Committing to Indecision
A Taxonomy of Suspension of Judgment

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Abstract
Suspension of judgment or belief is often described as the neutral doxastic position or stance, alongside belief and disbelief. However, in this contribution, I will demonstrate that there is more than one way of being neutral. I will introduce paradigmatic cases involving cognitive neutrality and highlight significant differences in their nature, such as their relation to inquiry. I will argue that judgment suspension is an act of committing to indecision, leading to a qualified neutral state of mind. However, subjects can commit to indecision in different ways: depending on their epistemic situation and goals, they can suspend agnostically, precautionarily, or hypothetically. These three resulting states of committed indecision must be distinguished from uncommitted indecision, which is the basic state of doxastic neutrality.

Introduction

People suspend judgment because they don't have enough evidence, see compelling arguments on all sides, or they feel that the question may be inherently unresolvable. In legal proceedings, judges and jury members are expected to suspend judgment until all evidence has been presented, and they must suspend their beliefs if these are based on inadmissible evidence. But what is the nature of suspension of judgement? What is it that subjects are doing when they are suspending? Are all of these subjects doing the same thing?

In epistemology, suspension of judgment is commonly described as the third doxastic stance, alongside belief and disbelief, and is referred to by various terms: being neutral, withholding judgment, putting off one's judgment, being agnostic, or being in a state of indecision or non-belief. In this contribution, I will argue that there is more than one way of suspending judgment and being neutral. Specifically, I will demonstrate that the examples above involve distinct phenomena, reflected in their respective relationships to inquiry.

However, it needs to be explained why all these instances fall under the same genus, "suspension of judgment." To address this issue, I will argue that suspension of judgment is not a state of mind but rather an *act* of committing to one's de facto indecision, leading to qualified,

neutral states of mind. I propose that subjects can commit to indecision in different ways: depending on their epistemic situation and zetetic goals, they can suspend agnostically, precautionarily, or hypothetically. The respective resulting states of committed neutrality must be distinguished from uncommitted neutrality, which is the basic state of doxastic indecision.

In the first part, I will address the concept and nature of doxastic indecision, outline its relation to inquiry, and briefly discuss its rational profile. In the second part, I will introduce the three different ways of committing to indecision, explaining the differences between suspending agnostically, precautionarily, and hypothetically, and briefly noting differences in their rational assessment.

1. Doxastic Indecision

For the purpose of this paper, I will take it that doxastic indecision is the basic state of doxastic neutrality that does not involve any commitments, not even a commitment to neutrality. This lack of commitment distinguishes the doxastically undecided mindset from other states of neutrality, e.g., the agnostic mindset, which involves a commitment. This distinction accounts for the difference between merely lacking an opinion about some considered matter and a neutral opinion one has adopted for a reason. Nonetheless, despite its uncommitted nature, doxastic indecision is psychologically more demanding than what is often called mere "non-belief" (Friedman 2013a, McGrath 2021a, Raleigh 2021, Zinke 2021) or the three non-assertable kinds of ignorance introduced by Rik Peels (2020): "unconsidered ignorance," "deep ignorance," "complete ignorance".[1] In the following, I will introduce the basic state of doxastic neutrality in its nature and rational profile. In Section 2, I will explain how suspension of judgment and committed states of neutrality relate to it.

1.1 Nature and Concept of Doxastic Indecision

Indecision involves an inability to decide between alternatives under consideration. A person is undecided regarding their options if and only if they have not (or not yet) committed to one of them. This holds true for practical indecision, where individuals have not made up their minds about what to do—such as whether to visit the museum or stay at home. In this case, the options in question are mutually exclusive courses of action but one can see those as possible answers to a practical question.[2] Doxastic indecision is about answers to theoretical a question one is attempting to resolve. A person experiencing doxastic indecision has not yet decided which possible answer to the target question is true (or correct).

