q. Given (A), the True Belief Rule tells us that $(p \equiv q)$ is true in all possible worlds where my situation is the same as in the actual one, i.e. all worlds where all the propositions in my set $f(a)$ are true. Given (B), there are both q- and $\neg q$-worlds included in that set of possible worlds. But since $(p \equiv q)$ is true in all of these worlds, the q-worlds among them must be p-worlds, and the $\neg q$-worlds among them must be $\neg p$-worlds. So there are both p- and $\neg p$-worlds included among the worlds where my situation is the same as in the actual world. Given (A) and (B), then, (CS) entails that my attitude of suspended judgment toward p is also correct.

Here is another example. I believe that *many advances are being made in the field of Artificial Intelligence*. But I suspend judgment about whether *machines will soon reach human-level intelligence*. On that basis, I come to suspend judgment about the (material) conditional: *if many advances are being made in the field of Artificial Intelligence, then machines will soon reach human-level intelligence*.

In the latter example, I transition from a state where I believe that p and I suspend judgment about q to a state where I suspend judgment about $(p \supset q)$ ('$\supset$' is the symbol

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[21]See McHugh and Way (2018) for a correctness-preservation account of good reasoning in general. I do not hereby mean to endorse McHugh and Way's proposal in its entirety. Whether good reasoning is always good (*qua* transition) in virtue of the fact that it preserves correctness is a complex question that I won't have the space to address here. For more discussion and criticism, see Hlobil (2019).

for the material conditional). This also looks like a good transition of thought. And, again, we can use (CS) to make sense of its goodness. Suppose that (C) I correctly believe that p, and (D) I correctly suspend judgment about q. Given (C), all the worlds where my situation is the same as in the actual world are worlds where p is true. Given (D), there are both q- and $\neg q$-worlds included among those worlds. So some of these worlds are worlds where both p and q are true, and some of them are worlds where p is true but q is false. That is: some of them satisfy $(p \supset q)$, others satisfy $\neg(p \supset q)$. In view of my situation, it might be that $(p \supset q)$ and it might be that $\neg(p \supset q)$, and (CS) says that my attitude of suspending judgment about $(p \supset q)$ is also correct.

The examples I just gave feature good transitions from/to agnostic attitudes. But there are also bad transitions involving agnostic attitudes. Consider the following case. Even though I believe that *Ana is in town* (p), I suspend judgment about whether *Ana is in her office* (q), and about whether *Ana is somewhere else in town* (r). I go from there and suspend judgment about the disjunction: *either Ana is in her office or she is somewhere else in town*. This is a bad transition. I go from my belief that p, suspended judgment about q and suspended judgment about r to suspended judgment about $(q \lor r)$—but $(q \lor r)$ must be true given that p is true. On the assumption that the attitudes I have transitioned from in this case are all correctly held by me, it follows from (CS) that my attitude of suspended judgment toward $(q \lor r)$ cannot be correct—for it is not the case that $\neg(q \lor r)$ might be true in view of my situation (we have assumed that I correctly believe that p, in which case the True Belief Rule tells us that p is true in all possible worlds where my situation is the same as in the actual one and, therefore, so is $(q \lor r)$). (CS) says that my transition does not preserve correctness in this case. The target transition is therefore categorized as a bad one, as expected.

To sum up, some transitions from/to attitudes of suspended judgment look like they are *good* transitions of thought, others look like they are bad ones at that. With (CS) under our belts, we have a theoretically promising way of drawing the line between the two: the good transitions are the ones that preserve correctness of attitudes, and the bad transitions are the ones that do not preserve correctness of attitudes. Of course, there are many other examples of transitions from/to agnostic attitudes, and I have only scratched the surface of this phenomenon here—a more systematic study of the relevant patterns of transitions is surely called for. It might even turn out that correctness-preserving transitions do not pair perfectly with what we pre-theoretically assume to be good transitions. But I take it that correctness preservation still captures *something* good about the target transitions, which can then be used to assess agnostic reasoning.[22]

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[22]For example, an agnostic about physicalism deserves praise for establishing her stance through a transition from suspended judgment about whether *zombies are possible* to suspended judgment about whether *physicalism is true*, given that she also believes that *physicalism is true if and only if zombies are not possible*. Accordingly, as we saw, this kind of transition preserves correctness of attitudes according to (CS) (we are only assessing the transition itself here, not the attitudes the agnostic has reasoned from). And a subject who suspends judgment about the disjunction *either zombies are possible or they are not possible* on the basis of her suspended judgment about each of its disjuncts does not deserve praise for making that transition. Accordingly, (CS) tells us that it fails to preserve correctness of attitudes.

