

Why Suspend Judging? *

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1 Introduction

Philosophers have been thinking about suspension of judgment for nearly as long as they've been thinking about anything. Contemporary discussions have it placed as traditional epistemology's other doxastic attitude. Nonetheless, here is only limited consensus about the nature of the state and generally very little said about its point or purpose or role in our doxastic lives (think, for instance, about how much on this score has been said about suspension's wildly popular bedfellow, belief). In this paper I want to provide a framework within which we can begin to answer the titular question here – why suspend judging? The framework will tell us more both about the nature and function of suspension of judgment as well as give us some guidance as to its “normative profile” (when we should/are permitted/are justified/have reason to, etc. suspend judging). The general thought is that suspension of judgment is closely tied to inquiry. In fact I want to argue that one is inquiring into some matter if and only if one is suspended on the matter.¹

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¹Talking about 'the state of suspended judgment/suspension of judgment' can be a bit cumbersome. As such I will often just call the attitude 'suspension' or say that a subject 'suspends about ...' or 'is suspended'. I take it that this is also the state that people are talking about when they are talking about “withholding belief” although I won't talk in those terms. I think that it is also fine to call the state of suspension 'agnosticism' and to call the suspended subject 'agnostic'. That term though is somewhat mired in discussions of religious opinion and so can bring along some unwanted connotations here. Moreover, one might think that there are some cases in which only one of 'suspension of judgment' and 'agnosticism' apply. My own view is that these are coextensive (and so that everything I say here about suspension of judgment should also be said about agnosticism), but for simplicity's sake I just stick to 'suspension' talk (this is in keeping with typical discussions across epistemology as well).

The first section of this paper works on clarifying some of the main elements of the discussion to come. The next argues that inquiry entails suspension of judgment and the one after that that suspending judgment entails inquiring as well. The first, ground clearing portion of this paper is perhaps longer than I'd like it to be, but in this case, given that we are not quite entering into a well-defined debate, I think that it's helpful if various elements of the framework are made explicit at the outset. In some cases this will help to deflect objections or concerns that might have otherwise arisen later in the paper. I could have waited until the objections arose, but I think it makes more sense to try to get things clear right from the start. This will also help the main arguments move more smoothly once we get to them.

2 Ground clearing

In this initial section I'll try to clarify some basic features of suspension of judgment and inquiry that are especially relevant for the discussion to come, I'll bring out the force of the titular question a bit more, and then explain the view about suspension and inquiry to be argued for here, tracing it back to some of the earliest accounts of suspension of judgment that we have.

2.1 Suspension of judgment: questions and conflicts

Sometimes epistemologists use 'suspended judgment' to pick out a state in which a subject lacks explicit belief on some matter and nothing more. That said, many seem to agree that there is more to suspending judgment than this. In particular, many seem to want to think of suspended judgment as an attitude in its own right, rather than the mere lack of belief. This paper takes this sort of "attitudinal" approach to suspension of judgment as its starting point.²

It is easy to see how one is pushed to thinking of suspension as a genuine attitude, rather than, say, the mere lack of opinion. Believing neither p nor $\neg p$ doesn't look sufficient for suspending about those propositions. Typical worries stem from

²In contemporary epistemology we can find this sort of thought in the familiar tripartite division of the doxastic. I take it that this has its roots in Chisholm (1966) and the like. Here the thought is that there are three possible doxastic attitudes that a subject can take towards some proposition – she can believe the proposition, disbelieve it, or suspend judgment about it. Given that disbelieving p is typically identified with simply believing $\neg p$, the "tripartite" division is perhaps better thought of as a bipartite division – according to these accounts there are two distinct sorts of doxastic attitudes, belief and suspension.

thoughts about ungraspable propositions or ones never actually considered. With respect to the property of neither believing p nor disbelieving p , Wedgwood (2002) says, “even rocks and numbers have *that* property”. As Friedman (2013c) argues, adding some bells and whistles to non-belief (not believing either a proposition or its negation) doesn’t seem to help much either. For instance, just adding that the subject consider the relevant matter won’t do, for the considering might be brief and incomplete and merely accidentally connected to the non-belief. And adding some sort of cognitive act or event seems misguided as well: one is suspended when one is in some temporally extended state of mind. One is suspended on some matter when one has some sort of opinion on the matter. Sturgeon (2010) characterizes this opinion as a “committed neutrality” (which is neither to say that we have to be entirely committed or entirely neutral). The thought that emerges then is that suspension is an attitude – a kind of neutral doxastic attitude.

Suspension reports are most naturally made with interrogative complements, rather than declarative ones. ‘Alice is suspending judgment that it is going to rain later’ is not a natural language construction. But ‘Alice is suspending judgment about whether it’s going to rain later’ is. And so are most ascriptions of the form ‘S suspends/suspended/is suspending judgment about Q ’ in which ‘S’ is replaced with the name of a subject and ‘ Q ’ with an indirect interrogative sentence, e.g., ‘who went to the party’, ‘where to buy an Italian newspaper’, and so on.³ This sets suspension ascriptions apart from both belief ascriptions (‘believe’ embeds declaratives, but not interrogatives) and knowledge ascriptions (‘know’ embeds both). Picking up on this, there have been some recent suggestions that we should be thinking of suspended judgement as a “question-directed” attitude (rather than a propositional attitude).⁴

I am going to use the relevant sorts of interrogative constructions throughout and take it that what is suspended on is a question. Questions are abstract objects although they are not propositions as these are standardly understood (for instance, questions are not truth-conditional). While I don’t think that considera-

³Suspension reports can also sometimes be made with noun phrase complements, e.g., ‘S suspended judgment about the result of the match’. The subject matter of “the match” is often thought to be something very much like a general question or set of questions about the match. See, e.g., Lewis (1988) for discussion.

⁴See, e.g., Friedman (2013a) and Booth (forthcoming). For an earlier and related thought: Higginbotham and May (1981), inspired by Levi (1967), claim that a subject’s suspension of judgment should be represented with a partition of the “possible states of nature”, which tracks one prominent way of thinking about questions.

tions of syntax alone should push us to this shift in our thinking about the contents of our “suspendings”, they certainly should be taken seriously. From the perspective of the attitude itself (rather than the attitude ascriptions), I don’t think that the thought that the object or content of a suspending is a single proposition has much plausibility even. In “suspending about a proposition” one suspends about the truth of that proposition, about whether that proposition is true or false. Someone keen on thinking of suspended judgment as a propositional attitude then should at least be averting to proposition-negation pairs. But ‘whether’ questions (sometimes called *polar* questions) do the job just as well in these sorts of basic cases, i.e., one suspends about whether it’s going to rain later rather than the propositions that it will and that it won’t. Moreover, since we can make sense of suspension reports with the whole range of interrogative complements (‘what’, ‘where’, ‘who’, and so on), the “propositionalist” about suspension will have to tell us which propositions are being suspended on when these ascriptions are true, e.g., when it’s true that S is suspended about why grass is green or how the hacker accessed the bank’s computers. This is no easy task. Again, the far more natural approach here is to just take these ascriptions on their face, taking it that what is suspended on is the question itself.

Perhaps some of what I say in what’s to come could be re-cast in purely propositional terms, leaving questions aside. I think that the discussion would be far more cumbersome, and more pressingly, inaccurate. Given this, I think the discussion does well to move forward with the questions-as-contents thought here. Part of what we get in taking suspension’s relation to questions seriously is a perspective on that attitude that brings it in line with other familiar folk-psychological states, and easily ties it in with some canonical accounts of suspended judgment (more on both to come). So perhaps this paper as a whole constitutes an additional piece of evidence for suspension’s question-directedness.

Linguists have had a lot to say about questions since it is now commonplace to treat questions as the semantic contents of interrogative sentences, e.g., ‘Who went to the party?’ (an interrogative sentence) has the question of who went to the party (an abstract object) as its semantic content. The details of these accounts needn’t occupy us here. One quick thought worth drawing out: while questions are not propositions, questions have answers and those are typically thought to be propositions. The question of whether Michael stole the watch, has as possible answers that he did steal it and that he didn’t. In general, questions have a true

answer at a world, and also other merely possible, but false ones. If at w Michael stole the watch, then the question of whether he stole the watch has p : *Michael stole the watch* as its true (complete) answer at w , but also has $\neg p$ as a possible (complete) answer at w .⁵ And the question of who stole the watch also has p as a true answer at w , and all sorts of other propositions about possible watch-stealers as possible answers at w .⁶ When I use ‘answers’, unless I say otherwise, I mean possible answers. And for the most part I will focus the discussion on ascriptions with simple embedded polar questions, i.e, embedded ‘whether’ interrogatives.

As I said, I am taking the attitudinal approach to suspension for granted which now entails that S ’s not believing that Michael stole the watch and not believing that he didn’t steal the watch is not sufficient for her suspending judgment about whether Michael stole the watch. In fact, I don’t think that her lacking those beliefs is necessary either. I take it that there is an initial temptation to say that lacking these sorts of answer-beliefs is necessary and that a subject who is suspended about whether Michael stole the watch cannot also believe that he did/didn’t steal it. I think that this initial temptation should be resisted.⁷

It is commonly thought that subjects can have conflicting beliefs at a time. That is, it is often simply taken as a datum that a subject can both believe p and believe $\neg p$ at a single time. Certainly, everyday experience taken on its face makes this sort of thing look not only possible but commonplace. The commonplace cases are the ones in which we fail to realize, or are not aware that we believe both things at once. We know we’ve seen some film, but when asked about it again we temporarily forget and come to think we haven’t. These are completely mundane and familiar sorts of cases. There can be inconsistencies across our (typically vast) doxastic database. But once we are happy to allow for inconsistencies amongst our beliefs and admit that suspension too is a doxastic attitude, why should we deny the possibility of other sorts of doxastic conflict? Just as a subject can be conflicted

⁵At any possible world that truly answers a question we can pick out the logically strongest true answer to the question at that world – this is the question’s true, complete answer at that world (every weaker answer can be thought of as a true, partial answer at that world). And we can say something similar about complete (vs. merely partial) possible answers.

