

An Account of Suspended Judgment as Suspended Acceptance

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Abstract

Recently, Jane Friedman has argued that what we call “suspension of judgment” is an interrogative attitude: If one suspends one’s judgment about the question *Q*, one is inquiring into *Q*. Many philosophers have criticised or developed Friedman’s idea by offering their own takes on suspended judgment. However, despite the differences we can find in the various accounts recently presented in the literature, there is a widespread idea in our theories of suspended judgment: What we call “suspension of judgment” implies a state of doxastic neutrality and is a condition that is doxastically incoherent and metaphysically or normatively incompatible with belief. In this paper, I propose a new conception of suspended judgment that is not committed to the previous widespread perspective. Following Cohen’s theory of acceptance, I will present a non-doxastic type of suspended judgment described as suspension of acceptance. Considering this new conception, I will first underline how this non-doxastic way of suspending our judgment can be regarded as an interrogative mental act. Then, against the widespread perspective, I will show that something we call “suspension of judgment” is a non-doxastic mental act that does not imply a state of doxastic neutrality and can doxastically cohere and be metaphysically and normatively compatible with belief.

Keywords

acceptance; doxastic neutrality; inquiry; mental acts; suspended acceptance

1 Introduction

In a recent series of papers, Jane Friedman [2013, 2017, 2019, forthcoming] has developed the perspective that one is inquiring into the question *Q* when one suspends one's judgment about *Q*. In this account, suspension of judgment is an *interrogative attitude* in which one aims to answer a given question. Epistemologists have reacted to Friedman's view by offering alternative perspectives on the nature of suspended judgment (Archer [2019, 2022], Crawford [2022], Feldman and Conee [2018], Ferrari and Incurvati [2022], Masny [2020], McGrath [2021], Raleigh [2021], Wagner [2022]) or by critically developing it (Lord [2020], Lord and Sylvan [2021, forthcoming]).

However, despite the differences we can find in the various accounts recently presented in the literature, it is a widespread idea in our theories of suspended judgment that what we call "suspension of judgment" implies a *state of doxastic neutrality* in which we neither display belief nor disbelief about a particular issue (Bergmann [2005], Crawford [2004, 2022], Hájek [1998], Masny [2020], Raleigh [2021], Van Fraassen [1998], Wagner [2022], Wedgwood [2002]). For example, in accordance with this intuitive idea, consider the agnostic about the question of God's existence: A natural description of when she suspends her judgment about this issue is that she is in a doxastic state in which she neither believes nor disbelieves the answer that God exists. Indeed, if she believed or disbelieved that God exists, she would not be an agnostic but rather a theist or an atheist. Put more generally, the previous widespread idea about suspended judgment provides us with the following picture: When one suspends one's judgment about a given question *Q*, one is in a state of opinion in which one displays neither belief nor disbelief about what the possible complete answer to *Q* might be.

Nonetheless, it is worth considering that suspending one's judgment about a given question does not necessarily mean not disbelieving any of the possible complete answers to *Q*—admitting that *Q* does not amount to the *polar question* of *whether p* or *not-p* is true. A form of disbelief is compatible with suspended judgment. Indeed, suppose I am asked: 'what position does Jupiter occupy among the planets of the Solar System?'. Intuitively, I might be in suspension about this question while disbelieving that Jupiter is the 3rd planet. However, even if this is true, those who suspend their judgment always display a form of doxastic neutrality in which they neither believe any of the possible complete answers nor disbelieve a *non-empty* set of them (Flamini [2024]). Indeed, in the previous case, despite disbelieving that Jupiter is the 3rd planet, there must be *at least* one possible complete answer on which I display neither belief nor disbelief. Otherwise, I would not truly be suspending

my judgment, either because I would already believe one answer or because, by disbelieving all possible complete answers, I would actually take the question as having no true answer. Moreover, it is worth noting that within this viewpoint, even if we cannot disbelieve all the possible complete answers to a given question while suspending our judgment on it, we can disbelieve *more* or *fewer* of them. Interestingly, this provides a way to measure the *degree of suspension* we exhibit on a specific question by subtracting the disbelieved answers from the set of possible complete answers: we obtain the *number* of possible complete answers we neither believe nor disbelieve.

In a nutshell, to sum up our considerations about the compatibility of suspended judgment with disbelief, when we suspend our judgment on a given question, we can disbelieve a set of possible complete answers that cannot equal the number of all possible complete answers. Therefore, we can say that those who suspend their judgment on a given question *Q* display a doxastic neutrality in which they neither believe any of the possible complete answers *A* nor disbelieve all of them, *i.e.*, there exists at least one answer to *Q* that is neither believed nor disbelieved.