5   More on situations

An obvious challenge to this paper's proposal is to explain what more exactly *situations* consist in. Formally, they are represented as sets of true propositions (true in the world the subject is in), and they are supposed to determine the modal basis relative to which possibility and necessity claims are made. But that notion doesn't seem to track the use of any natural language term, and so we have no pre-theoretical grip on which true propositions should count as part of a subject's situation.

I do not think, however, that such a technical notion has to track the use of any natural language term in order for it to have theoretical value. The very point of that notion is to deliver good consequences/make sense of claims we already accept when combined with (CS), and to do so in a way that adds unification to our epistemological theories. If it accomplishes that much, we can then adopt the framework that deploys that notion and address further questions we have no clear answers to—for example, whether some more complicated transitions involving suspended judgment are any good, or whether certain complex combinations of attitudes constitute conflicting doxastic states (because it is impossible for all of those attitudes to be correctly held in the same situation).

As we saw above, constructing situations by means of the True Belief Rule[23] *did* deliver good consequences—for example, the consequence that one should not suspend on what one knows, and that certain kinds of transitions are good or bad as they intuitively are. We address the question 'What should count as part of a subject's situation?' by testing which interpretations of that notion deliver the best results as it occurs in (CS)—which means that the True Belief Rule is at the very least a *prima facie* plausible contender for interpreting that notion (given its deliverances).

The question to be further explored here is, then: What other rules could be used to construct situations in addition to/as an alternative to the True Belief Rule? Going back to a thought I already hinted at in Section 2, we could instead use a Knowledge Rule here: a subject's situation is constituted by everything the subject knows to be the case.[24] In a sense, the Knowledge Rule is less inclusive than the True Belief Rule, since one can have true beliefs that do not constitute knowledge, but not vice-versa. But that does not mean that the combination of (CS) and the Knowledge Rule won't deliver the good consequences that the combination of (CS) and the True Belief Rule has delivered, albeit through different routes. For example, we could try and explain the conflict between believing that p and suspending judgment about p by pointing out that it is impossible for both of these attitudes to be at their epistemic bests at the same time (if the subject knows that p, then p is part of her situation set—and so it is not the case that both p and $\neg p$ might be true in view of her situation, which entails that suspended judgment cannot be correct, *ergo* it cannot be at its epistemic best).

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[23] The True Belief Rule is, again: if the subject believes that p at w and p is true at w, then $p \in f(w)$.

[24] Formally, this would be: if the subject knows that p at w, then $p \in f(w)$.

I will leave the exploration of alternative ways of constructing situations for future work, however, since there is no space to compare the alternatives in a more comprehensive manner in this paper (there is a plethora of theoretical possibilities to be investigated here). My goal so far was just to show that (CS) is a theoretically fruitful hypothesis, and that there are at least *some* plausible ways of interpreting situations that deliver good epistemological consequences and provide us a valuable tool with which to assess agnostic states and transitions.

Still, one might want to hear more about what the technical notion of a situation is supposed to pick out here (even though it is not supposed to capture the meaning of any natural language term, as its use is to be justified solely on the grounds of its theoretical fruitfulness).[25] The way I think of it is as a set of information that was somehow encoded or registered by a cognitive system (I am using 'information' as a *factive* notion here). It is an incomplete description or history of the world where the cognitive system is embedded in. Since only truths can be part of such a description, and a cognitive system can hold false beliefs, situations don't just amount to the totality of a cognitive system's beliefs. And this minimal characterization doesn't guarantee that a cognitive system's situation equals her total body of evidence, since false propositions may also count as evidence. And, even if evidence is also taken to be factive, situations might include more than just what is part of the cognitive system's body of evidence—information that has been encoded in that system but is not available to it as evidence (the system is not able to deploy that piece of information in reasoning and decision-making, say, because it has no knowledge or even belief toward that piece of information).

So I invite the reader to think (at least provisionally) of a subject's situation as the total information that is encoded by her cognitive system, where that total information is a set of facts that constitutes a partial description or story of the world. That partial story is bound to have some gaps, or to leave other parts of the complete story unresolved. A subject's attitude of suspension toward p is correct, then, when that set of facts doesn't yet settle whether p is true or false.