⁶In fact, some have identified questions qua abstract objects with sets of these possible answers. See, e.g., Hamblin (1973), Karttunen (1977), Groenendijk and Stokhof (1982) and Groenendijk and Stokhof (1984), for some central “sets of answers” accounts.

⁷I want to put aside Frege/Kripke-style cases here. I think there is a route into the thought that belief and suspension are compossible via these sorts of moves (see Salmon (1995) for some good discussion), but I think we can get there even if we want to think of contents as very fine-grained or think of the relevant attitude ascriptions as involving quantification over (fixed) guises.

with respect to her beliefs on some matter, she can be conflicted with respect to her beliefs and suspendings on some matter. This is just another sort of doxastic conflict, much the same as the belief conflict. Of course, most will want to say that a subject who both suspends about Q and believes one of Q 's complete answers is not only in some sort of conflicted doxastic state or has incoherent doxastic commitments, but is in a normatively defective (or otherwise less-than-ideal) state. But this is par for this course. In the end, I think that if we are happy to accept the possibility of doxastic conflict with respect to belief, then we should accept the possibility of doxastic conflict across the board, which means denying that “answer-non-belief” (not believing any of the answers to some Q) is even necessary for being suspended about some question.⁸

To be clear, we are in the following situation now. Take a polar question Q , its two (complete) possible answers p and $\neg p$, a subject S and a time t . With respect to our two doxastic attitudes – belief and suspension – there are now eight possible doxastic states for S to be in at t (and every S will be in exactly one such state at t): three in which she has exactly one of belief in p , belief in $\neg p$, or suspension, three in which she has exactly two of those, one in which she has all three (ouch) and one in which she has none of them.⁹

2.2 Why suspend judging?

I think that once we start to think of suspension as a genuine doxastic attitude, this question presses on us with extra force. One way to see this is to generalize the (very helpful) metaphor of the belief box. To say that some p is in S 's belief box is to say that S has a specific sort of attitude towards p , one often largely characterized functionally. We can think of boxes as roughly functionally individuated. Once we think of suspension as an attitude with a specific content then we should also start to wonder about suspension boxes. Questions go in suspension boxes, but what sort of functional profile does a suspension box have? Why put a question in

⁸Some of the sorts of cases discussed in this paragraph have prompted some to claim that our doxastic states are “fragmented” or “compartmentalized”. Rather than our having a single doxastic corpus we have many. Different fragments may regulate different bits of behaviour, and these fragments are not fully integrated with one another. See Lewis (1982) and Egan (2008) for some discussion. Those inclined towards this sort of “compartmentalization” picture might have even less difficulty accepting the compossibility of belief and suspension: shouldn't it then be easy to find cases according to which relative to one fragment a subject believes that Michael stole the watch, and relative to another she suspends about whether he did?

⁹I am simply putting aside a number of – very interesting – issues that arise here in thinking about suspending about non-polar questions.

a suspension box? Why suspend judging?

I take it that one sort of answer that people are initially tempted to give is something about one's deficient epistemic standing with respect to *Q*. Why suspend about *Q*? Because one is not in the position to know *Q* or because one's evidence fails to settle *Q* or because one has insufficient reason to believe *Q*'s answers (and so on).¹⁰ But this sort of answer feels inadequate or ungrounded once we admit that suspending is a matter of taking up some attitude rather than merely resisting some. Very plausibly, if my epistemic standing with respect to *Q* is deficient in the relevant senses, then I shouldn't believe any of *Q*'s answers. But if suspending is different from merely not believing, then the claim that I shouldn't believe any answers is not equivalent to the claim that I should suspend. Should I do this other thing too? Why, as a rational subject whose epistemic circumstances are relevantly deficient, would I ever adopt this attitude of "committed neutrality" with respect to *Q* rather than simply not believe any of *Q*'s answers? Again, why put a question into the relevant box rather than simply not put answers into some other boxes?

This problem potentially cuts deep. One version of the worry is something like this: when a subject's epistemic standing is deficient in the relevant respects there are two permissible states for her to be in, and so we need some further story to tell us why a rational subject is in one rather than the other, and in particular why she would take up an attitude rather than not. But there's another version of the worry as well: the thought that one ought not to believe any of *Q*'s answers when one's epistemic circumstances are dire is a plausible claim, but if suspension is not identical to answer-non-belief, then that claim simply isn't a claim about suspension. And without knowing more about suspension, about what sort of attitude it is, about its function in cognition, we can't say whether there's an analogous claim for suspension; in fact, it's hard to say anything about its normative profile at all.

An analogy with belief is helpful here. Rational subjects believe when their epistemic situations have a certain character – when they are in the position to

¹⁰On 'knowing *Q*'. We often make knowledge *Q*/knowledge-*wh* ascriptions – we say that *S* knows who went to the party, or *S* knows where to buy an Italian newspaper. Nonetheless many think that knowledge is a propositional attitude, rather than a genuinely question-directed one. Here knowing who went to the party is often thought to just be a matter of knowing some proposition(s), e.g., that *X*, *Y* and *Z* went to the party. Knowing-*wh* is, on this sort of account, thought reducible to knowing-*that*. Some resist this sort of reduction (see [Masto \(2010\)](#) for a good overview of the debate here). For the purposes of this piece we can assume that knowing *Q* (at *w*) is reducible to knowing *p* (at *w*), where *p* is *Q*'s true answer at *w*. I think that some forms of non-reductionism would force some additional (interesting) twists and turns in the discussion. I don't think these would have a significant impact on the conclusions though, so I leave the complications aside for now.

know or have sufficient evidence (and so on). But we have a good deal to say about why rational believing looks like that. We can talk about epistemic goals or goods like knowledge and true or justified belief. We can talk about the relation between belief and action and the value of having beliefs that are true and knowing for acting. Rational subjects follow their evidence to belief exactly because evidence is a guide to truth and following evidence is a way of coming to know and we have some idea of why we might want true beliefs and knowledge. We have no story like this in the case of suspension of judgment. These attitudes are not candidates for knowledge (or even truth if their contents are questions). Why follow our epistemic standing to suspension then? Why suspend judging?

2.3 The view

My aim here is to propose an account of suspension of judgment to help answer our titular question. The view I want to defend has old roots, or at least is inspired by some truly canonical views of suspension of judgement. We can start by thinking about what happens at the start of the *Meditations*. There Descartes effectively sets out to inquire into the truth of all things (or some relevant subset thereof). The first step on this inquiry? Suspending judgment. Anything whose truth needs to be inquired into, is called into question by suspending on it before it is investigated. While there is, of course, much debate about what exactly Descartes is doing at the start of the *Meditations*, I think what we find is a general thought that suspension is closely tied to inquiry, and a specific thought that suspending is something one does in order to genuinely inquire.¹¹

We can find a tight connection between suspension and inquiry in one of the earliest discussions of suspension as well. And I think that the view I want to propose here has this Pyrrhonian view as its closest relative. Sextus Empiricus, the main recorder of Pyrrhonian scepticism, portrays the Pyrrhonists as inquirers or investigators – ‘sceptic’ literally means searcher or investigator – and insists that what distinguishes them from all the other philosophical schools is their persistent engagement in inquiry.¹² For Sextus the (Pyrrhonian) sceptic suspends on all mat-

¹¹The “method of universal doubt” – the method Descartes deploys at the start of his inquiry in the *Meditations* – might not be his only method of inquiry. Although he does say things in both the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* and the *Discourse on the Method* that do make it seem as though he thinks that all inquiry ought to proceed in accordance with that method. For a good discussion see, Broughton (2003).

¹²It is not obvious how we’re to make this very prevalent aspect of Sextus’ account of Pyrrhonian scepticism consistent with various other parts, e.g., that suspension leads to tranquility (*ataraxia*).

ters.¹³ So one thought here is that the sceptic – the suspender – is distinguished from all others by her persistent engagement in inquiry.

Here are a couple of passages from *Outlines of Scepticism (PH)* (Sextus Empiricus (2000)),

Those who are called Dogmatists in the proper sense of the word think that they have discovered the truth – for example, the schools of Aristotle and Epicurus and the Stoics, and some others. The schools of Clitomachus and Carneades, and other Academics, have asserted that things cannot be apprehended. And the Sceptics are still investigating. (PH 1.13)

For those who agree that they do not know how objects are in their nature may continue without inconsistency to investigate them: those who think they know them accurately may not. For the latter, the investigation is already at its end, as they suppose, whereas for the former, the reason why any investigation is undertaken – that is, the idea that they have not found the answer – is fully present. (PH 2.11)

Again, and in general, we find the thought that suspension is closely tied to inquiry. More specifically, I think that we can extract the following line of thought from Sextus: the suspender is essentially an inquirer, and it is only the suspender who is an inquirer. I want to argue for a version of this thought here. My main argument in the paper will be for the following biconditional: one is inquiring into a question *Q* if and only if one is suspended about *Q*.