Moreover, another widespread perspective in our current theories of suspension of judgment is that what we call “suspended judgment” is a condition that is *incompatible* with belief, whether metaphysically or normatively speaking (Archer [2025], Crawford [2022], Friedman [2017], McGrath [2021], Raleigh [2021], Rosa [2019, 2021, 2023], Wagner [2022]). For example, the metaphysical incompatibility of suspended judgment and belief is a natural consequence for those who claim that suspension of judgment implies a state of doxastic neutrality (Raleigh [2021]). Indeed, reconsider the case of God’s existence. As we saw, the agnostic neither believes nor disbelieves that God exists by definition for those who claim the doxastic neutrality of suspended judgment. From their perspective, if she believed or disbelieved that God exists, she would simply not be an agnostic but rather a theist or an atheist. In other words, for those who defend the doxastic neutrality of suspended judgment, it would be a natural claim that if one suspends one’s judgment about a given question *Q*, one does not and cannot display a belief toward the possible complete answer to *Q*. For, otherwise, one would and could not really suspend one’s judgment about *Q*, period.

Nonetheless, even putting aside the problem of metaphysical compatibility, many philosophers would agree that suspending while believing involves having *incoherent doxastic commitments* regarding a certain issue that, intuitively, a rational agent would not have (Archer [2025], Friedman [2017], Rosa [2019, 2021, 2023], Wagner [2022]). Namely, if one suspends one’s judgment about a certain question and believes one of its possible complete answers, one would find oneself in an *incoherent doxastic condition* that one should not be

in. For example, this normative incompatibility is an intuitive consequence for those who believe in the doxastic neutrality of suspended judgment but at the same time accept its compossibility with belief (Wagner [2022]). Indeed, take once again the case of God's existence and imagine that a long-term theist becomes an agnostic because she realises that we do not have evidence to prove or disprove the presence of God. However, despite this, further imagine that due to her long-term commitment to theism, she finds psychological difficulties in getting rid of her belief: while being agnostic, she still believes that God exists.¹ In this case, those who defend the doxastic neutrality of suspended judgment but accept its compossibility with belief would say that the previous agnostic would find herself in an incoherent doxastic condition in which she would believe and not believe that God exists.² Intuitively, they would argue that the agnostic should not be in such a condition if she wants to be a *rational agnostic*. In other words, in this perspective, to suspend one's judgment about a given question *Q* in a rational and appropriate way, one should not believe a possible complete answer to *Q*.

In a nutshell, taking all the previous considerations together, there is a widespread conception about suspension of judgment that provides us with the following picture: What we call "suspended judgment" implies a state of doxastic neutrality and is a condition that is doxastically incoherent and metaphysically or normatively incompatible with belief.

¹ This case is adapted from Wagner [2022].

² One might argue that this condition amounts to a contradiction—one both believes and does not believe the same proposition—and, therefore, is an impossible situation. However, following Friedman [2017] and the theory of the fragmented mind (Borgoni *et al.* [2021]), we can have doxastic databases or fragments of the mind that can conflict and be incoherent regarding a certain theoretical or practical issue. For example, the case I adapt from Wagner [2022] can be read as follows: the long-term theist who becomes an agnostic finds herself in a situation in which she holds two conflicting databases or fragments of her mind regarding the problem of the existence of God. This conflict places her in a state of doxastic contradiction regarding the same issue. In one fragment, having suspended judgment, she neither believes nor disbelieves that God exists. In the other fragment, rooted in her long-term theistic commitment, she still believes that God exists. Hence, regarding the issue of God's existence, she finds herself doxastically incoherent—believing and not believing that God exists. Therefore, by appealing to the idea that the mind is fragmented and can contain conflicting doxastic databases, one can account for this kind of doxastic incoherence and contradiction, as exemplified in the case of the long-term theist who becomes agnostic.

1.1 The program of the paper

The main aim of this paper is to offer a new conception of suspended judgment that is not committed to the previous widespread picture.

Following Cohen's theory of acceptance [1989, 1992], I will propose a type of suspended judgment described as *suspension of acceptance*. Specifically, I will claim that there is something we can call "suspension of judgment" that is the deliberate mental act of including neither any of the possible complete answers A to Q nor all their negations among one's premisses for deciding what to do or think in a particular context, regardless of what one does or does not believe about the truth or falseness of the A . In particular, when one suspends one's judgment in this way about a given question Q , there exists at least one answer to Q whose affirmation and negation are both deliberately not included among one's premisses to decide what to think or do in a given context, no matter what one believes or disbelieves about Q .