6 (CS) and the nature of suspension

There are different accounts of what suspended judgment is out there. A natural question to ask here is whether the hypothesis that suspension has correctness conditions in the form of (CS) is compatible with those accounts. Let me briefly make a case for a positive answer to this question.

6.1 The higher-order belief account

According to one view, suspended judgment is higher-order belief toward a specific type of propositional content. For example, consider the thesis that suspended judgment

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[25]I thank an anonymous referee for *Inquiry* for pressing me on this point.

about p is a belief to the effect that *one is not in a position to know whether p*,[26] or a belief to the effect that *one cannot yet tell whether or not p is true*.[27] Since beliefs have correctness conditions—and according to these views suspension is a kind of belief—it simply follows from this account that suspended judgment has correctness conditions. So the proposal I put forward above should not be at all surprising to defenders of the higher-order belief account of suspension. It is already part of their view that suspended judgment can be either a correct or an incorrect attitude for one to have.

In fact, the correctness conditions for suspension according to these accounts constitute candidate precisifications of the right hand side of (CS). Consider the first of the aforementioned proposals: the subject correctly suspends judgment about p if and only if (a*) the subject suspends judgment about p—that is, according to the present account, she believes that *she is not in a position to know whether p*, and (b*) she is not in a position to know whether p (what she believes is true). If we let K be an operator representing the relation of being in a position to know, then (b*) amounts to $(\neg Kp \wedge \neg K\neg p)$. We can then fetch a new operator P that is the dual of K, meaning that Pp is equivalent to $\neg K\neg p$. Since the truth-value of formulas of types Kp and Pp are relative to the informational state of the agent (or the knowledge she already has in the world she is in), $(Pp \wedge P\neg p)$ is a way of interpreting the locution 'in view of the subject's situation, it might be that p and it might be that $\neg p$' that occurs in (CS). In this case, the 'might' of (CS) is again read as an epistemic modality, in that the subject's situation is constituted by what the subject knows to be true, or the total information possessed by her (either implicitly or explicitly).

Clearly, then, not only is the proposal that I presented above *compatible* with the higher-order belief view of suspension, but there are precisifications of (CS) that are *entailed* by different versions of this view.[28]

6.2   The credence account

An alternative view says that suspended judgment is *middling credence*.[29] Credences (or degrees of belief) toward propositions are measured by real numbers in the unit interval. A middling credence is a credence that falls within a subinterval $[1 - t, t]$, for some $t \in [0, 1]$. This goes naturally with the idea that t is a threshold above which credences constitute belief, and $1 - t$ is a threshold below which credences constitute disbelief.[30] So the subject suspends judgment about p if and only if she has a credence

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[26] This is roughly what Rosenkranz (2007) takes the *agnostic position* regarding p to be—but see Fn. 17 above.

[27] See Raleigh (forthcoming).

[28] Of course, there will be versions of the higher-order belief account that do not entail (CS) (for example: suspension is belief to the effect that one's evidence is neutral regarding p, where evidence *is not* factive). But any version of the higher-order belief account will already tell us that suspension has correctness conditions. So the spirit of this paper's proposal will be preserved by these accounts either way. An advantage of my arguments for the conclusion that suspension has correctness conditions is that they do not depend on any particular view about what suspended judgment is (objections to the higher-order belief account are not thereby objections to my arguments).

[29] See Hájek (1998), but also Sturgeon (2010) and Friedman (2013b) for criticism.

[30] See Foley (1993, ch. 4), Leitgeb (2014), and Pettigrew (2016, ch. 4) for different versions of the so-called 'Lockean Thesis'. See also Buchak (2014), Littlejohn (2015) and Staffel (2016) for criticism.

of $m \in [1 - t, t]$ that p is true.

Notice that those who endorse the credence account of belief are already committed to the claim that *some* credences have correctness conditions. For if beliefs can be either correct or incorrect, and belief *just is* high credence, it follows that some credences can be either correct or incorrect (namely, at least those that constitute belief). To go from there and say that credences *in general* have correctness conditions is facilitated by the fact that both the correctness conditions for belief and those for suspended judgment can be cashed out in the very same framework: the one I have been exploring above (see again Section 3 for the recapture of the standard correctness conditions for belief). Different intervals of credences will again correspond to different attitudes from the usual menu of doxastic options, and thereby to their correctness conditions, thus:

(HC) A subject correctly maintains high credence ($> t$) that p if and only if (α) the subject maintains that high credence, and (β) p must be true in view of that subject's situation (which means that p is true),[31]

(MC) A subject correctly maintains middling credence ($\in [1 - t, t]$) toward p if only if (α') the subject maintains that middling credence, and (β') in view of that subject's situation, it might be that p and it might be that $\neg p$.