This is obviously not the only account of suspension of judgment out there. Some others reject the attitudinal approach in general, (e.g., DePaul (2004)), and those who accept it part ways over what sort of attitude suspension is or involves. Some options: middling credence (e.g., Hájek (1998), Christensen (2009)), mushy credence/confidence (e.g., Sturgeon (2010)), as involving higher-order doxastic or epistemic states like believing that one doesn't know *p* (e.g., Bergmann (2005), Rosenkranz (2007)). And there are other variations still. It is not my plan to argue against these other accounts. Although I've already said a little bit about why

For some relevant discussion of how to square some different aspects of Sextus' views about inquiry and suspension, see (e.g.), Palmer (2000), Striker (2001), Fine (2010), Vogt (2011), and Grgić (2012).

¹³Although I take that this is an acceptable claim to make about the attitude of the Pyrrhonian sceptic, it too has been a subject of controversy. See the excellent discussions in Burnyeat and Frede (1997) for some of this.

I think some of them must be wrong, I am not going to speak to others. In particular, I am not going to say anything about whether suspending might not be given a thoroughly credence-theoretic treatment. Thinking this way about suspension might help us to get an answer to our titular question, but I want to argue for a different one. Suspension was born and finds a natural home in a more “traditional” framework and I think it’s worth thinking about what work it might be doing there.¹⁴

All of that said, I do think that all of the accounts of suspension mentioned are in agreement about the thought that suspension of judgment is some sort of neutral state. And I agree. The view I want to propose simply cashes out this neutrality or indecision by way of something like a commitment to continued inquiry. So while, as we will see, the view to be presented is revisionary in some respects, it is nonetheless grounded in this central conception of the state.

The last part of our ground-clearing section focuses in a little bit more on the second key player in this discussion: inquiry.

2.4 Inquiry

It is important to distinguish different uses of ‘inquire’ here and so fix on the relevant one. Some books and speech acts are called inquiries (one sense of ‘inquire’ is roughly synonymous with ‘ask’). The sense of inquiry that is central to this discussion though is one that picks out something that a subject is engaged in, perhaps something best thought of as an activity. This activity is sometimes conceived of as a series of actions, but inquiry is not mere action. For instance, while “gathering evidence” is thought to be an action that is central to inquiry, I take it that any natural understanding of this has it as necessarily involving changes to one’s doxastic state. One has gathered new evidence only if one acquires new evidence and acquiring new evidence means acquiring new beliefs or new knowledge. More importantly still, the activity of inquiry has at its core a particular sort of mental state and doing things like “gathering evidence” or other inquiry-related acts is neither necessary nor sufficient for having that attitude. Or so I’ll argue now.

Imagine a detective inquiring into some robbery. The mere fact that the detective notices the robbery is not yet sufficient to make it that she is investigating it or inquiring into it. Neither is her noticing and coming to know all sorts of things

¹⁴For a discussion of why we should resist reducing suspension to degrees of belief, see [Friedman \(2013b\)](#).

about the robbery: recording facts at the crime scene or about the crime. Perhaps she's just taking some notes for fun, with no concern for finding the robbers. "Collecting evidence" that bears on the crime is not sufficient for similar reasons: cleaning up the crime scene does not, on its own, amount to an inquiry into the crime. Those who are genuinely inquiring into the crime might come to the scene and examine every inch, collecting objects and information from the event's location. But so might a crime-scene enthusiast with collections of crime memorabilia. The enthusiast might come to know all the same things as the detective, but the former's collecting needn't qualify as part of an inquiry into the crime in any interesting sense. Or imagine an actor shadowing the detective to prepare for a movie role, and then doing everything she thinks the detective would do to crack the case. While the actor's activities might count as a sort of ersatz inquiry into the robbery, she doesn't seem to be genuinely investigating the robbery. What distinguishes this sort of ersatz inquiry from the real thing? Why doesn't the crime enthusiast's evidence collecting seem to amount to an inquiry into the crime? I take it that in general the answer is clear enough: the actions of the actor and enthusiast are not motivated in the same sorts of ways as those of the detective. Only the detective is aiming to solve the crime, the actor and enthusiast are not.

So far: actions only look like parts of a genuine inquiry when they are grounded in a specific sort of (goal-directed) state of mind or attitude. How should we characterize this goal-directed "inquiring state of mind"? The detective's collecting is part of an investigation or inquiry into the robbery at least partially in virtue of the fact that the detective has the aim or goal of "solving the crime". But what sort of aim or goal is this? The crime was some event, but events aren't standardly solved; problems and puzzles are solved, mysteries are solved. And in a way this is very much how we should conceive of the aims or goals of the detective: there are some puzzles or mysteries that she is trying to solve. In this case the primary mystery to solve is, *Who committed this robbery?*. But there may be others as well, e.g., *Why wasn't the robbery captured on CCTV?*, *How did the thief access the safe?* and so on. The detective genuinely aims to answer these (and maybe other) questions about the crime. The enthusiast or actor does not (or at least need not be). These ersatz inquirers may also be aiming to answer some questions, but they are different ones, and it is in virtue of these differences that they are not inquiring into *the robbery* while the detective is.

This makes the relevant "inquiring state of mind" look like a question-directed

state of mind. The detective has some questions about the crime open in thought that she is aiming to close. This is to say that just as in the case of suspension, it looks as though the central attitude of the inquirer has a content or object and that content or object is a question. Syntactically, there are similarities as well: ‘Inquire’ (and ‘inquire into’) cannot embed declarative complements, but can embed interrogatives. Moreover, as with suspension, if we say that a subject is inquiring into some proposition p , then that seems to mean that she’s inquiring into whether that proposition is true or false. And again, it looks as though we can inquire into the whole range of questions – we can inquire into how to get to Vancouver from here, who broke the car mirror, what happens to a grapefruit when it’s put in the freezer for a week, and so on. Inquiry, like suspension, is question-directed (or at least centrally involves a question-directed attitude). A genuine inquiry into Q has a subject aiming to come to know or believe the answer to Q , and in this sense it has her treating Q as open or unresolved or unanswered.

Actions alone don’t make for inquiry in the sense at issue here. But I think that inquiring actions are not necessary for a subject to count as inquiring into Q either. Descartes’ inquiry involved his sitting by the fire and thinking. More generally, inquiry doesn’t stop when the inquirer is not actively inquiring, i.e., acting with the aim of resolving the question or actively thinking about the question. The detective’s inquiry is ongoing even when she’s off duty, Descartes didn’t get to the *Cogito* in one, unbroken episode and we often engage in long-term inquiries that can last days or years or more (certainly a lot of philosophical inquiries are like this). At many times over the course of a longer-term inquiry the inquiring subject will be making no active effort to resolve the question. But the inquiry is nonetheless ongoing. In virtue of what are these inquiries ongoing? In virtue of the subject’s attitude towards the relevant question. So being in the “inquiring state of mind”, having that specific sort of orientation towards or with respect to a question in thought is both necessary and sufficient to make it that one is inquiring into that question. We can say that one is inquiring into Q if and only if Q is on one’s *research agenda*.¹⁵

This claim about inquiry has the result that the fact that a question is an object of inquiry for a subject or is on her research agenda at a time, has only limited

¹⁵This talk of a subject’s “research agenda” comes from some recent discussion of extensions of the AGM framework for belief revision that include a model for a subject’s research agenda, which can be thought of as a set of questions the subject wishes to close. See, [Olsson and Westlund \(2006\)](#) for the initial suggestion. A number of refinements and additions have been suggested since as well.

implications for a how the subject will (or should) act at that time (and onwards). But this should not come as a surprise. Inquiries can look radically different. Even subjects inquiring into the same question can act in dramatically different ways – two detectives investigating the same crime but with different bodies of relevant evidence might do very different things to reach their goals. More generally, how a rational subject will act given that some question is open in thought is going to be influenced by a whole range of other attitudes she has.¹⁶ Even if the detectives had the same (first-order) evidence relevant to *Q*, they might have very different meta-investigative beliefs (beliefs about where information is likely to be, about the best means for getting that information, and so on) and in response deploy different question-answering strategies. Moreover, not all questions that are open or on a subject's research agenda at a time can be actively pursued at that time and some ranking of relative importance will be made. We might think of this as a “need to close” function that takes each question to some measure of the subject's need to resolve that question.¹⁷ For some questions on a subject's research agenda, the need to close will be very high (the time-pressured detective or Descartes) but for others it can be quite low. When the need to close a question is low, that question may have little influence on action and deliberation, remaining open for an extended period of time during which little or no active effort is made to resolve it. These are just a few features that are relevant to how a rational subject will think and act given that a question is an object of inquiry for her.

What more can we say about the functional profile of the relevant sort of inquiring state of mind (especially in light of the thought that it might be less clearly connected to action than we might have thought)? As we have already to some extent seen, it is a goal-directed state of mind. It's a state of mind that has specific sorts of epistemic or doxastic satisfaction conditions. In inquiring into some question we aim to resolve or answer the question; we aim to (e.g.) know the answer to the question. A subject inquiring into *Q* is then, at bottom, a subject aiming to close or resolve or answer *Q*. Here is a very preliminary thought about the functional profile of this state: it should involve at least a sort of orientation towards or

¹⁶This keeps this sort of attitude exactly in line with most other attitudes, doxastic or otherwise. That a subject believes that there is beer in the fridge has only very limited implications for her behaviour. If she has one set of desires, hopes, beliefs, she may go to the fridge, but with a different set she may avoid the fridge at all costs. While all sorts of attitudes may influence our behaviour, exactly how they do will depend upon the web of attitudes within which they occur.