Regarding the structure of the paper, in Section 2, I will develop a definition of suspended acceptance based on Cohen's theory of acceptance. In Section 3, I will argue that suspended acceptance can be regarded as an *interrogative mental act* that constitutes a *non-doxastic type* of suspended judgment. Finally, in Section 4, against the widespread view, I will show that something we call "suspension of judgment" is a non-doxastic mental act that does not imply a state of doxastic neutrality and can doxastically cohere and be metaphysically and normatively compatible with belief.^{3,4}

³ It is notable that there already are non-attitudinal accounts of suspended judgment, like those proposed by Crawford [2022] and McGrath [2021], in which suspension of judgment is something we do rather than a doxastic attitude. However, despite this, in these latter accounts, belief excludes or is incompatible with suspended judgment. Different from this perspective, our account will show the existence of a non-doxastic mental act we can call "suspension of judgment" that is normatively and metaphysically compatible with belief.

⁴ See Lord and Sylvan [forthcoming] for a perspective on suspended judgment that has similar conclusions about the compatibility of suspension of judgment and belief but employs a different theoretical framework—an attitudinal account of suspended judgment rather than an account based on the perspective that suspended judgment is a mental act. They identify two types of interrogative attitudes that they equate to two ways of having one's judgment suspended and argue that it can be coherent, possible and legitimate to have these attitudes while believing. For example, they underline how we have the ability to compartmentalise our beliefs at one level and put them under scrutiny at another level without showing a problematic doxastic incoherence or something defective from a normative point of view. See their work for more details.

2 Suspension of acceptance

As just anticipated in the introduction, following Jonathan Cohen's [1989, 1992] definition of acceptance, I will propose a type of suspended judgment that can be identified with suspended acceptance. Therefore, the first thing to consider is the notion of acceptance that has been developed by Jonathan Cohen:

To accept the proposition p or its negation $\text{not-}p$ is the *deliberate mental action* of including p or $\text{not-}p$ among one's premisses for deciding what to do or think in a particular context, whether or not one believes p to be true or false.

Said informally, the first part of the definition tells us that accepting that p or $\text{not-}p$ equals the deliberate mental action of treating p *as if* it were true or false in a particular decision context. Moreover, the latter part, 'whether or not one believes p to be true or false', tells us that one of the main features of acceptance is that one can accept a proposition or its negation *regardless of what one thinks about it*. Expressly, one can accept what one believes, disbelieves, or even what one does not have any doxastic state about. Namely, acceptance is a mental act metaphysically independent and compatible with the presence or absence of any state of opinion: it neither constitutes nor implies a doxastic state.⁵

To have an intuitive understanding of this notion of acceptance, consider the following scenario that can exemplify an ordinary situation for lawyers:

LAWYER

Jana is Tex's lawyer and has no opinion about whether he killed Carson. However, since she will defend Tex in court against the prosecutors, she postulates that he is innocent in order to decide what to do or think to provide him with the best defence.⁶

⁵ See Cohen [1989, 1992] for a full perspective on the differences between acceptance and belief. For more non-doxastic accounts of acceptance, see also Alston [1996], Audi [2008], Bratman [1992], Buckareff [2004, 2005, 2010], Engel [1998], Frankish [2012], Stalnaker [1987], Tuomela [2000], Van Fraassen [1980] and Velleman [2000].

⁶ This case is adapted from Cohen [1989, 1992].

LAWYER intuitively shows that Jana decides to treat the proposition p_1 , ‘Tex is innocent’, as if it were true to set what to do or think to defend Tex in the court from the prosecutors’ accusations. Namely, she accepts that p_1 for the sake of Tex’s defence. However, LAWYER also points out that she can do this without necessarily having any belief about Tex’s innocence or guilt. Note that Tex’s prosecutors may do a similar thing. Indeed, they might treat p_1 as if it were false to set what to do or think in order to make their accusations viable. Nonetheless, they might lack full belief that p_1 is indeed false because they may only have clues but not proper evidence that Tex committed the crime. Namely, they may postulate Tex’s guilt even if they do not fully believe it in order to do their work as prosecutors.

But now, since we have a positive and negative form of acceptance that parallels the state of believing and disbelieving the truth of a certain proposition, we can also define a third mental action in the acceptance realm, which is the non-doxastic correspondent of suspended judgment. Let us call this kind of mental act *suspension of acceptance*. Following Cohen’s framework, the following definition can first be offered: suspending one’s acceptance about the question of whether p is the *deliberate mental action* of including neither the answer p nor the answer $\text{not-}p$ among one’s premisses for deciding what to do or think in a particular context, whether or not one believes p to be true or false. However, we can generalise this definition to any type of question and not just limit our perspective to the *question of whether p* . By doing so, we have that suspending one’s acceptance about a given question Q is the deliberate mental action of including neither any of the possible complete answers A to Q nor all their negations among one’s premisses for deciding what to do or think in a particular context, regardless of what one does or does not believe about the truth or falseness of the A . Specifically, when one suspends one’s acceptance about Q , there exists at least one answer to Q , whose affirmation and negation are both deliberately not included among one’s premisses to decide what to think or do in a given context, no matter what one believes or disbelieves about Q . Said differently, suspended acceptance about Q is the mental action by which one *deliberately refrains* from using both any of its possible complete answers and a *non-empty set* of their negations to decide what to do or think in a particular context, regardless of what one does or does not believe about Q .