The connection between indecision and options is further illustrated by the fact that the expression "being undecided" only embeds interrogative complements: one is undecided whether (to go to the movies; determinism is true), where (to go for lunch; Vermeer's painting *The Concert* is located), or who (to invite for dinner; stole the last cookie). It is infelicitous to say that one is undecided that (one will have pasta for lunch; determinism is true, etc.).[3]

Indecision can be defined as pertaining to at least two considered options. Minimally, this involves indecision between performing and omitting an action φ for practical indecision, or, in the case of doxastic indecision, deciding which possible answer to one's target question is true. A subject who is undecided regarding one of two options must be symmetrically undecided regarding the second. However, if there are more than two possible answers—for example, for wh-questions such as "What is the smallest planet in the solar system?" ($q^?$)—the symmetry condition becomes more complex and may only hold between a subset of all possible answers. This is because doxastic indecision regarding the correct answer to $q^?$ does not necessitate doxastic indecision about *all* possible answers, such as those in the answer set P={Earth, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Neptune, Saturn, Uranus, Venus}. For instance, one might know that Jupiter and Saturn are large and therefore disbelieve that they qualify as the smallest planet. Still, one can stay undecided about which of the remaining six planets is the smallest. Similarly, if one is undecided about where to have dinner tonight (φ, ψ, …, none of the three), one has typically already ruled out some options; for example, one may have excluded the restaurant where the waiter was in a grumpy mood last time. Thus, we can define indecision as pertaining to at least two options, even for wh-questions. In the case of doxastic indecision, subjects are undecided about which of the considered two or more (complete) answers to the target question is true.[4]

The psychological state of doxastic indecision involves viewing two or more possible answers to a question as still viable based on the available evidence. There are two notions of "possible answer" at play here: one is the *subject-relative* notion of treating some proposition as a viable answer to the question, and the other is the *semantic* notion of a "possible answer." Subjects can recognize propositions they consider false as semantically possible answers whilst not treating them as viable answers, as in the case of Saturn and Jupiter. To capture this distinction, I will use the term "subjective hypothesis partition," which is the set of possible answers treated as viable answers by the subject. This set may differ from the set of all semantically possible answers to the question; the two sets are identical only if a subject is fully undecided–that is, if they are acquainted with all possible answers to the target question and have not ruled out any of those as false. While only the set of possible answers determines the (full) meaning of a question, the hypothesis

partition may be seen as a representation of the question as considered by the subject.[5] Let me suggest the following definition of the mental state of doxastic indecision:

(Doxastic Indecision) A subject *S* is doxastically undecided regarding the correct answer to a question *Q* if and only if

i. *S* has (or has previously had) *Q* on their research agenda by entertaining (or storing) a hypothesis partition with at least two possible answers to *Q*, and
ii. *S* has not yet settled on the truth of any single answer within the partition.

Condition i captures the idea that subjects can be undecided about the correct answer to a question *Q* even if they are not currently contemplating or actively inquiring into *Q*. Just as propositions can be stored as believed or disbelieved, a question (represented by a hypothesis partition) can be stored as undecided. For a dispositional reading of indecision, it is important to differentiate between (1) a disposition toward indecision regarding a question not yet considered, and (2) dispositional indecision in the sense of non-occurrent, stored indecision. Besides occurrent indecision, only (2), not (1), satisfies **Doxastic Indecision**. Subjects merely disposed to be undecided about a question they have not yet considered are not actually undecided about this question.[6]

Let's say that Satsuki has never thought about the number of Saturn's moons and, apart from knowing that Saturn has several moons, has no further information on this matter. While Satsuki may be described as being in a state of non-belief (if one considers this a state of mind at all), she is not undecided about the correct answer to this question until it is actually on her research agenda. She does not qualify as undecided, even if it is true that she has a disposition to be undecided–which is to say, she would be undecided were she to consider this question.

1.2. Indecision and Inquiry

How does doxastic indecision[7] relate to inquiry? Doxastic indecision and the inquisitive state of mind are related but nonetheless distinct mental states. Inquiry is a complex phenomenon that typically involves both (i) an inquisitive state of mind and (ii) acts of inquiry. A scientist who decides to investigate a natural phenomenon is typically in an inquisitive state of mind, mentally asking what explains the observed phenomenon, in line with (i), while simultaneously performing certain zetetic acts—such as manipulating variables, changing the experimental setting, taking measurements, and assessing and evaluating the evidence acquired so far—in line with (ii).