¹⁷See Kruglanski and Webster (1996) for a good discussion of the sorts of factors that can influence one's need to close a question.

sensitivity to information that bears on the question. A subject aiming to resolve a question is one aiming to get new information that will lead to this resolution, and so she must be at least minimally sensitive to or oriented towards information that will bear on the question and so help her to resolve it (even if she is not actively seeking that information out).¹⁸

I want to argue that one suspends judging *Q* if and only if one is inquiring into *Q*. Now we can flesh this thesis out a bit more. The claim that one is inquiring into *Q* only if one is suspended about *Q* is the claim that any case in which one has *Q* on one's research agenda, any case in which one is in the relevant sort of inquiring state of mind, whether actively or otherwise inquiring, is a case in which one is suspended about *Q*. And the claim that one is suspended about *Q* only if one is inquiring into *Q* is the claim that any case in which one is suspended about *Q* is a case in which one is in an inquiring state of mind with respect to *Q* (or rather a case in which *Q* is on one's research agenda, or in which one has an attitude towards *Q* with the relevant sorts of epistemic satisfaction conditions, or in which one aims to close *Q*).

3 Inquiring into *Q* entails suspending judgment about *Q*

Suspension of judgement is a question-directed attitude. Inquiry is also question-directed. They are not alone in this regard. There seems to be a whole range of states, processes, or attitudes that have questions as their contents or objects: wondering, curiosity, investigating, deliberating, contemplating and there are cer-

¹⁸The very preliminary thought here is that when a question is on a subject's research agenda, she is sensitive to information that bears on the question even outside of active inquiry. This is at least in part an empirical claim. But when we think of the subject's research agenda as keeping track of some of her epistemic goals, then we can find at least some support for the thought. There is a good deal of evidence that our aims and goals guide our cognitive and epistemic interactions with the world and information more generally. For instance, it is well known that attention in perception is influenced in a range of "top-down" ways, by the subject's goals and intentions at the time (for an overview see Johnston and Dark (1986)). We pick up an announcement about our flight at the airport or notice a friend in a crowd when others miss these things. At any given time we are presented with more in perception than we can attend to and a whole range of practical and cognitive goals help direct our attention even when we are not explicitly or occurrently engaging with these goals. For some discussion of unconscious or implicit goal pursuit see Bargh et al. (2001) and Gollwitzer and Bargh (2005). This sort of work can give us a sense of the variety of ways in which we can try to and succeed in resolving open questions even outside of active inquiry. See also, Achtziger et al. (2011) (and references therein) for some discussion of the evidence from "dichotic listening tasks" wherein a subject's auditory attention is pulled away from other tasks by information relevant to goals and open projects (ones that aren't being actively or occurrently attended to). Also see Koralus (2014) for a question-driven account of attention in general.

tainly more. I will call these all ‘attitudes’ here.¹⁹ The very considerations that lead us to the conclusion that suspension is question-directed and inquiry too, apply to these other attitudes. Syntactically, the VPs that pick them out don’t embed declaratives but do embed interrogatives (and the whole range). And in each case it looks as though ‘whether’ questions are more appropriate objects than single propositions in the basic case. This list of question-directed attitudes is not exhaustive. My goal here is not to get a complete list, and I will focus the discussion largely on wondering and curiosity (as well as, of course, on inquiry and suspension), taking them as representative of the class as a whole. For now we have more of a loose collection of attitudes that seem to share an important property: they are all question-directed attitudes. Let’s call all of these question-directed attitudes, *interrogative attitudes* (IAs).

Many of the IAs seem to share another key property as well. At least at first glance many of these attitudes – e.g., wondering, curiosity, deliberation (and more) – seem to share the same sort of orientation towards or with respect to the relevant focal question that we find in inquiry. When we wonder, are curious, deliberate, investigate, and so on we are aiming to answer questions. Like inquiry, these attitudes have epistemic satisfaction conditions, and are in general aimed at resolving some focal question(s). These attitudes are all, in this sense, “askings”. They all seem to involve treating some relevant question as open or unresolved or unanswered and aim at answering or resolving or closing. As I’ve already said, part of the argument to come is for the conclusion that suspension should be thought to have this property as well.

For now though I want to explore a different (but related) feature of the IAs: it looks as though they don’t interact well with knowing, although it is not entirely clear just how or where the relationship breaks down. Let’s start here though. Assertions like, “I know whether Bob went to the party, but I wonder whether he went” or “I know who won the election, but I’m curious about who won” sound awful. And “Bob went to the party, but I wonder whether he went”, or “Alice won the election, but I’m curious about who won” sound just as bad, if not worse. This requires some sort of explanation.

One thought is that the subject who utters ‘I know *Q*, but I wonder/am curious (etc.) about *Q*’ is uttering an inconsistent pair of propositions. Jason Stanley’s

¹⁹Although surely some more careful discriminations between states, processes, and so on could be made here. I will say a little bit more about this in the concluding section of the paper, and just keep up the “attitude” talk for ease of exposition for now.

claim that, “If you *wonder* who went to the party, you certainly don’t know who went to the party” seems to be a push in that direction.²⁰ Taken as a general claim about the IAs, this amounts to the thought that wondering Q , being curious about Q , inquiring into Q and so on entail not knowing Q . Again, for the purposes of this discussion we can assume that a subject knows Q (at t and w) if and only if she knows p (at t and w), where p is the true, complete answer to Q (at t and w). On this account there is no possible case in which a subject both knows Q and has a Q -IA (IA directed at Q). Making an assertion of the form, ‘I know Q and I ϕ Q ’ (where ‘ ϕ ’ is replaced with an IA-expressing VP) means asserting that one is in a state that it is not possible to be in, and this can play the key role in understanding why the assertions sound bad. And we can then explain why uttering something of the form ‘ p , but I ϕ Q ’, where p is one of Q ’s complete answers, also sounds bad by making use of familiar norm-of-assertion explanations of Moore-paradoxical-like assertions.²¹

This explanation is not right though. There are possible cases in which subjects know Q and have IAs towards Q . Here is one (I take it fairly commonplace) sort of case. Let’s just stay focused on wondering for now. I know that my colleague Alice is on leave in Paris this term, she told me last month that she would be. Still, yesterday I seemed to have no memory of that conversation with Alice and I wondered why she hadn’t been to the talk last week; today I remembered. Yesterday I knew why Alice hadn’t been to the talk, and yet I wondered why she’d not been there at the same time. It is extremely easy to generate more cases like this. In these sorts of cases, some knowledge that I have temporarily escapes my view along with the knowledge that I have it, and as a result I reconsider a question that that knowledge fully answers. I know that I’ve put my keys in my tennis bag, but I spend 20 minutes wondering where they are. Eventually I recall what I’ve done. In recalling I don’t learn something new, but the thing that I knew all along comes back into

²⁰See Stanley (2011): 42.

²¹For instance, say knowledge is the norm of assertion. It is then only appropriate to assert p if one knows p . It can then only be appropriate to assert something of the form ‘ p , but I ϕ Q ’ if one knows what is expressed by the assertion. Knowing something like that would require one to know both p and that one has the relevant Q -IA. But if p is a complete answer to Q , and having a Q -IA entails not knowing Q , then one cannot know both p and that one has a Q -IA. If having a Q -IA entails not knowing Q , then if one knows that one has a Q -IA, one does not know Q . And if one knows p in this case then one does know Q . So one cannot know both p and that one has the relevant Q -IA, and so it cannot be appropriate to make the relevant assertion. Obviously there are many details to be filled in here, but this would be the general strategy. See, e.g., Williamson (1996) for an explanation like this in the case of Moore-paradoxical assertions.

view.²²

What should we say about the troubling assertions then given that wondering *Q* and knowing *Q* are compossible? I think that the sorts of cases from the last paragraph give us some guidance. These are not epistemically happy cases. Once I recall that Alice is on leave or where I've put my keys I don't feel good about having wondered about each of the relevant questions; I realize that I was confused. Since I knew all along, I shouldn't have been or didn't need to be wondering. And this sort of unhappiness is not particular to wondering while knowing. While wondering about why Alice hadn't been at the talk, I can be curious about that question, investigate it or inquire into it (and so on). But just as in the case of wondering about that question, given that I do, in fact, know why Alice wasn't at the talk, it feels as though there is something less than ideal about my being in these states towards that question. I was curious about or inquiring into a question whose answer I already knew.

Notice, past-tense or third-person versions of our troubling assertions – e.g., “She’s wondering whether Bob went to the party, but she knows he went”, and “She knows who won the election but she’s curious about who won”, or “Yesterday I wondered whether Bob went to the party, but I knew he went”, and “I knew who won the election but I was curious about who won” – don’t sound quite as bad as the first-person present-tense ones do, but don’t sound good either. A natural interpretation of these assertions has them describing unfortunate states or affairs and confused states of mind. This sets our troubling assertions apart from Moore-paradoxical ones: the past-tense and third-personal versions of those do not describe confused subjects (though they may describe inaccurate ones).