Similarly to the doxastic neutrality of suspended judgment we discussed in the introduction, the restriction that there exists at least one answer to Q whose affirmation and negation are both deliberately not included among one’s premisses is needed because, otherwise, one would not suspend one’s acceptance about Q in a certain context. Indeed, if one were to include a particular proposition p as the true answer to Q among one’s premisses, one would be simply accepting that answer to Q in a certain context: one would

decide what to do or think in that context by presupposing that a certain proposition p is the true answer to Q , regardless of what one really believes about it. Likewise, if one were to include all the negations of the answers to Q , then one would simply not be accepting any answer to it in a certain context: one would decide what to do or think in that context by presupposing that all the answers to Q are false, regardless of what one really believes about it. Finally, in parallel with the doxastic neutrality of suspended judgment discussed in the introduction, it is worth noting the following: even if we cannot include all the negations of the answers to a given question when we suspend our acceptance about it, we can still deliberately include *more* or *fewer* negations of its possible complete answers among our premisses to decide what to think or do in a particular context. Interestingly, this provides a way to measure the *degree* to which one suspends one's acceptance about Q by subtracting from the set of all possible complete answers those answers whose negations are deliberately included in one's premisses: we obtain the *number* of answers to a given question that one deliberately does not rely on, neither in their affirmations nor in their negations, to decide what to think or do in a given context.

Again, to intuitively appreciate this notion of suspended acceptance, consider the following scenario, which describes how sometimes we can attempt to conduct a *neutral investigation*:

DETECTIVE

Jana is a detective inquiring into who killed Carson. The mass media have built a case that incriminates the politician Tex. Jana is persuaded by the mass media case because she profoundly hates Tex and really thinks that a lousy person like him can commit murder. However, she is in charge of finding out who killed Carson and recognises that her political beliefs should not guide her investigation because she might be accused of making a partisan inquiry and even be fired. Given these considerations, she decides not to presuppose Tex's innocence or guilt to decide what to do or think within her inquiry. Indeed, she acquires and evaluates all the relevant evidence, not just focusing on confirming that Tex is guilty. To her surprise, she discovers that Carson was killed by Tex's wife, Clara, because she was jealous of their secret love affair.

The case shows that Jana is convinced that Tex is Carson's killer, influenced by her political opinions and the mass media case. However, it also points out that, despite her belief, Jana

can take a *neutral approach* to inquire into who killed Carson. Indeed, she can suspend her acceptance about the question of whether Tex is guilty even if she believes the answer that he really is. Namely, she can choose to treat Tex neither as if he were innocent nor as if he were guilty to decide what to do or think within her investigation and render a verdict that is not partisan because of her political beliefs.

Moreover, note that, despite her belief that Tex is guilty, Jana might also suspend her acceptance about the more general question of who killed Carson to be even more confident of performing a neutral inquiry. In particular, she might *totally* suspend her acceptance and treat any possible answer neither as if it were true nor as if it were false to decide what to do or think within her investigation, regardless of whether she already believes one of the possible answers to be true. Otherwise, she might *partially* suspend her acceptance about Q by treating no possible complete answer as true while treating some—but not all—possible complete answers as false. For example, this might happen when, during her investigation, Jana discovers conclusive evidence that rules out some suspects as the culprits.⁷

Therefore, given these considerations, we have an intuitive picture of how suspended acceptance works, and we can see that, similarly to positive and negative acceptance, it is a mental act we can do regardless of what we believe or disbelieve about a particular issue: it neither is nor implies a doxastic state.

⁷ It is important to underline that acceptance is not a stative thing within an inquiry. Indeed, given the evidence one acquires during one's investigation, one can decide to modify one's acceptance dynamically. For example, take the case Jana suspends her acceptance about who Carson's killer is in DETECTIVE. Moreover, imagine that, at a certain point, she discovers good but insufficient evidence that Tex's wife is Carson's killer. Given this, she can choose to pass from suspending her acceptance to accepting that Tex's wife is the killer to decide what to do or think within her inquiry (for example, acquiring more evidence confirming that Tex's wife is guilty). In other words, what we accept or not in our investigations can be a dynamic thing that can vary as we acquire and evaluate the relevant evidence.