The defender of the credence account of belief and suspension can coherently adopt these correctness conditions. After all, according to this view, we can always substitute 'belief' for 'high credence' and 'suspended judgment' for 'middling credence' in sentences such as (HC) and (MC).

So the proposal advanced in this paper is at least *consistent* with the credence account of belief and suspension. In fact, that proposal can be seen as a way of extending and making more precise the commitment that defenders of the credence account already have to the claim that some credences are correct. (In general, defenders of the credence account should be ready to apply the terms that we use to assess categorical attitudes to credences as well—terms like 'justified', 'knowledge' and 'correct'). Of course, maybe credences themselves are not suitable attitudes for being assessed as correct or incorrect, and that goes for middling credence as well as it goes for high credence. But that is a problem for the credence account of belief and suspended judgment itself, quite independently of whether those who defend it will end up endorsing (CS) as well.[32]

Similar points could be made about accounts of suspended judgment that represent neutral credal states through intervals of point-valued credences.[33] What matters here is that either variety of credence account is trying to capture the *neutrality* of suspension in some way or another. The idea behind (CS) is that, where correctness is concerned,

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[31]It follows from (β) that p is true because the subject's situation is constituted by *true* propositions only. All the propositions that are part of a subject's situation set $f(w)$ are true in the world w that the subject is in—and so are the propositions that *must* be true given the truth of those propositions.

[32]See Fantl and McGrath (2009, Ch. 5) and also Ross and Schroeder (2014) for this objection to reducibility accounts of belief.

[33]See van Fraassen (1989, p. 193), and also Sturgeon (2010) for the idea of suspended judgment as 'thick confidence'.

the neutrality of suspension about p is supposed to correspond to the neutrality of some relevant part of reality (some set of facts) with respect to whether p is true. And that can be so independently of how one is going to make more precise sense of the neutrality of suspension—whether it is through single point-valued credences or intervals of point-valued credences. (The correctness conditions will be the same all the way, just like in the belief case. For example, independently of which threshold t is chosen by the defender of the credence account of belief, and independently of whether that threshold is fixed by context, beliefs are correct only when they are true).

6.3   The inquiring attitude account

The most well-developed account of the nature of suspended judgment in the current literature is Friedman's *inquiring* or *interrogative attitude* account (Friedman 2013, 2017). According to this view, the content of an agnostic attitude is an interrogative construction of the form *Is it the case that p?* To suspend judgment about p amounts to being in an inquiring state with respect to whether p is true (Friedman 2017).[34]

How does (CS) fare with this account? Roughly, we could say that a subject's inquiring attitude towards p counts as correct or fitting[35] if and only if the set of truths that constitutes her situation does not already contain the answer to the question of whether p is true—meaning that both p and $\neg p$ might be true as far as the joint truth of all the propositions in that set goes. If the subject's situation already contains the answer to the question of whether p is true, then her interrogative attitude toward p does not fit the facts that constitute her situation. (It is important to keep in mind here the distinction between *correctness* or fit with reality and other epistemological notions such as *rationality* or *justification*. The subject's agnostic attitude might be justified by her total evidence even though it is not correct—just like beliefs can be justified and false at the same time).

Perhaps defenders of Friedman's account would want to subscribe to the Knowledge Rule for constructing situations: if one already *knows* enough to establish the answer to a given question, then it isn't correct for one to be asking oneself that question. It is only correct for one to inquire into whether p when one doesn't already have the information needed to settle the issue. Correct suspension connects to action here: it demands collecting more evidence, interrogating people, testing hypotheses, etc.—activities that could make the agent more knowledgeable about the relevant topic and bring her to settle her inquiry. Correct suspension means that one does not yet know enough to answer a given question, and one needs to gather more information in order to be able to do so.

In any case, it seems that (CS) is perfectly compatible with the inquiring attitude

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[34]See Archer (2018, forthcoming), Raleigh (forthcoming) and Masny (forthcoming) for objections to Friedman's account.

[35]Again, I'm using the notions of fittingness and correctness interchangeably here. It just sounds more idiomatic to use the notion of fit in this particular context.

account of suspension. Nothing prevents defenders of this account from thinking that inquiring or interrogative attitudes can also be objectively successful ones, in the sense that they can fit or fail to fit some part of reality (independently of whether the inquirer herself is aware that the fittingness relation holds/fails to hold).