So, I think what we should say is that there is a sort of incompatibility between knowing *Q* and having an IA towards *Q* but that incompatibility is not impossibility but normative incompatibility. There is something epistemically inappropriate

²²We should take care to distinguish these sorts of cases from ones in which I take myself to have or know the answer to the relevant question but cannot seem to call it up from memory, e.g., familiar (and familiarly annoying) tip-of-the-tongue (TOT) cases. In the cases in this paragraph I do not take myself to have the answers to the relevant questions in memory. I am, in this sense, genuinely wondering about where Alice is rather than trying to dislodge an answer that I take to be stuck in memory (say by running through the alphabet). In the cases in this paragraph I cannot give the answer to the question but I also don't think that I have or maybe even ever had it. In TOT cases I also can't give or say the answer to the relevant question, e.g., *Who wrote Disgrace? What was the name of my high school history teacher?*, but I do think that I have it, which is evidenced by the fact that I'm using the alphabet strategy (which would be a terrifically bad strategy for answering the question if the answer wasn't in memory).

ate about having that sort of combination of attitudes.²³ There is a discussion to be had about just what sort of inappropriateness this is. For instance, do we want to use axiological normative concepts here or deontological ones (and so on)? Is this a rational conflict? It is not my intention to adjudicate here. I want to say generally that the subject ought not to be in this sort of conflicted state where this should track at least the thought that the state is sub-optimal (if not worse). I'll call these sorts of states "epistemically inappropriate".

Given all this, I think that what we should say is that the IAs are subject to what we can call an *Ignorance Norm*: a norm that (in this case) bars both having a Q-IA at t and knowing Q at t . This combination of states/attitudes is epistemically inappropriate. More specifically, this Ignorance Norm says that one ought not to have a Q-IA at a time if one knows Q at that time, or rather, that having a Q-IA at a time is only permissible if one does not know Q at that time. If one knows the answer to some question at some time then one ought not to be investigating that question, or inquiring into it further or wondering about it, or curious about it, and so on, at that time.

Ignorance Norm for the IAs Necessarily, if one knows Q at t , then one ought not have an IA towards Q at t .²⁴

But what is it about inquiry and about the IAs in general that makes having them impermissible or inappropriate in this way while knowing? We can think of the situation this way: a subject with an IA towards Q is a subject who is treating Q as open or unanswered or unresolved. When we are curious or wondering or inquiring into Q , we are in some important sense taking it that we do not already have the answer to Q ; it is in this sense that we are "treating Q as open". But a subject who knows Q is a subject for whom Q is closed. This subject has resolved

²³This is not to say that this sort of conflict is merely epistemically inappropriate. It may be practically sub-optimal as well in that I may waste time continuing to try to answer a question I've already answered. I don't think though that re-opening a question that I've already closed is always a bad idea practically speaking: sometimes recovering the thing known from memory is more cognitively taxing than just figuring it out again. What I think remains in all cases though is a basic epistemic conflict or incoherence between a certain kind of attitude towards a question and a certain kind of attitude towards that question's answer.

²⁴This Ignorance Norm has the 'ought' scoping over just the consequent; it is a "narrow scope" norm. This means that it says more than just that a subject ought not to both know Q and have a Q-IA at a time, but that if she knows Q at a time, then she ought not to have a Q-IA at that time. I think that this is the right way to think about this sort of normative conflict, but nothing of significance in this paper hangs on it, and so those who would prefer something "wide scope" can think of the scope of 'ought' that way.

or answered the question – she knows the answer to that question. So we can frame the conflict in those terms: a subject who knows *Q* and has an IA towards *Q* at the same time is treating *Q* as open or unanswered or unresolved, despite the fact that *Q* is answered or resolved or closed for her; she's treating a closed question as open. This is one way of casting the conflict in these cases and so hopefully getting closer to some explanation of the inappropriateness here.

With this thought we can say a little bit more about the epistemic openness that is involved in inquiry, and in having an IA more generally: it should be a sort of epistemic openness that is in (normative) conflict in this way with knowing *Q*. Perhaps some forms of epistemic openness combine happily with knowing *Q*, e.g., being less than perfectly certain. So what sort of epistemically open attitude towards *Q* conflicts in the way we're after with knowing *Q*? Obvious candidate: suspended judgment about *Q*.

My thought here is that inquiry (and the other IAs, but let's stay focused on inquiry now) involves a certain kind of epistemic stance or commitment or attitude that is in conflict with or inconsistent with knowing *Q*, and that the most straightforward candidate for this stance or commitment or attitude is suspension of judgment. Knowing *Q* and suspension about *Q* are conflicting sorts of attitudes or orientations towards *Q*. And so the reason that one ought not to inquire into *Q* (or have any IA towards *Q*) when one knows *Q* is that inquiring into *Q* always involves suspension of judgment about *Q*. One inquires into *Q* only if one is suspended about *Q*. This is not a normative claim, but a descriptive one – a claim about what it is to be genuinely inquiring into some question (and what it is to genuinely wonder or be curious or investigate a question). One has an interrogative attitude towards a question only if one is suspended about that question.

So this is one way into the thought that inquiry entails suspension of judgment. This entailment helps to explain a conflict we want explained. This argument trades on the thought that knowing and suspending are a conflicting pair of attitudes. I think that this is fairly straightforward and basic thought, but we can plausibly say more about the conflict here. The cases that I used to verify the claim that it is possible to both wonder or be curious about or inquire into *Q* while knowing *Q* should have a familiar feel to them. They are very much like typical and familiar “doxastic conflict” cases discussed earlier in the paper. Just as subjects sometimes end up with conflicting doxastic commitments to a proposition by both believing and disbelieving, they can end up with conflicting commitments

here too. But if knowledge entails belief, and the IAs entail suspension, then these cases should feel a lot like doxastic conflict cases for good reason – they are cases that essentially involve basic doxastic conflict since they are cases in which subjects both believe and suspend at a time. At least some of the normative pressure to avoid having an IA while knowing is the normative pressure to avoid having conflicting doxastic commitments at a time.^{25,26}

This also gives us a nice explanation of what’s going wrong with the sorts of assertions that we started with in this section. If we report that S both believes p and believes $\neg p$ we report S’s unfortunate doxastic state – she’s confused and somehow ended up with conflicting beliefs about the truth of p (and in at least some of those cases she’ll have got there by wondering or being curious about or inquiring into something that she already knew). But when S herself utters things like ‘I believe p , and I believe $\neg p$ ’ or ‘ p , but I believe $\neg p$ ’ or just ‘ p and also $\neg p$ ’ things seem worse by a mile for S. Clear-eyed assertions of first-personal doxastic conflict begin to verge on incoherence. And this is just the pattern we find in the sort of assertions that prompted this section’s discussion (and not the pattern we find in, e.g., Moore-paradoxical assertions). This is further evidence that we should be treating these conflicts as cases of basic doxastic incoherence, and so further evidence that the IAs entail suspension of judgment.

3.1 Knowing and inquiring

One central claim so far is that inquiring while knowing is somehow epistemically impermissible or inappropriate, and that the subject who is in a state like this is in a doxastically or epistemically conflicted state. But one might think that this is not always the case. Isn’t some double-checking epistemically appropriate? Moreover, if it is not clear to a subject that they know when they do, isn’t further inquiry just fine? With respect to the latter, the following sort of cases press. Say S knows Q , but believes that she does not know Q . Say she thinks that p is true and recognizes that p is a complete possible answer to Q , but she doesn’t think that her p -belief

²⁵This should not be taken to imply though that every case in which subjects (say) inquire and know at a time are cases in which they are unknowingly conflicted. Cases of incessant double-checking look like good candidates for cases in which the relevant sort of conflict is clear to the subject.

²⁶Although see Egan (2008) for a story according to which having incompatible belief “fragments” can be a good thing. Egan’s story relies on a specific sort of account of belief formation that I think can be resisted. Either way, I’m not sure that my view isn’t ultimately compatible with Egan’s. Obviously that discussion will have to be saved for another time.

qualifies as knowledge. So in order to try to improve her epistemic standing with respect to p and Q she inquires further into Q . Is a subject like this in any sort of epistemically inappropriate or conflicted state?²⁷

The first thing to flag here is that the Ignorance Norm does not say or imply that it is epistemically inappropriate or impermissible in every sense or all things considered to inquire into Q when one knows Q , but that it is in some sense or way or to some extent epistemically inappropriate. There may be some sense in which it is epistemically appropriate to inquire despite knowing in some sorts of cases. My claim though is that there is some sense in which it is not. The subject who inquires while she knows will be doing something epistemically inappropriate, but not necessarily everything.

I think that there is a good deal to say about cases in which knowledge escapes from view, and about how one ought to react to misleading evidence that

²⁷There is different, but related worry lurking here as well. Inquiring while knowing is epistemically inappropriate on the view I've argued for here, but so is inquiring while merely believing. Given that one is conflicted in the relevant sense in any case in which one believes and suspends, and that inquiring entails suspending, one is conflicted in any case in which one inquires and believes. Some of what I say in this section will be relevant to this conflict as well. I take it that some will worry about the thought that a subject must be doing something epistemically inappropriate by continuing to inquire into a question when they already believe some answer to the question. Might there not be cases in which this is exactly how an epistemically virtuous subject behaves, trying to improve their epistemic and doxastic position by inquiring further? I think that there is a lot to say here, too much for this paper, unfortunately. For now, I'd like to emphasize the following. It does not follow from the fact that a subject who both believes and suspends at a time is doxastically conflicted, that a subject who suspends about some question Q while having high credence in one of Q 's answers is in any sort of conflicted state. The view I've proposed here leaves it open that suspension of judgement is perfectly normatively compatible with a whole range of credence distributions over answers (in fact, see [Friedman \(2013b\)](#) for the thought that we should expect suspension of judgment to be normatively or rationally compatible with even very high and very low credences in answers). Without further assumptions about the relationship between full and partial belief (which we are not entitled to make without argument), even the view that suspension of judgment about Q is perfectly normatively compatible with any credence distribution over answers is so far left open.