3 Suspended acceptance as an interrogative mental act and a non-doxastic type of suspended judgment

3.1 Does suspended acceptance imply an interrogative attitude? Positive, negative and suspended acceptance as interrogative mental acts

As mentioned in the introduction, philosophers are debating whether suspended judgment is an interrogative attitude. The debated question is whether one is inquiring into a given question when one suspends one's judgment. Similarly, we can ask the same question for suspended acceptance: when one suspends one's acceptance about *Q*, is one inquiring into *Q*?

As our considerations about DETECTIVE show, it is intuitively possible that one inquires into a given question when one suspends one's acceptance about it. Indeed, Jana can suspend her acceptance about the question of who killed Carson and inquire into it. However, it does not seem necessarily true that one inquires into *Q* whenever one suspends one's acceptance about *Q*. For example, imagine a case in which Jana does not inquire into the question of whether the Earth is round because she is totally convinced by science that the Earth is indeed round. However, she has a best friend who is a flat-earther: Jana does not want to offend or argue with him due to his beliefs when they converse. One strategy she can adopt to further this goal, *beyond others* she might take, is suspending her acceptance about the previous question. In the specific context of conversations with her flat-earther best friend, she can deliberately choose not to presuppose whether the Earth is flat or not in order to decide what to do or think to avoid offending or arguing with him. In this eventuality, Jana does not inquire into the question 'Is the Earth round?' even if, in her current context, she does the deliberate mental action of not presupposing any possible answer to decide what to think or do in order to avoid offending or arguing with

her flat-earther best friend.⁸

However, even if those who suspend their acceptance about a given question do not need to be inquisitive about it, it is worth noting that they can be regarded as being in an *interrogative condition*. Indeed, when one suspends one's acceptance, one does the deliberate mental action of presupposing neither the possible complete answers to a given question nor all their negations *in order to decide what to do or think in a particular context*. Namely, those who suspend their acceptance can be considered as subjects who have unsettled or "open in their thought" (Friedman [2017, 2019]) the *decision question*: 'what should I do or think in this context?'. Indeed, for example, in DETECTIVE and the case of the flat-earther friend, when Jana suspends her acceptance, she is intuitively aiming to settle the questions Q_1 and Q_2 : 'what should I do or think to inquire into the question of who killed Carson in a neutral way?', 'what should I do or think not to offend my flat-earther friend or argue with him?'. Namely, when Jana suspends her acceptance, she intuitively aims to solve the question of what to think or do in a particular context in which she pursues inquiry neutrality or conflict avoidance.

Moreover, it is worth noting that this reasoning can be extended to the positive and

⁸ One might object that Jana is not actually suspending her acceptance on the question of whether the Earth is round. Indeed, one could *redescribe* the case by saying that Jana is using three premisses in her deliberation about how to behave: that the Earth is round, that her friend is a flat-earther and that she does not want to offend or argue with her friend. By taking these three facts into account, Jana can decide how to behave without suspending her acceptance about whether the Earth is round or not. Indeed, in this description of the case, she is actually using the proposition that the Earth is round as a premise to decide what to think or do in the context she finds herself in. Considering this objection, I agree that this is a *way* for Jana to settle her question about how she should behave to avoid offending or arguing with her best friend. However, it does not exclude the fact that Jana might settle the same issue by suspending her acceptance in that context. Indeed, it is important to emphasise that suspending acceptance, as a deliberate action, is subject to the agent's *control* and, as such, can be *freely* adopted or forgone. Moreover, suspending acceptance could even be the *conclusion* of a prior process of practical deliberation. For instance, Jana might reason as follows: 'I believe that the Earth is round, I know my best friend is a flat-earther and I want to avoid offending and arguing with him for his beliefs. Given all this, it's better if I refrain from taking any stance on whether the Earth is round for deciding what to think or do in our conversations'. Namely, through practical deliberation, Jana could conclude that she should suspend her acceptance during conversations with her flat-earther friend as a strategy to avoid offending or arguing with him. Therefore, given these considerations, I do not think that the proposed redescription rules out the possibility that Jana suspends her acceptance in the case I presented. In particular, since suspending acceptance is a deliberate mental action over which we have control, she is free to adopt it as part of her strategy for deciding what to think or do in order to avoid offending or arguing with her best friend.

negative forms of acceptance. Indeed, even in *LAWYER*, when Jana accepts that Tex is innocent, she can be taken as aiming to find a way to settle the question Q_3 : ‘what should I think or do to defend Tex from the prosecutors’ accusations?’. Similarly, despite having no full belief of Tex’s guilt, the prosecutors who accept that Tex is not innocent but rather guilty can be seen as aiming to find a way to settle the question Q_4 : ‘what should we think or do to make the accusation against Tex viable?’. Namely, in both cases, they can be intuitively regarded as subjects who are aiming to find a way to settle the question of what to think or do in their specific contexts in which they seek to comply with their professional duties as lawyers and prosecutors—defending a client or accusing a suspect.