However, the scientist's inquisitive state of mind and the acts she performs are not unrelated: she performs acts of inquiry, or what I call "zetetic acts" (Wagner 2023), *because* she aims to answer the question on her research agenda. Thus, *acts* of inquiry—as varied as the physical act of positioning measurement devices and the mental act of opening a relevant sub-question—are governed by *states* of inquiry, insofar as subjects perform these acts with the aim of resolving the target question associated with the relevant state of inquiry.[8]

Often, subjects inquire into a question about which they are undecided. In such cases, the content of the the inquisitive state of mind and that of the state of doxastic indecision is the same: a question represented by a hypothesis partition, where the partition comprises the possible answers to the question considered viable by the subject. However, the inquisitive state of mind and indecision are distinct mental states. Doxastic indecision is aimless, whereas subjects in the inquisitive state of mind aim to determine the correct answer to the question or at least improve their epistemic stance (Falbo 2022).[9]

This suggests the following psychological relationship between the inquisitive state of mind and the state of indecision: according to the first condition of **Doxastic Indecision**, for *S* to be undecided about *Q*, it is necessary that *S* is (or has previously been) in an inquisitive state of mind regarding *Q*. While it is also true that subjects who have a question on their research agenda are often undecided about its correct answer–since indecision is a typical starting point of inquiry–this does not hold for all cases. As I argue in line with critics of Friedman's (2019) DBI-norm (Don't Believe and Inquire), e.g., Archer (2018), Falbo (2021), Millson (2020), one does not need to be undecided to inquire into a question, whether from a psychological or a rational standpoint. I will briefly return to the problem of inquiry without indecision, when I introduce what I call "Hypothetical Suspension" in Section 2.4.

In any case, it is no coincidence that the state of doxastic indecision and the inquisitive state of mind are often found together: the pre-stance state of doxastic indecision is the typical starting point for figuring out questions and their answers on uncommitted grounds. However, not all instances of neutrality shared the uncommitted nature of doxastic indecision. Some subjects, as I will elaborate on in Section 2, are undecided in a *qualified* way: they are committed to their de facto indecision and may even hold a neutral *opinion* or stance. Before introducing the mental act of suspending judgment and the qualified states of neutrality that flow from it, I will discuss the rational profile of unqualified or uncommitted doxastic indecision.

1.3. Rational Assessment of Doxastic Indecision

When is it epistemically justified for a subject to be in a state of doxastic indecision? Doxastic indecision can be governed by some of the same norms as belief and disbelief, albeit in a negative way. Within an evidentialist framework, for example, it is justified for *S* to be or remain undecided regarding the correct answer to question *Q* if and only if *S* lacks sufficient on-balance evidence for each answer in the relevant hypothesis partition representing *Q*.

If the hypothesis partition for a non-polar question does not match the set of all possible answers, there is an additional rationality constraint concerning those possible answers absent from the hypothesis partition. These answers are excluded either because *S* is not acquainted with them (as is often the case for answers to why-questions) or because *S* has ruled them out as false, e.g., ruling out Jupiter and Saturn as candidates for the smallest planet in the solar system. In the latter case, indecision regarding the remaining answers in the hypothesis partition is justified only if there is sufficient evidence to disbelieve the ruled-out answers. Thus, for non-polar questions, it is not only psychologically possible but also rationally unproblematic to remain undecided about all possible answers in one's hypothesis partition while disbelieving (and thus being decided about) other semantically possible answers. The ruled-out answers are simply not part of the set that constitutes the objects of indecision—the possible answers within the hypothesis partition. For example, one can be rationally undecided about which planet is the smallest in the solar system concerning the hypothesis partition P'={Earth, Mars, Mercury, Neptune, Uranus, Venus}, while disbelieving that it is Jupiter or Saturn.

It is important to recognize that the uncommitted nature of doxastic indecision makes it subject to *negative assessment* by norms of belief. Indecision among two or more answers within the hypothesis partition can only be unjustified if it is justified to believe one of those answers (or a possible answer that one has previously ruled out). This is due to the uncommitted nature of doxastic indecision: being in this state does not require a commitment or reason for anything–not even a commitment or reason for neutrality that could be assessed positively.[10] The epistemic justification of indecision is only assessable by the absence of sufficient on-balance evidence for belief.

The commitment-free nature of doxastic indecision makes it an appropriate fallback state after a revision based on undermining defeat. If one adopts a belief in one of the answers in one's hypothesis partition, one is epistemically justified if one has sufficient on-balance evidence or reason (according to your preferred normative theory). If this belief is later undermined—say, by an undercutting defeater—the rational response is to give up the belief and revert to a state of doxastic indecision. To use a standard example, let's say that Cole wants to determine the color of

a particular object in a room and forms the belief that it is red based on his visual perception. A bit later, he learns that the only light source illuminating the object is red (from sunset, a red light bulb, or some other source), and so he rationally drops his belief that the object is red. Given the lack of alternative evidence about the object's actual color, he reverts to indecision with respect to the initial hypothesis partition. In the next chapter, I will outline how indecision can function as a fallback position not only for undermined beliefs as in Cole's case but also for undermined agnostic neutrality.