So nothing I've said so far has the result that subjects who are barely or somewhat or very (or even perfectly) confident in some answer to Q cannot continue, without conflict or inappropriateness, to investigate Q . In this sense of 'belief' my view leaves it open that belief and inquiry are a perfectly happy match. What the view doesn't leave open is that full belief in some answer, the traditionalist's full belief, is perfectly normatively compatible with inquiry into the relevant question. But with this caveat about partial belief in place, it isn't clear that this is a bad result. A subject who truly and fully believed some answer to a question but was continuing to look for an answer to that question, who continued to inquire into or investigate that question, is not obviously in a completely happy epistemic state. If she believes p and, say, is fully aware that she believes p and that p completely answers Q , then there does seem to be something strange about a continued search for answers. If this is right then it stands to mark an important distinction between full belief and merely high credence.

one does not know.²⁸ For now though, I want to try to say something more general here about why we should want to say that the subject who both knows *Q* and inquires into *Q* is in a conflicted state (and, in this sense, is in a state she ought not to be in). I take it that even those uncomfortable with the Ignorance Norm are going to be happy with something in its vicinity. While double-checking might seem fine sometimes, the incessant double-checker is very far indeed from the epistemic ideal. And while inquiring into *Q* when one's knowledge of *Q*'s answer is obscured from view might look alright, continued inquiry into *Q* when one's knowledge is perfectly transparent in every relevant respect is not. At some point inquiring while one knows is clearly not epistemically appropriate.

But I don't think that there is much hope of capturing what's going wrong in the cases in which it is clear that something is going wrong without the Ignorance Norm. Cases in which we are somewhat happy for subjects to double-check seem to be cases in which subjects have (perhaps, reasonable) doubts about whether they know. Once those disappear and subjects become more fully aware and in the right sort of way that they know, inquiry no longer looks appropriate. Triple- and quadruple- (and so on) checking look like epistemically bad practice at least in part because it is no longer plausible to think of the relevant subjects as having (reasonable) doubts about whether they know. Considerations like these might tempt one into thinking that the Ignorance Norm should be replaced with (e.g.) an "Awareness of Ignorance Norm", a norm that says that one ought not to have an IA towards *Q* if one is aware that one knows *Q*.

This norm says that inquiry is impermissible in cases in which the inquiring subject is fully aware that she knows, but is silent on cases in which she knows *Q* with less-than-full awareness, leaving it open that knowing *Q* and inquiring into *Q* are a perfectly permissible combination sometimes. I take it that this norm would have to be refined to be made truly plausible, but the spirit is clear enough. Nothing I've said, of course, rules out there being additional higher-order norms like this one. My worry is about replacing the first-order Ignorance Norm with meta-cognitive norms like The Awareness of Ignorance Norm. It is very hard to see how these higher-order norms could be in place without there being something wrong with the first-order combination of attitudes. That is, it is hard to see how there could be an Awareness of Ignorance Norm for the IAs were there not an Ignorance Norm for them. If there's nothing wrong with inquiring into *Q* while knowing *Q*,

²⁸See Lasonen-Aarnio (2010) for some relevant discussion.

then why should we be bothered when the subject is aware of being in this state of mind (we can just assume that she's also aware that she's inquiring)? If knowing is perfectly normatively compatible with inquiry, then when the subject comes to be aware that she knows and is inquiring, she's not being alerted to anything going wrong; she's becoming aware of being in a combination of first-order states that is just fine (and we can assume she knows this). Why should she modify these first-order attitudes then? I think the problem is this. We need some explanation of why this Awareness Norm (and other related norms) should hold. But without a first-order Ignorance Norm it is very hard to see how that explanation will go. If there's nothing wrong with inquiring while knowing then why shouldn't I inquire while knowing, in full awareness?

Plausibly, when we become aware that something bad is happening this changes our normative circumstances, and puts us on the normative hook in some way that perhaps we weren't before we became aware. But this only makes sense against a backdrop according to which what we become aware of is that something is going wrong. And whatever additional normative responsibilities flow from awareness, are ultimately (at least in part) grounded in the badness or wrongness of that which we became aware. In this case, becoming aware that I know and am inquiring might put me under additional normative pressure to resolve my first-order state (which might help explain our patterns of intuitions as we move from double- to triple- to quadruple- (and so on-)checking), but that assumes that the first-order state is something that ought to be resolved. I think that an Awareness of Ignorance Norm makes little sense if the Ignorance Norm is not already in place. Alternatively, if one wants to get rid of the Ignorance Norm then it is very hard to see how the Awareness of Ignorance norm won't go with it.²⁹

In general, if we want to say that there is something going wrong with the subject who continues to inquire into *Q* despite it being perfectly clear to her that she

²⁹This objection applies not only to the Awareness of Ignorance Norm, but to other, related norms that try to make the relevant sorts of metacognitive attitudes incompatible with inquiry without making the relevant sorts of first-order ones incompatible. The Awareness Norm says that one ought not to have a *Q*-IA when one knows *Q* and is aware that one knows *Q*. Awareness seems to be factive. My objection here applies if we replace talk of awareness in the norm with some similar but not factive attitude. The objection also applies to norms cast in terms of thinking that one knows, or being subjectively confident or feeling sure that one knows, where the demand that one in fact know *Q* drops out of the norm altogether. If there's nothing wrong with inquiring while knowing, why should the subject be doing anything normatively untoward by inquiring when she feels sure that she knows? Anyone tempted by these sorts of metacognitive norms, will have to accept the basic first-order Ignorance Norm as well.

knows Q (which I take it most everyone does), I think that we have to say that at bottom there is a fundamental conflict between knowing Q and inquiring into Q and so that it is always in some sense or to some extent epistemically inappropriate to be in a state of mind that combines the two.³⁰

4 Suspending judgment about Q entails inquiring into Q

That concludes my case for one direction of the key biconditional I want to argue for here: one is inquiring into Q only if one is suspended about Q . This is a claim about the state of mind of an inquirer (rather than some sort of normative claim about rational inquiry, say). The other direction of the biconditional says that one is suspended about Q only if one is inquiring into Q . Recall, what I take this conditional to be claiming is that any possible case in which a subject is suspended about a question, is a case in which that question is an object of inquiry for that subject, where this means that the subject is in an “inquiring state of mind”: in a state that aims at resolving the relevant open question, or a state with particular sorts of epistemic satisfaction conditions. My claim then is that anyone who is suspended is oriented in this sort of way with respect to the focal question – she aims to close that question.

While the other direction of our central biconditional was (at least *prima facie*) intuitively plausible, this direction might seem less so. At the end of inquiry, when all investigative avenues have run out, isn't suspension exactly the right attitude to have? And doesn't the claim that one is suspended only if one is inquiring render this sort of end-of-the-line suspending inappropriate? I think that the answers to both of these questions are less obvious than they might seem, and in some ways help my case here.

Let's start with the first question. There is a way of thinking about suspension

³⁰Does this mean that there is always something epistemically inappropriate about double-checking? Not necessarily. If by 'double-checking' we mean that a subject continues or re-opens inquiry while knowing throughout, then the Ignorance Norm renders all cases of double-checking inappropriate in some sense. Again though, it may be epistemically and practically appropriate in a range of ways as well, so it isn't clear that this is the wrong outcome. It is a result of our cognitive limitations that it is not always perfectly clear to us that we know. Double-checking can help to reassure us, but it is plausibly a product of our sub-optimality and so that it results in some sort of conflict might not be all that surprising. On the other hand, if the extension of 'double-checking' includes cases in which one is inquiring into Q without knowing Q , e.g., cases in which one knew Q in the lead-up to the inquiry, but relented before re-opening the question, then the Ignorance Norm is compatible with perfectly appropriate double-checking. When the subject drops her knowledge (e.g., by dropping her belief) while inquiring further, the Ignorance Norm is silent.

of judgment according to which it is an attitude that a rational subject only has at the end of inquiry, when answers don't seem available. If I am right that inquiry entails suspension of judgment, then this way of thinking must be rejected. In fact, I think we have independent reason for rejecting it. We should not be thinking of suspension as a state reserved for the end of inquiry. First, as we have already seen, that doesn't seem to track the canonical accounts of suspension: I've traced the view that inquiry entails suspension back to Descartes and Sextus. On these sorts of views (as on the view being proposed here), suspension is an attitude we have right from inquiry's start, and not only at its end.³¹ More importantly, we want to be able to say that suspension is rationally or normatively compatible with inquiry: there is nothing barring a rational subject who is suspended on a question from continuing to inquire into that question. So the general thought that suspension must (in the relevant sense) come on the heels of inquiry has little purchase.