Given this description of the cases, we can see that when one suspends one’s acceptance about a given question or accepts the truth or the falseness of a certain proposition, one can be regarded as being in an interrogative condition toward the decision question: ‘what should I do or think in this particular context?’. Namely, one can be regarded as having the previous question unsettled or open in one’s thought. Furthermore, besides being in this interrogative condition, it is also worth noting that one also actually does something by accepting in a positive or negative way or by suspending one’s acceptance: one adopts a specific policy *in order to settle* the previous decision question and, therefore, decide what to think or do in a particular context. Precisely, one does the deliberate mental action of presupposing a proposition or its negation or presupposing neither the truth of any answer to a given question nor the falsity of all of them in order to solve the decision question of what to do or think in a particular context.

Indeed, in *DETECTIVE*, when Jana suspends her acceptance about the question of whether Tex is guilty, she presupposes neither that Tex is guilty nor that he is innocent to settle the decision question Q_1 , namely to decide what she should do or think to inquire into the question of who killed Carson in a neutral way. In the case of the flat-earth friend, when Jana suspends her acceptance about the question of whether the Earth is round, she presupposes neither that the Earth is round nor that it is not round to settle the decision question Q_2 , namely to decide what she should do or think not to offend her flat-earth friend or argue with him. In *LAWYER*, when Jana accepts that Tex is innocent, she presupposes that Tex is indeed innocent to settle the decision question Q_3 , namely to decide what she should think or do to defend Tex from the prosecutors’ accusations. On the contrary, when prosecutors accept that Tex is not innocent but rather that he is guilty, they presuppose that Tex is indeed not innocent but rather that he is guilty to settle the decision question Q_4 , namely to decide what they should think or do to make the accusation against Tex viable.

Therefore, given these considerations, it follows that the mental acts of positive, negative and suspended acceptance, despite not being strictly interrogative attitudes, can be considered *interrogative mental acts*: acts that are done with the aim of settling a question one has unsolved or open in one's thought. In particular, taking into account our considerations, when one accepts p or $\text{not-}p$, or one suspends one's acceptance about a given question Q , one can be taken as doing a mental action—presupposing p or $\text{not-}p$, or presupposing neither the truth of any answer to Q nor the falseness of all of them—that is aimed at settling the decision question, 'What should I do or think in this particular context?', one has unsolved or open in one's thought. In other words, we can draw an *interrogative conception of acceptance*, according to which any form of acceptance—including suspended acceptance—can be understood as a deliberate mental act oriented toward resolving a decision question.⁹

In conclusion, based on this conception, we can see that suspended acceptance can be regarded as a mental act that implies an interrogative attitude toward the decision question of what to think or do in a particular context and that is aimed at settling it by deliberately adopting the policy of presupposing neither the truth of any answer to the question on which acceptance is suspended nor the falseness of all of them.

⁹ At this point, one might pose the following questions: while this may *typically* occur when we perform the mental act of acceptance in its various forms, are such acts *always* oriented toward deciding what to think or do in a specific context? Can we accept p or $\text{not-}p$, or suspend our acceptance about Q without having a decision question to solve? To answer these questions, I acknowledge that there may be forms of acceptance that are not aimed at solving the question of what to think or do in a specific context (see footnote 5 for alternative conceptions of acceptance). However, if we adhere to Cohen's conception, one adopts the aforementioned policies—presupposing p or $\text{not-}p$, or presupposing neither the truth of any answer to Q nor the falseness of all of them—specifically to decide what to think or do in a given context. *By definition*, if there were no question about what to think or do in that context, or if one had already made up one's mind about it, one would not deliberately adopt any of these policies *in order to* resolve the previous decision question, as there would be nothing to decide or nothing left to decide. To be clear, one might adopt the previous policies without them being directed toward deciding what to think or do. But then, one would not engage in any form of acceptance as defined by Cohen if one's presupposing p or $\text{not-}p$, or one's presupposing neither the truth of any answer to Q nor the falseness of all of them, is not directed to decide what to think or to do in a certain context. In other words, according to my understanding of Cohen's framework, these mental actions alone are *insufficient* to constitute any form of acceptance *à la* Cohen if there is no issue regarding what to think or do in a particular context and, therefore, if these mental actions are not directed toward deciding what to think or do in that context.