To sum up, doxastic neutrality is a neutral, pre-stance state representing the relevant condition of not having made up one's mind about the correct answer to a considered question. This state is not adopted for a reason; rather, it is a default state of mind in the absence of sufficient on-balance evidence for believing any of the answers in one's hypothesis partition. Thus, it is only negatively assessable with respect to its rationality. In terms of defeat, only rebutting defeaters exist for doxastic indecision, as they provide reasons for belief. There are no undermining defeaters for doxastic indecision, as it involves no commitments or reasons that could be undermined. It is therefore the typical state in which subjects engage in inquiry, though it is also psychologically possible and rationally coherent to remain undecided in a non-occurrent way (i.e., dispositional, stored indecision) without being in an inquisitive state of mind. Moreover, as I will show in Section 2.4, it is also psychologically possible and rationally permissible to engage in inquiry without being undecided. Nonetheless, doxastic indecision is the default starting point of inquiry and the standard fallback state after undermining defeat. In the next Section, I will introduce the mental act of suspending judgment as committing to one's de facto indecision.

2. Suspension of Judgment and Committed Neutrality

In this section, I introduce the concept and nature of judgment suspension and contrast it with (uncommitted) doxastic indecision. I will begin with the observation that the expression "suspension of judgment" is used in various contexts to refer to different cognitive phenomena. I take this fact seriously and suggest that there are different kinds of judgment suspension. Nonetheless, it needs to be explained why all these instances fall under the same genus, "suspension of judgment." To address this matter, I propose that any instance of suspending judgment involves an act of commitment to indecision, which differentiates it from mere, uncommitted indecision. While all such committing acts qualify as judgment suspension, there are distinct types of commitment: subjects can commit to indecision in more than one way. Consequently, the rationality requirements for committing to indecision in one form or another

will also differ. To account for the different ways of suspending judgment, I will distinguish between agnostic, precautionary, and hypothetical suspension.

2.1. Agnostic Suspension

To illustrate the difference between uncommitted indecision and the commitment to indecision relevant for agnostic suspension, let me start with the example of Uriah, who is doxastically undecided in the way I outlined in Section 1.

> **Undecided Uriah** is an amateur astronomer who is investigating the question of what, if anything, happened before the Big Bang. On the internet, he finds various theories suggesting cyclic universes, quantum fluctuations, the multiverse, and even theories arguing that there was no "before" the Big Bang at all. At this stage of his quest, none of these theories have convinced him. Uriah has no opinion (yet) about what, if anything, happened before the Big Bang and continues his search.

What makes Uriah a case of uncommitted indecision according to **Doxastic Indecision** is that he has the question of what, if anything, happened before the Big Bang on his research agenda (Condition i) and has not yet settled on the truth of any answer within the hypothesis partition (Condition ii). Note that, for Uriah to count as doxastically undecided, it is not necessary for him to continue searching. Now consider another subject, Agnes, who has been dealing with the same question:

> **Agnostic Agnes** is a theoretical physicist who has investigated the question of what, if anything, happened before the Big Bang. After decades of active research, she still does not consider herself in a position to answer this question. While she was able to falsify some of the competing theories, let's say, there are still a few candidates providing what she considers to be possible answers to the question. Now, in her late seventies, Agnes settled on the view that science will never establish what, if anything, happened before the Big Bang. She argues that science systematically lacks sufficient evidence to prove or disprove any of these possible answers and that the theories, while fun and exciting to explore, are ultimately speculative and lack empirical support.

Agnes and Uriah can both be described as being in a state of doxastic indecision: both lack an answer to the question of what, if anything, happened before the Big Bang ($Q^?$) that is or has been on their research agenda. Yet, while Uriah is in a state of mere or uncommitted indecision toward $Q^?$, Agnes is in a qualified state of indecision toward $Q^?$. Agnes adopts the agnostic stance by committing to her de facto indecision as the *outcome* of her inquiry, thereby settling the question without answering it. While Uriah's neutrality consists in the absence of an opinion on a question on his research agenda, Agnes has settled her indecision and thus holds a neutral *opinion*. It is natural to characterize Agnes—but not Uriah—as having (agnostically) suspended judgment regarding $Q^?$.