Perhaps the worry here though is that even if suspension does not need to come at the end of inquiry, it is the appropriate attitude to have at the end of a frustrated inquiry. For our purposes we can say that an inquiry into *Q* is *frustrated* when the inquiring subject comes to know or think that she will not be able to answer *Q*. But it is false that every case in which inquiry is frustrated is a case in which suspension is appropriate.³² For instance, say that at *w*, the world of inquiry, *S* realizes that *Q* has some false presupposition or is similarly unsound, e.g.,

³¹That suspension of judgment comes right at the start of inquiry does not entail that it cannot follow some period of reflection on a question, but only that this earlier question processing would count as a sort of "pre-inquiry" phase of question evaluation. In fact, empirical work on question answering divides question processing into two distinct stages very much like this. In her work on question answering, Lynn Reder (in, e.g., Reder (1987) and Reder (1988)) argues that when question processing starts, when we first begin trying to answer a question, we perform an initial evaluation of the question and then as a result of this evaluation adopt a strategy for answering the question. During this very quick preliminary assessment, the subject "decides" on a question-answering strategy. In particular, she decides on whether the answer to the question is likely to already be waiting in memory or not, and so whether to attempt to merely retrieve it or instead start to work at genuinely figuring that answer out. Very roughly, the subject either decides that they already have the answer and tries to retrieve it or decides that they don't and genuinely tries to figure out what the answer is. The latter decision can be thought of as the decision to genuinely inquire into the question, to open it up in thought. Obviously, Reder's picture meshes nicely with mine. Hypothesis: the decision that we don't have the answer and the move to an answering strategy based on this decision just is our suspending judgment.

³²Again, these are cases in which subjects have certain kinds of higher-order beliefs about how they are faring or will fare epistemically. Although there hasn't been much discussion about these sorts of distinctively "meta-investigative" beliefs or knowledge and what sort of impact they ought to have on our first-order attitudes, given the state of the debate about higher-order evidence generally, we should not expect any easy resolutions in this case either. For some relevant discussion see Christensen (2010) and Horowitz (2013).

Q = *What colour was Thomas Jefferson's Ferrari?* (and w is the actual world). I take that the discovery that Q is unsound in this sort of way makes it that S knows that she will not be able to answer Q (none of Q 's possible answers are true at w). But in this sort of case suspending about Q seems to be exactly the wrong sort of attitude to have. Here the discovery that an inquiry will never be successful seems to render suspending about the relevant question impermissible or inappropriate. And I think similar considerations can be adduced in the case of vague questions (questions involving vague predicates in the right sorts of ways). Say Q' = *Was Jefferson tall?*, and that S comes to think that neither answer is appropriate and instead that Jefferson constituted a borderline case of tallness. It is not at all clear that suspending about whether Jefferson was tall is appropriate now. Certainly, if S thinks that there is no fact of the matter about whether Jefferson was tall, then suspending judgment about whether he was tall seems strange indeed.³³

In these sorts of cases some inquiry is frustrated but suspension of judgment looks inappropriate. Why should suspension be inappropriate in these cases? I think that there's a natural answer here, and that answer supports the conclusion that I want to argue for in this section. In these sorts of cases it isn't just suspension that looks inappropriate, but any IA whatever (if you think there's no fact of the matter about whether Jefferson was tall, then being curious about whether he was tall also seems to amount to a sort of confusion). In fact, I think that what's inappropriate in these cases is having the question on one's research agenda at all. If you discover that your question has no true answer, then it no longer makes sense to keep it open in the relevant sense. If suspending about Q also entails having Q on one's research agenda, then we have a nice explanation of why suspension looks bad in these cases (and if we deny that suspension involves this sort of openness, then we'll have to give some other explanation for why it starts to look bad exactly when having a question on the agenda starts to look bad).

But even if suspension is not appropriate in every case in which inquiry is frustrated, it is surely appropriate in some such cases. For instance, what about cases in which subjects come to think that their focal question will not be answered for more mundane sorts of reasons – there is no more evidence, we have reached the farthest edge of some best science, and so on? When inquiry is frustrated in these sorts of ways, suspension of judgment looks to many to be appropriate. I think

³³See Caie (2012) for some related discussion and relevant arguments. Caie is interested, in the first instance, in attitudes towards propositions expressed by paradoxical sentences like the liar. I think what he says there dovetails nicely with the thoughts in this paragraph though.

that a careful account of these sorts of cases would come to a more tempered conclusion according to which suspension of judgment is appropriate in some cases and not others. But – bringing us to our second question – this is no problem for the view being proposed now. It is surely not right that any case in which inquiry is (even very badly) stalled in the relevant sorts of ways is a case in which the question should be dropped rather than kept open in some sense. I think that we should say that any case in which suspension is appropriate will also be one in which inquiry is.

Imagine a subject engaged in some long term inquiry into *Q* who eventually comes to think that she will not be able to answer it. She has, to the best of her knowledge, exhausted every potential source of answers, and believes or even knows that there is nothing further she can currently do to answer the relevant question. I take it that suspension looks like a perfectly appropriate sort of attitude for this frustrated inquirer to have, despite the fact that active inquiry may be temporarily paused or even permanently ended for this subject.

The first thing to note is that the view being proposed here does not have the result that suspension should be impossible in a case like this. It only has the result that the suspending subject is also in an inquiring state of mind. If that seems inappropriate in these sort of cases, then the proposal might be saddled with the result that suspension is inappropriate. My claim though is that in these sorts of cases suspension is appropriate and so are some forms of inquiry. Take any case in which the object of inquiry, *Q*, is sound and *S* has no reason to think otherwise, but in which her inquiry is frustrated. In most any case like this continued curiosity about *Q* looks perfectly appropriate (unlike in the sorts of cases in which *S* discovers that *Q* is unsound). But if curiosity is appropriate, then (a) so is suspension, and (b) so is keeping the question open in thought in some sense. As we've seen curiosity involves the relevant sorts of epistemic satisfaction conditions as well.

In general, and as discussed earlier, to say that a question is an object of inquiry for a subject is not to say or imply that the subject is making or will soon make any significant effort to resolve the question. Not all inquiry is active inquiry. A rational subject who thinks she's, say, run out of evidence relevant to a question and even won't be able to find more, may well make no further efforts to resolve that question (perhaps some long-term religious agnostics are like this). I take it that it is exactly these further actions aimed at closing or resolving the question which we think are inappropriate in these epistemic end-of-the-line cases. But an even

moderately sophisticated account of the relation between inquiry and action can accommodate that thought. Given what I've already said about the relation between inquiry and action at the outset, it simply does not follow from the fact that certain courses of action designed to close a question look inappropriate (practically or even epistemically) in a case that keeping that question open in thought is inappropriate in that case. Whether some course of action designed to close a question is inappropriate will be a function of the subject's total mental state including all sorts of other beliefs, knowledge, desires and other attitudes she has, and there will be many cases in which all sorts of actions designed to close a question are inappropriate, but keeping the question open in thought is not.

In fact, keeping lines of inquiry open but "paused" and so maintaining at least a minimal sensitivity to information that bears on the question, often seems like the right idea. Scientific inquiries can often reach temporary stopping points where best science at the time gives out, but we don't typically think that these questions should be abandoned in these cases. Scientific advances and conceptual advance in general often open up new avenues for answers at some point in the future. So the mere fact that active inquiry has run dry at a time (and the inquirer, say, knows this) does not render it inappropriate or otherwise epistemically impermissible to keep the question as an object of inquiry. Perhaps there is some point at which this happens (and then we should also say that suspension is no longer appropriate at that point as well), but figuring out just where and when that happens requires careful thought.³⁴

These sorts of considerations help defuse some initial concerns about this direction of the key biconditional. They also help to make a positive case for the claim that suspending entails inquiring. The truth of that conditional helps to explain why suspension of judgment seems inappropriate in some cases. We've also already seen some other reason to think that this is the right way to think about

³⁴These sorts of thoughts can also help respond to related worries about suspending about trivial or uninteresting questions. One might have worried that the proposal here could not make sense of a subject's being suspended about questions that they found boring or useless. This isn't so. A subject's "need to close" a given question can vary over the questions that she has open at a time, where some questions will press with great urgency and others with virtually none (I take it that typically the greater a subject's indifference about *Q*, the lower her need to close *Q* will be; although I can imagine atypical cases as well). Again, perhaps questions about which one is largely indifferent should rarely push one into active inquiry, but that's not a bar to their remaining on the agenda. That said, I take it that some boring questions will be dropped rather than suspended on. In general, rational subjects don't tend to take up attitudes towards contents that are of absolutely no interest (practical, epistemic, and so on) to them.

suspension of judgment: it tracks the treatment of that state through the history of philosophy in that it is plausibly closely aligned with the Cartesian and Pyrrhonian accounts of suspended judgement. I think that there are a few more things that can be said in defence of the view. While perhaps none of these are decisive, I think that all together they make for a compelling case.