3.2 A non-doxastic type of suspended judgment

At this point, we can ask ourselves whether suspended acceptance, as previously defined, can be considered a form of suspended judgment. The answer seems to be positive. For example, consider DETECTIVE: Jana can be intuitively described as suspending her judgment about Tex's guilt when she suspends her acceptance. Indeed, in a sense, she decides neither to judge Tex guilty nor to judge him innocent in the context of her investigation. Specifically, she makes this decision because she wants to use a neutrally conducted inquiry to determine who killed Carson and not just assume the verdict based on her political opinions. Hence, given this description, Jana can be regarded as an agent who suspends her judgment about Tex's guilt in order to decide what to do or think in the context of her inquiry and conduct a neutral investigation. The same considerations apply to the case of Jana's flat-earth friend. Indeed, in this scenario, Jana decides neither to judge the Earth as being round nor to judge it as being not round in the context of her interactions with her best friend, who is a flat-earth friend. Specifically, she takes this decision because she does not want to offend or argue with her best friend. Hence, given this description, Jana can again be regarded as an agent who suspends her judgment about Earth's shape in order to decide what to think or do in the context of her interactions with her flat-earth friend.

However, one might point out that Jana, in DETECTIVE, believes that Tex is guilty based on her political beliefs and, therefore, that she is not really suspending her judgment about Tex. The same can be said for the case of Jana's flat-earth friend. Indeed, one might point out that since Jana believes that the Earth is round, she is not really suspending her judgment about the Earth's shape. Given this, one might ask: 'is Jana suspending or not her judgment in DETECTIVE and the flat-earth case?'.

To dispel this question, it is sufficient to note that Jana is judging the propositions p_2 , 'Tex is guilty' and p_3 , 'The Earth is round', in two different ways in DETECTIVE and the flat-earth case: one doxastic, the other non-doxastic. On the one hand, her judgment amounts to a *state of opinion*: she believes that p_2 and p_3 . Hence, in this perspective, she does not suspend her judgment because she does not suspend her belief. However, on the other hand, her judgment is a form of acceptance that neither is nor implies a credal state but is a mental act she does in the context of her inquiry or interactions with her best friend: she decides to treat p_2 and p_3 neither as if they were true nor as if they were false when she inquires or interacts with her flat-earth friend because she wants to conduct a neutral investigation or she wants not to offend her friend or argue with him. In this second perspective, Jana suspends her judgment because she suspends her acceptance about

the question of whether p_2 or p_3 .

In other words, to dispel the initial question, it is sufficient to note that the label “suspension of judgment” is *ambiguous* and can express different things: A doxastic condition in which one suspends one’s belief but also a *non-doxastic mental act* by which one suspends one’s acceptance.

4 Suspended acceptance is a type of suspended judgment that is doxastically coherent and metaphysically and normatively compatible with belief

With this word-sense disambiguation, we can now appreciate that there are some negative consequences for the widespread view regarding suspension of judgment, which we presented in the introduction.

We saw that, by definition, suspended acceptance is not a doxastic state but a mental act *metaphysically independent* and *compatible* with the presence or absence of any state of opinion. Namely, we do not need to have or lack any doxastic state to suspend our acceptance and we can have or lack any doxastic state when we suspend our acceptance. On the one hand, this means that we can suspend our acceptance about the question of whether p and not necessarily be in a state of doxastic neutrality in which we neither believe nor disbelieve that p . On the other hand, it points out that we can suspend our acceptance about whether a certain proposition is true and believe it to be true. Indeed, this is intuitively exemplified by DETECTIVE: Jana suspends her acceptance about whether Tex is guilty and believes that he really is. In contrast with the widespread view, this directly shows that there is something that we can call “suspended judgment” that is not a doxastic state, does not necessarily imply a state of doxastic neutrality and is metaphysically compatible with belief.

Moreover, if the last statement is true, then it also follows that suspension of acceptance can doxastically cohere and be consistent with any state of opinion—belief included. Indeed, since suspended acceptance is not a doxastic state but a mental action metaphysically independent and compatible with any state of opinion, it follows that there is, in principle, no doxastic incoherence that is necessarily instantiated by both suspending one’s acceptance and believing. For example, it is possible to have a case in which we believe that p and we suspend our acceptance about whether p without being in a state of doxastic neutrality in which we neither believe nor disbelieve that p . Clearly, in this possible scenario, we would not be in the doxastically incoherent situation in which we both have and do not

have the belief that p . Furthermore, reconsider DETECTIVE. Intuitively, Jana does not display any incoherence in her set of beliefs when she suspends her acceptance about whether Tex is guilty and believes that he really is. Indeed, she believes that Tex is guilty based on her political convictions, but she also believes that her politically biased belief should not guide her inquiry if she does not want to be accused of being partisan or even dismissed. Notably, for this very latter reason, she suspends her acceptance about whether Tex is guilty. Therefore, in contrast with the commitments of the widespread view, the characteristic features of suspended acceptance directly show that it is not true that what we call “suspended judgment”, if combined with belief, always generates incoherent doxastic commitments toward a certain issue.¹⁰