Subjects like Agnes, who adopt the agnostic stance, treat their de facto indecision as the outcome of their inquiry, thereby closing the question on their research agenda without answering it. Instead of settling on a possible answer in their hypothesis partition, agnostic subjects can be understood as *treating* their de facto indecision as the correct answer to the question. It is this feature of treating indecision as an answer to the target question which makes it plausible that agnostic subjects–unlike subjects who are undecided in an uncommitted way–can be described as being in the third doxastic *stance*.

> **(Agnostic Suspension)** A subject S agnostically suspends judgment regarding a question Q if and only if they are in a state of indecision regarding Q and commit to treating their indecision as the answer to Q, such that further inquiry into Q is terminated.[11]

Settling a question is the relevant act or event of making up one's mind, and a subject who has done so has closed the corresponding question. Making up one's mind involves a transition from uncommitted indecision to one of three stances: belief, disbelief, or agnosticism. Agnostic suspension is the relevant act that accounts—psychologically speaking—for the transition from uncommitted indecision to the agnostic stance. This transition can also be assessed rationally (see Wagner 2022 and Section 2.3).[12]

Note that closing the question and committing to one's indecision as the result of inquiry does not mean the subject cannot revise based on new opposing evidence or would refuse to do so. Committing to one's indecision as the result of inquiry means treating indecision as the correct answer to the question and thereby removing the target question from one's research agenda. As such, the subject is no longer in the inquisitive state of mind and, consequently, will not perform any further zetetic acts specifically motivated by this question. However, if the subject encounters new defeating evidence, which sometimes happens without active searching, they will revise their

agnostic position accordingly—assuming they are rational and aware that the new evidence undermines their agnostic stance. The same holds for agents who have settled on belief or disbelief. Like the agnostic, settled believers have closed inquiry and removed the question from their research agenda, but this does not necessarily make them insensitive to or dismissive of new defeating evidence. They have merely stopped actively seeking further information on this matter.

As mentioned in Section 1.3, the distinction between mere indecision and the agnostic stance allows for a unified description of revising one's opinion due to undercutting and rebutting defeaters. Rebutting defeaters provide evidence for an alternative stance, prompting rational subjects to transition directly from their current stance to another, e.g., from belief to disbelief. Undercutting defeaters undermine the support for the current stance and the reasons for which it was adopted, leading rational agents to give up their current stance without adopting an alternative, e.g., from belief to indecision as in Cole's case (Section 1.3). Mere indecision, but not agnosticism, can serve as the default neutral fallback position after giving up one's doxastic stance (belief, disbelief, or agnosticism) upon encountering undercutting defeaters. If an agnostic subject is rational and aware of the undercutting defeater against her agnostic position, they will unsettle their agnosticism and revert to the pre-stance state of mere indecision.

For example, Agnes might learn about a new, promising theory that has already convinced her old friend and esteemed colleague, though she doesn't yet know any details. The mere fact that her once-skeptical friend was so easily convinced may undermine her reason for agnosticism, prompting her to give inquiry another try. The here described transition is a genuine change of mind, intelligible only if we distinguish between settled and unsettled indecision.

2.2. Precautionary Suspension

In the last section, I argued that we need to distinguish between subjects who are neutral regarding an issue because they have no opinion (Undecided Uriah) and those who hold a neutral opinion or stance (Agnostic Agnes). I described the uncommitted state of indecision as the default state for various stages of inquiry before an opinion or stance is reached, while agnosticism marks the end of inquiry. Agnostic suspension of judgment, as I explained, is the relevant act or event by which a subject commits to their de facto indecision as the outcome of their inquiry thereby *treating* indecision as the correct answer to the question without actually answering it.

Suspension of judgment, however, is not exclusively used to describe cases where inquiry is closed. It also applies to subjects who keep inquiry open with the aim of answering the question

at some later point (see also McGrath 2021a, b, this volume, Chapter 1). To illustrate this approach to suspending judgment, let me consider Jane:

> **Juror Jane** is a member of a jury in court, where four eyewitnesses to a crime are set to testify. After the first testimony, which incriminates the defendant, Jane is inclined to believe he is guilty. However, she knows that three more witnesses are yet to give their reports and that forming a judgment now would be premature. Jane understands that if she settles on an answer at this point, she is more likely to be biased and less open-minded in receiving the remaining witness reports. Thus, Jane temporarily withholds judgment until all witnesses have been heard.