First, we can find some related inspiration in some Peircian thoughts about doubt:

Thus, both doubt and belief have positive effects upon us, though very different ones. Belief does not make us act at once, but puts us into such a condition that we shall behave in some certain way, when the occasion arises. Doubt has not the least such active effect, but stimulates us to inquiry until it is destroyed. (Peirce (1877): 6)

Doubt has a kind of suicidal tendency: it prompts us to inquire until it is extinguished. My proposal is that suspension shares this push towards its own demise: in suspending we ask a question and (at least in some minimal sense) seek an answer. Although I don't think that doubt and suspension are identical, and I don't know whether Peirce's claim about doubt is right, it wouldn't be surprising if doubt and suspension shared this property. In general, and other things equal, uncertainty and ambiguity (and the like) are experienced as aversive; we want clarity and certainty and stability. From this perspective, it is easy to get into the thought that in suspending about a question we put ourselves into a state that aims at closing. Any normal subject at any given time is ignorant over a vast space of possibilities. In most cases this the specifics of this expanse of ignorance goes unnoticed. When we suspend judgment though we frame up some portion of this space of the unknown (at least typically these questions are unknown, but not always as we've seen). When we do this we move ourselves from a state of mere ignorance, to explicit uncertainty: we bring some aspect of the unknown into view. In this sense, in suspending judgment we enter into a state which we want to get out of in a particular way: by answering or resolving the question.³⁵

Second, I think that suspension's role amongst the interrogative attitudes should also push us towards the conclusion that suspending aims at closing. We know that

³⁵Curiosity-seeking behaviours were once thought paradoxical since curiosity is thought to be aversive in the sense at issue here. Why would we seek out aversive states like this? A number of explanations were generated. See Loewenstein (1994) for a good discussion. Loewenstein argues that curiosity is indeed aversive, but the the expectation of pleasure from curiosity satisfaction makes being in the aversive state worthwhile.

the IAs are question-directed attitudes. Given the arguments in the last section, I think we can add further defining features: the IAs are bound by the Ignorance Norm, and more importantly the IAs are attitudes that all, of necessity, involve suspension of judgment. I've focused the discussion here on key members of the class – inquiry obviously, but also wondering and curiosity (and a few more). But plausibly there are more, e.g., deliberation, contemplation. The IAs are a collection of states and processes, all question-directed, all entailing suspension of judgment.

If any question-directed attitude that entails suspension of judgment is part of the class, then suspension is trivially part of the class. But suspension is not just a member of the class, it's a central or core member. [Williamson \(2000\)](#) suggests that knowledge is the most general factive mental state. The rough idea there is that if one is in any factive mental state at all (e.g., seeing, remembering) towards p , then one knows p . Given what's been said here, suspended judgment plays a somewhat analogous role for the interrogative attitudes. Suspension is a core IA, an IA that one has if one has any IA. If one is curious about Q , then one is suspended about Q ; if one wonders about Q , then one is suspended about Q ; if one inquires into Q , then one is suspended about Q , and so on.

But every other member of the class we've so far seen has the sort of orientation with respect to the focal question that I want to say suspension shares. Wondering, curiosity, investigation, deliberation, and so on, all seem to have the relevant sort of aims or satisfaction conditions and in much the same way. All of these IAs are attitudes that aim at answering, they are requests for answers, and in this sense involve an inquiring stance. Qua core IA, it isn't a stretch to think that suspension shares this property. And we can press further here. Inquiry, wondering, curiosity, and so on, begin when a subject "opens a question in thought". In opening a question in thought in this sort of way the question becomes an object of inquiry or wondering or curiosity, it becomes a question one aims to resolve or settle. But we know that one cannot have an IA towards a question without having suspended about it. Suspension of judgment, on the view being argued for here, is not the product or outcome of some extended inquiry, it's a precondition for genuine inquiry, it's an attitude we have right from the start of inquiry. But thinking of suspension as a basic way of making a question an object of inquiry, brings this story together in an elegant way: we can say that there is nothing more to "opening a question in thought" than simply suspending judgment on that question. In suspending about Q we make Q an object of inquiry. From there we can wonder or

be curious or deliberate (and so on) about *Q*. Suspending about a question puts that question on our research agenda.

In fact, here is a further tentative suggestion: we might think that this sort of quest for answers that we find in the IAs is a property of any genuinely question-directed attitude. Compare our use of questions in language. We ask questions. This is to say, we use them to request information or answers. We might then think that they play the analogous role in our mental lives: any genuinely question-directed attitude is a way of asking a question and trying to get an answer. Suspension of judgment included. Any question-directed attitude involves the sorts of epistemic aims and satisfaction conditions we find in inquiry (and wondering, and curiosity, etc.).

The thought is then that by suspending judgment about *Q* we commit to a particular sort of neutrality with respect to *Q* – we commit to keeping the question open in thought, or to keeping it an object of inquiry. In a way, we can get to this thought just from the form of words we use to pick out the attitude. ‘Suspending judging’ seems to imply putting off or delaying judging, where that seems to imply some intention to take up the task of judging again. That one “suspends judging” seems to imply a commitment to continued efforts to judge. In this sense, one suspends judging with the aim of judging; one suspends in order to continue to try, and hopefully succeed, to know.

5 Concluding remarks

I’ve argued that one is inquiring into *Q* if and only if one is suspended about *Q*. In closing, I want to say a little bit more about the relationship between these two states and the relationship of each to the rest of the IAs, and then return to our titular question.

Although I’ve been loosely characterizing all of the states and processes I’ve been discussing here as attitudes, it is worth re-visiting that suggestion in the case of inquiry. I’ve argued that inquiry essentially involves being in a specific sort of state of mind or having a particular sort of attitude, but it isn’t clear that we want to say that inquiry just is that attitude. What we do want to say, I take it, is that a subject is inquiring in virtue of being in a particular state of mind – one that aims at at closing or resolving the focal question, one with the relevant sorts of epistemic satisfaction conditions (e.g., coming to know). A subject inquires in virtue of being

in an “inquiring state of mind”. Perhaps we should say this about inquiry then: it is something (an activity?) that a subject is engaged in in virtue of being in a particular sort of mental state or undergoing a particular sort of process. Any time a subject is in this sort of mental state or undergoing this sort of process she is inquiring. But as we have seen, any subject with an IA is in this sort of state of mind or undergoing this sort of process. Curiosity, wondering, suspension and all the rest of the IAs are “askings” in this sense. So we might say that inquiry (or better, inquiring) is a determinable with many determinates – wondering, being curious, suspending, and so on. All of these are more specific ways of inquiring. Wondering about *Q* is a way of inquiring into *Q*, being curious about *Q* is a way of inquiring into *Q*, suspending about *Q* is a way of inquiring into *Q*, and so on.

Unlike inquiry or inquiring, suspension of judgment does look like a genuine attitude. And as I’ve argued it is the core or central interrogative attitude, the IA one has when one has any IA. The relationship between the IAs and suspension is not that of determinates to determinable, but something closer to the relationship between (say) knowledge and belief: suspended judgment is an attitude that one must have to have any IA.³⁶ Every IA is a way of inquiring that involves a basic and fundamental question-directed attitude – suspension of judgment. These are only very preliminary remarks, of course.

I want to end by returning to our titular question: why suspend judging? My hope was to provide a framework within which we could better fix on the nature and function of suspension of judgment, and thereby get a start at answering that question. My claims for suspended judgment are very much in line with Peirce’s claim about doubt. Suspension’s primary function is in inquiry. Why suspend about *Q*? In order to inquire into *Q*, or better, in order to know *Q*. Plausibly, knowing is the aim of inquiry and now we should also say that it is the aim of suspending. Why suspend judging *Q* rather than simply not believe any of *Q*’s answers? To improve one’s epistemic standing with respect to *Q*; to try, and hopefully succeed, in settling that question.

We might also find some guidance as to suspension’s normative profile by way of our biconditional and suspension’s role amongst the IAs. When should a subject suspend? When is she justified in suspending or permitted to suspend? When does she have a reason to suspend? And so on. The following answers suggest

³⁶This marks a distinction between Williamson’s claim about knowledge and the factive attitudes and mine about suspension and the interrogative attitudes. Williamson claims that the factive attitudes are all ways of knowing.

themselves now: when she should (is justified, permitted, has a reason to ...) be curious, wonder, investigate, inquire, and so on. In effect, typically she should suspend when she should aim to resolve or answer or close some question; when she should aim to know. Notice, the thought that rational subjects suspend exactly when their epistemic situation is deficient in the relevant range of ways need not be true now. Of course, that the subject's epistemic standing is deficient in those ways is still highly relevant to whether or not she should or has reason or is permitted to suspend, but so are a whole range of other inquiry-related considerations. And these inquiry-related considerations might be a fairly motley collection. At least at first glance it does not look as though they will be purely "epistemic" sorts of considerations: there may all sorts of non-epistemic and non-evidential reasons to inquire (and so suspend). In general, inquiry looks to be a place at which the practical and the epistemic meet. In inquiry we aim to know, and that aim can be prompted by pure epistemic interest or pure practical necessity, or anything in between. The moves the subject makes to come to know, and that will be evaluated in her quest to know, are actions, inferences, attitudes, and more. And these moves can be evaluated along both epistemic dimensions (e.g., evidence-respecting) and practical dimensions (e.g., efficiency). While the focus here has largely been on suspension of judgment, if what I've said here is right, we can make progress on understanding that state of mind, only by getting a better handle on its close relative – inquiry. Hopefully, some of what's been said here is a helpful start in that regard.

It is sometimes said that belief has an aim (or more than one), e.g., beliefs aim at truth or aim at knowledge. But now much of what we say about the aim of belief, the point or purpose or goal of believing, we can also say about traditional epistemology's other attitude. We suspend in order to get to the truth or to know (and so on). If we want to move ourselves from a state of ignorance to a state of knowing by inquiring, then at least two things need to happen: a question needs to be opened or asked and then it needs to be closed in the right sort of way or answered. The point or purpose or aim of opening is the very same point or purpose or aim of closing when the circumstances are right: to improve our epistemic standing on some matter – to settle a question and to come to know.

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