Finally, it is worth noting that suspending one’s acceptance while believing does not even necessarily create problematic normative situations that a rational agent should avoid being in. Rather, it can be a *reasonable* thing to do or even the course of action one can take to comply with what one *ought to do* in a given context. Indeed, take the case DETECTIVE and imagine if Jana had used her politically biased false belief to carry out her inquiry: what would she have done? Thinking about the worst case, she would have made a partisan inquiry in which she would have ignored all the facts demonstrating Tex’s innocence and she would have searched and used just the evidence supporting her false view that Tex is the killer. In the end, after building her accusation, she would have concluded that Tex is indeed the killer and would have put an innocent in jail. Instead, in the best case, after acquiring some evidence, she would have realised that her belief was false and unjustified because it was just based on her political opinions. Based on this, she would have decided

¹⁰ However, it is important to note that even if there is not necessarily doxastic incoherence between belief and suspended acceptance, there is indeed *practical incoherence* between suspended acceptance and the *use* of one’s belief in one’s actions, whether mental or bodily. Indeed, take DETECTIVE and imagine that while Jana suspends her acceptance, she also acts based on her belief: she would use and not use the proposition that Tex is guilty to decide what to do or think in the context she finds herself in. Therefore, even if suspended acceptance does not necessarily generate incoherent doxastic commitments if combined with belief, the use of one’s belief that p in one’s actions is practically incoherent with the suspension of acceptance about whether p if they are both realised in the same context. Here, one might object that this is not a real concern because such a condition is impossible due to the practical contradiction it exemplifies. However, similarly to the doxastic contradiction we have addressed in footnote 2, one might have incoherent databases in one’s mind regarding the issue of how to act in a certain context. Given this, one might find oneself in a situation like the one we have presented, in which one behaves in an incoherent and contradictory way due to conflicting databases.

to abandon the work already done, discard the information acquired to accuse Tex and investigate in another way.

Either way, we can appreciate that Jana would have done something wrong or unideal epistemically, practically and inquisitively if she had followed her politically biased false belief to conduct her investigation. Indeed, she would have conducted a bad, inefficient, or even failed inquiry, wasted her time, done the morally wrong thing, or been a faulty epistemic agent who believes in an unjustified way and is not responsive to the evidence appropriately. Hence, we can recognise that, in DETECTIVE, Jana does one of the most reasonable things—practically, epistemically and inquisitively—when she suspends her acceptance to conduct a neutral inquiry. Rather, we can even say that, by suspending her acceptance, she did what she *ought* to do to carry out a correct inquiry that could successfully discover the truth and avoid the bad epistemic and practical consequences we saw above: Jana did what she ought to do when she suspended her acceptance not to carry out a biased inquiry, which would have been epistemically, practically and inquisitively faulty.

Therefore, in contrast with the commitments of the widespread view, these considerations directly show that it is not always true that what we call “suspended judgment” generates a situation one should not be in if combined with belief. Indeed, as we have just noted in DETECTIVE, Jana does what she ought to do from an epistemic, practical and inquisitive point of view when she suspends her acceptance about the question of whether Tex is guilty, but she believes the answer that he really is. By doing so, she avoids making a bad, inefficient, or faulty inquiry, acting immorally and continuing to believe something false and epistemically unjustified. Rather, by suspending her acceptance, she conducts a proper investigation that enables her to uncover the truth and bring about justice.¹¹

¹¹ However, taking into account the considerations in footnote 10, even if our beliefs can be normatively compatible with suspended acceptance, the use of them in our actions while we suspend our acceptance might be practically problematic. Indeed, as footnote 10 describes, using one’s belief that *p* while suspending one’s acceptance about whether *p* in the same context is a type of practical incoherence. One might say that we are safe from this type of incoherence because it is metaphysically impossible to suspend one’s acceptance about whether *p* while using one’s belief that *p* (see footnote 10 about this issue). However, imagine that suspended acceptance and the use of one’s belief were really compossible: it would be possible to have a situation in which an agent uses and does not use a certain proposition in her actions in the same context. Intuitively, by reading this scenario, it exemplifies a type of incoherence we should avoid if we want to be rational agents. Namely, one should not suspend one’s acceptance about whether *p* and use one’s belief that *p* in the same context because, otherwise, one would be an incoherent agent from a practical point of view. Therefore, assuming the reality of the previous possibility, even if there would be no illegitimacy in

In conclusion, taking into account all our considerations, the widespread view about suspended judgment we can find in contemporary philosophical literature and its theoretical commitments are not literally true. Indeed, there can exist a form of suspension of judgment as a non-doxastic mental act, which does not imply any neutrality of opinion and can be doxastically coherent and fully compatible, both metaphysically and normatively, with belief. I argued that this type of suspended judgment is suspended acceptance.¹²

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believing and suspending one's acceptance, one would be in a normatively defective condition if one used one's belief that *p* in one's actions and one suspended one's acceptance about whether *p* in the same context.

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