Unlike Agnes, Jane does *not* close the question on her research agenda but keeps it open. Not only does she refrain from closing the question, but she also actively resists the inclination to follow the first witness report. To prevent her initial inclination from prematurely closing her mind or introducing bias in assessing the other, yet-to-be-heard witness reports, Jane postpones her decision on the verdict, driven by her concern for reaching an accurate conclusion. Her caution may stem from an awareness of psychological factors like confirmation bias and primacy and recency effects,[13] or it could be that Jane is simply fulfilling her duty as a responsible juror who has been briefed accordingly.[14] In this way, Jane suspends her judgment for now, expecting to be in a better position to assess all reports impartially later. While Agnes suspends judgment *agnostically* and thereby removes the question from her research agenda, Jane suspends judgment *precautionarily* to keep the question on her agenda up to a specific point.

To account for the difference between agnostic and precautionary suspension, we must examine how Agnes and Jane are committing to their de facto indecision. Unlike Agnes, Jane clearly does not commit to indecision as the final outcome of her inquiry. Instead, her goal in suspending judgment is to keep the question open. Nonetheless, it makes sense to describe Jane as committing to indecision insofar as she commits to *remaining* undecided *until* all reports are in. The neutral state resulting from Jane's commitment to indecision is not one of *settled* indecision but rather a state of indecision with an expiration date.

The relevant act of commitment in Jane's case functions as a policy of precaution to ensure open-mindedness and prevent premature judgment. This can seen as a disposition to intervene if inclined to judge. To be effective in preventing judgment, the commitment must be in place *prior* to the formation of the judgment one seeks to avoid. Typically, this takes place in the early stages of the judging process (active intervention) or even before the process begins. As a relatively inexperienced juror, let's say, Jane intervenes when she realizes that, after only one report, she is

inclined to think of the defendant as guilty. By committing to remain undecided until all reports are in, Jane actively counteracts her inclination, which she deems premature and potentially misleading. For such instances, the terms 'withholding' or 'holding back' are appropriate because they only make sense if there is a judgment, at least potentially, "in the making" that is then to be withheld.[15]

However, not all cases of precautionary suspension must be like this. We can consider another, more experienced juror or a professional judge who, by default, commits to remaining undecided until all evidence is considered, even in the absence of any specific inclination. Like Jane, they have the disposition to withhold judgment, but given their longstanding experience, they are rarely inclined to judge, so the disposition is almost never triggered.

> **(Precautionary Suspension)** A subject precautionarily suspends judgment if and only if they are in a state of indecision and commit to remain in this state until some predefined condition *C* applies. This act of commitment is performed with the aim of keeping inquiry open and results in a disposition to counteract any inclination to judge before *C* applies.

Condition *C* can take various forms; for example, it may involve a situation in which one's epistemic circumstances are improved compared to the present. These circumstances might relate to one's body of evidence, as in Jane's case, but they could also concern one's cognitive capabilities (think of deferring difficult questions to the next day when one will be well-rested, free of a headache, or sober again). *C* may also refer to a specific point in time by which the agent must or wishes to have made up her mind (such as when actions or practical decisions need to be taken). While it is true that there is always a chance of obtaining better evidence later, there are more and less rationally appropriate candidates for *C*, which I will briefly address in the next section.

2.3. Rational Assessment of Agnostic and Precautionary Neutrality

In Sections 2.1 and 2.2, I introduced agnostic and precautionary suspension, describing both as commitments to one's de facto indecision. In both cases, subjects find themselves in a doxastic state of indecision but qualify this state through an act of commitment. This act distinguishes mere, uncommitted indecision—as exhibited by subjects who merely lack an opinion, like Uriah—from committed indecision, as exhibited by Agnes and Jane. However, as I pointed out, there are different ways of committing to indecision. While agnostic suspension involves committing to

one's indecision as the result of inquiry (leading to a settled neutral state, the agnostic stance), precautionary suspension involves committing to remain undecided until a specific condition *C* applies (leading to a state of conditionally upholding neutrality, with a disposition to withhold judgment if inclined to do so before *C* applies).

Since agnostic suspension settles the question on one's research agenda without answering it, the agnostic state of mind is psychologically incompatible with the state of inquiry. This is evident in the subject's behaviour: agnostic subjects stop performing zetetic acts aimed at settling the question because it is no longer on their research agenda. In contrast, the neutral state of mind resulting from precautionary suspension does not settle the question but instead serves to keep it on the subject's research agenda to allow for a better position to answer it once condition *C* applies. While the state of agnostic neutrality involves a neutral opinion and marks the end of inquiry, the state of precautionary neutrality functions as an *intermediary* state within the inquiry, aimed at avoiding premature and potentially false judgments. Agnostic suspension ends the aim of answering the question, whereas precautionary suspension does not.