7 *Ex ante* and *ex post* correctness

We can draw a distinction between *ex ante* and *ex post* correctness, or between *it being correct for one to* have a certain attitude (whether or not one already has that attitude) and *one's correctly holding* that attitude. This is analogous to the distinction between *ex ante* and *ex post* justification (see Goldman 1979). The fact that one justifiably believes that p (*ex post* justification) entails that it is justified for one to believe that p (*ex ante* justification). But the converse is not true, as it can be justified for one to believe that p even though one does not even believe that p. Similarly, the fact that one correctly believes that p (*ex post* correctness) entails that it is correct for one to believe that p (*ex ante* correctness). But the converse is not true, as it can be correct for one to believe that p even though one does not even believe that p.[36]

(CS) and (CB) from above give us the conditions for *ex post* correctness of suspended judgment and belief, respectively. What about *ex ante* correctness, however? You might think, together with Goldman (1979) that *ex ante* justification requires at least the possibility of *ex post* justification, in some nomic sense of possibility. So *ex ante* correctness would similarly require the possibility of *ex post* correctness: it is correct for the subject to believe that p when p is true *and* it is possible for the subject to correctly believe that p. This additional condition on *ex ante* correctness will prove to be relevant here, as the reader will shortly see.

With that distinction in place, one might object to my proposal as follows. Suppose that (CS) is true. If the True Belief Rule is used to construct situations then, as we saw, it is impossible for one to correctly believe that p and correctly suspend judgment about p at the same time. In other words, simultaneous *ex post* correctness of belief and suspension toward the same proposition is impossible. But simultaneous *ex ante* correctness of belief and suspension toward the same proposition is possible. For if p is true and it is possible for the subject to correctly believe that p, then it is correct for the subject to believe that p. And if at the same time the subject's situation leaves it open whether p is true and it is possible for the subject to correctly suspend judgment about p then, according to (CS), it is also correct for the subject to suspend judgment about p. So it is both *ex ante* correct for the subject to believe that p and *ex ante* correct

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[36] As an anonymous referee for *Inquiry* has correctly pointed out, there is a disanalogy between *ex post* justification and *ex post* correctness, in that the former has a basing constraint saying that the belief must be formed in the right way, whereas *ex post* correctness simply consists of one's believing a proposition that is true. The other points of analogy mentioned above, however, are the ones that matter the most both to make the objection that I will address here and to respond to it. I also thank the same anonymous referee for suggesting that *ex ante* correctness requires the possibility of *ex post* correctness, as I will assume below.

for the subject to suspend judgment about *p*. Of course, if the subject goes on and believes *p* then the latter claim isn't true anymore, simply because her situation has now changed (assuming the True Belief Rule). But, until then, *ex ante* correctness of belief and *ex ante* correctness of suspension will co-exist—and this might strike the reader as the wrong thing to say.

There is more: even *ex post* correctness of suspension is compossible with *ex ante* correctness of belief, since the fact that one's situation leaves it open whether *p* is the case is compossible with the fact that *p* is actually true and that it is possible for the subject to correctly believe that *p*. If (CS) were true, then, we could also consistently say the following: the subject correctly suspends judgment about *p* (*ex post* correctness), even though it is correct for her to believe that *p* (*ex ante* correctness). This again might strike the reader as the wrong thing to say.

But notice, first, that *ex ante* correctness does not agglomerate. That is to say, the fact that:

CB∧CS: It is *ex ante* correct for one to believe that *p* and it is *ex ante* correct for one to suspend judgment about *p*,

does not entail that:

C[B∧S]: It is *ex ante* correct for one to [believe that *p* and suspend judgment about *p*].

For, again, it is impossible for one to correctly believe that *p* and correctly suspend judgment about *p* at the same time. Therefore, it is impossible for one to correctly [believe that *p* and suspend judgment about *p*].[37] But it is *ex ante* correct for one to [believe that *p* and suspend judgment about *p*] only if it is possible for one to correctly [believe that *p* and suspend judgment about *p*]. My *modus tollens*, then, it follows that it is not *ex ante* correct for one to [believe that *p* and suspend judgment about *p*]—even though it is *ex ante* correct for one to believe that *p* and it is *ex ante* correct for one to suspend judgment about *p*. The impression that it is wrong for us to say that it is *ex ante* correct for one to believe that *p* and it is *ex ante* correct for one to suspend judgment about *p* might as well stem from the impression that it is wrong for us to say that it is *ex ante* correct for one to [believe that *p* and suspend judgment about *p*]. But, since *ex ante* correctness does not agglomerate, again, the former does not entail the latter. C[B∧S] is false even when CB∧CS is true.