How do we assess agnostic and precautionary suspension and the respective neutral states that follow? In the case of agnostic neutrality, the state of indecision and the act of commitment are assessed independently of each other. The state of doxastic indecision is justified by a lack of on-balance evidence for any of the answers in the hypothesis partition (see Section 1.3). The additional act of committing to one's indecision as the outcome of inquiry must be assessed zetetically. These two sources of justification may diverge; for example, *S* can be epistemically justified in her indecision but still engage in further, fruitless (and thus zetetically unjustified) inquiry. This may be a waste of resources and time, but there is nothing epistemically wrong with it.

We can also imagine that a subject settles on her indecision too early: *S* can be epistemically justified in her indecision at that time but unjustifiably commit to it as the outcome of her inquiry; for instance, if the stakes are high and resolving the question is important. Again, there is no epistemic flaw here, but a zetetic one. Lastly, *S* can be epistemically unjustified in her indecision and either zetetically justified or unjustified in committing to her *de facto* indecision as the outcome of inquiry. Even if zetetically justified in their commitment to indecision, the resulting neutral state is epistemically unjustified as a consequence of not being epistemically justified to be undecided in the first place.

The assessment of precautionary neutrality is more complex because the commitment to remain undecided until a condition *C* applies is typically made in the presence of opposing evidence. We must ask whether Jane is epistemically justified in her indecision despite the positive

first-order evidence provided by the witness report. I suggest that cases of expected better evidence should be understood as providing higher-order evidence (HOE), which *can* outweigh one's first-order evidence. In Jane's case, her awareness of psychological effects like confirmation bias zetetically justifies her commitment to remain undecided if the stakes are high. However, this awareness may even epistemically justify her state of doxastic indecision if it is sufficient to counterbalance her first-order evidence. This works in the opposite direction as well: the commitment to remain undecided until *C* (epistemically) ought not to be upheld if *S* encounters very strong evidence for a considered possible answer before *C* applies. This could serve as a defeater of her precautionary commitment.

As we can see, the rational assessment of agnostic and precautionary suspension differs significantly, even though the rational assessment of doxastic indecision plays a fundamental role for both.

2.4. Hypothetical Suspension

In this section, I will introduce a third type of judgment suspension, alongside agnostic and precautionary suspension. To illustrate, let me introduce Luke, who serves as a lay judge in court.

> **Lay Judge Luke** is attending a trial where a tape recording is presented as evidence. In the recording, the defendant makes incriminating statements that contradict parts of her earlier testimony. However, it is later revealed that the tape was illegally obtained, rendering the evidence provided by it inadmissible in court (exclusionary rule). Thus, Luke is not allowed to use the content of the recording as evidence when deciding whether or not the defendant is guilty. Luke, in exemplary fashion, puts his belief about the tape's content aside for the sake of making up his mind without being influenced by it.

Luke may be a rare case, but it is plausible to describe him as suspending his belief for the sake of unbiased decision-making. However, neither agnostic nor precautionary suspension can fulfill this role because a commitment to one's de facto indecision requires the subject to be *doxastically* undecided in the first place. Luke, however, is not doxastically undecided and would need to drop his belief about the tape's content to reach that state. If we assume that Luke has good reason to believe the tape is genuine (despite being illegally obtained), there is nothing *epistemically* wrong with his belief about the tape's content. It would be odd if the exclusionary rule required Luke to suspend his belief in a doxastic way—that is, by demanding that he actually drop it.

Fortunately, it is not necessary to suspend doxastically to correctly adhere to the exclusionary rule. Satisfying the legal principle does not require the abandonment of one's beliefs in critical evidence but merely prohibits its use in deciding the defendant's guilt (fruit of the poisonous tree). Thus, the type of suspension required here must be one that allows for setting aside a belief without discarding it altogether. I suggest that excluding certain parts of the evidence means only that Luke must be able to locally mute his belief or put it out of play so that it does not influence the process of deciding the question of the defendant's guilt. This, I argue, requires a non-doxastic kind of suspension, which I will call *hypothetical suspension*.[16]