Second, notice that other normative notions exhibit a similar pattern. Right now, before doing anything, I am permitted to drive and I am permitted to text my friend (both going forward). But I am not permitted to [drive and text], as it is not possible for me to permissibly drive and permissibly text my friend at the same time. In general,

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[37] *Ex post* correctness naturally distributes over conjunctions: if one correctly [believes that *p* and suspends judgment about *p*] then one correctly believes that *p* and one correctly suspends judgment about *p*. So if the latter isn't possible then the former isn't possible either.

it can be the case that: (a) one is permitted to A going forward, (b) one is permitted to B going forward, but (c) one is not permitted to [A and B], as it is impossible for one to permissibly do both A and B at the same time. And even if *I am* driving—and permissibly so—I may still be permitted to text my friend going forward. If I were to do the latter, however, I would have to stop driving (in order not to break any laws). What matters is that I cannot simultaneously do both.

Similarly, right now it may be correct for me to suspend judgment about p and correct for me to believe that p, given what my situation is and given that p is true. But it is not correct for me to [believe that p and suspend judgment about p], as I cannot correctly hold both of these attitudes at the same time. And even if I go on and correctly suspend judgment about p, it will still be correct for me to believe that p. By doing the latter, however, I'd have to stop suspending judgment about p (in order for all my attitudes to be correct). Notice how the True Belief Rule validates the last step: my situation changes as I form new true beliefs. If I were to correctly believe that p, then my situation would necessitate p—in which case suspended judgment about p would not be a correct attitude for me to have anymore.

So, as long as *ex post* correctness of belief and *ex post* correctness of suspension are not compossible—which has the consequence that it is never *ex ante* correct for one to [believe that p and suspend judgment about p] at the same time—I don't see anything intrinsically wrong with being committed to the compossibility of *ex ante*/*ex post* correctness of suspension and *ex ante* correctness of belief. If this were a good reason to reject (CS), then it should also be a good reason to reject the permissibility conditions for actions that make situations such as the one mentioned above possible (similarly for other normative notions that exhibit a similar structure).[38] Furthermore, why should that compossibility bother us if the 'real deal' is ruled out, that is, if the situation where one correctly believes that p and correctly suspends judgment about p at the same time is simply impossible?

8   Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have explored the hypothesis that suspended judgment has correctness conditions, just like beliefs do. I suggested that the correctness conditions for suspension are captured by (CS), and I motivated this proposal on general theoretical grounds: the hypothesis that suspension has those correctness conditions contributes unification to

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[38]Relatedly, see Goble (2013) for different attempts to deal with conflicting obligations in deontic logic. Notice, however, that the proposal that I have advanced so far does not necessarily give rise to conflicting obligations. There would be conflicting obligations if we had norms of the forms (where 'O' is the 'ought' operator): $O(p \supset Bp)$ (believe that p if p is true) and $O(\text{both } p \text{ and } \neg p \text{ might be true given } f(w) \supset Sp)$ (suspend judgment on p if both p and $\neg p$ might be true given your situation). On the condition that ($p \wedge$ both p and $\neg p$ might be true given $f(w)$), you could only satisfy both norms by believing that p and suspending judgment about p at the same time. But the mistake was in the original norms themselves. $O(Bp \supset p)$ (believe that p only if p is true) and $O(Sp \supset \text{both } p \text{ and } \neg p \text{ might be true given } f(w))$ (suspend on p only if both p and $\neg p$ might be true given your situation) do a much better job at capturing what doxastic obligations we have (if any) vis-a-vis correctness.

our epistemological theories, it vindicates core epistemological claims that we already accept, and it provides us with a new tool to assess agnostic modes of reasoning (in a way that matches our pre-theoretical assessments).

This paper is a first step toward a more comprehensive study of the idea that suspension has correctness conditions, as well as the theoretical benefits that stem from different proposals regarding those conditions (e.g., alternative semantics for the relational 'might', different construals of situations, etc.). As we saw in the previous section, there will surely be challenges to this idea. But I think the potential theoretical value in it makes it well worth being explored further.[39]

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