Hypothetical suspension targets beliefs in the zetetic realm (the realm of inquiry) without dismissing them in the doxastic realm. Typically, individuals who inquire into some question $Q^?$ utilize a set of premises that contains at least some $Q^?$-relevant beliefs. For the purpose of inquiry, individuals can manipulate the set of premises by either (a) *adding* propositions they do not consider true or even believe to be false (hypothesis testing) or (b) *excluding* propositions they do believe to be true. Just as a disbelieved $Q^?$-relevant hypothesis may be added by a subject to the set of premises without thereby adopting the corresponding belief, a $Q^?$-relevant belief may be excluded from the set without being removed from the doxastic realm. I suggest that *hypothetical suspension* is what it takes for (b): the exclusion of a $Q^?$-relevant belief from the set of premises used for inquiry into $Q^?$.[17] This hypothetical suspension of a belief is psychologically and rationally compatible with still holding the belief.

Due to its non-doxastic nature, *hypothetical suspension* differs from agnostic and precautionary suspension; nonetheless, it can still be described as a commitment to indecision. Whereas this commitment to indecision cannot be about the subject's *de facto* indecision (Luke is not actually undecided about the tape's content), it is instead a commitment to *simulate* indecision for the sake of unbiased inquiry. In this sense, Luke inquires into the question of the defendant's guilt *as if* he were undecided (or even ignorant) about the tape's content.

> **(Hypothetical Suspension)** A subject *S* hypothetically suspends her belief in a $Q^?$-relevant proposition *p* if *S* believes *p* and commits to inquiring into $Q^?$ as if *S* were undecided towards the truth of *p*.

A $Q^?$-relevant proposition *p* is relevant in the sense that the subject considers it important for making up her mind about $Q^?$: *S* may think that *p* provides evidential support for one of $Q^?$'s possible answers, though she may be mistaken. Alternatively, *S* may (correctly or incorrectly) believe that *p* is not evidentially relevant but still consider it a potential and to-be muted influence on her inquiry. For example, Luke may find himself in a situation where he wants to shield his

inquiry from both types of potential influence. He may wish to mute his justified belief in the content of the illegally obtained tape, which supports the defendant's guilt. Additionally, he may try to set aside irrelevant beliefs about the defendant's personal characteristics, such as gender, ethnicity, or religion, which he suspects could unintentionally impact his inquiry. Hypothetical suspension is a tool that subjects can use at will to exert control over their inquiry. This is why hypothetical neutrality–in contrast to agnostic and precautionary neutrality–is only subject to zetetic assessment. Since hypothetically suspended beliefs remain intact and are simply not utilized in inquiry, there is not in need for *epistemic* justification. However, it may be more or less rational to do so from a zetetic point of view.

There is another important role for hypothetical suspension that I will address only briefly here. I will argue that double-checking is a special case of hypothetical suspension, where the Q-relevant proposition p is relevant in virtue of being a possible answer to Q that the subject already believes to be true. For example, Richard and his friends are going to the movies tonight, and Richard believes that the film starts at 8 PM because that's the usual time they have met before. Yet, to be on the safe side, he re-checks the online program, temporarily setting aside his belief that it starts at 8 PM. He does not abandon his belief but merely puts it out of play for his re-inquiry. Depending on the outcome, he will either confirm his original belief or revise it based on defeating evidence.

Intuitively, it is plausible that an agent who wishes to assess one of her beliefs must suspend or set aside the relevant belief for the sake of genuine re-inquiry. According to Friedman's (2019) DBI-norm (Don't Believe and Inquire), rational subjects ought not to inquire into a question if they believe one of its possible answers. While I think it is plausible to suspend one's belief during its assessment, I do not think that the required kind of suspension is doxastic in nature. As Falbo (2021) points out, we sometimes have good reason to inquire into things we already know, for example, when the stakes are high, and potential mistakes would have serious consequences.

Hypothetical suspension of the relevant p-belief, I suggest, offers a way to make sense of the intuition that a belief needs to be set aside for assessment without being abandoned doxastically. It is sensible to put a to-be-assessed p-belief out of play as long as the question of p remains on one's research agenda. Depending on the outcome of the assessment, the belief will either be reinstated or revised according to any new supporting or defeating evidence acquired during the assessment. Subjects who assess their belief in p engage in hypothetical suspension by committing to inquire into the question of whether p as if they were undecided about p's truth.

Conclusion

In this contribution, I introduced four examples featuring subjects exhibiting different neutral states of mind. Uriah, Agnes, and Jane are doxastically undecided about the answer to a question that they have (or previously had) open in mind. Uriah is in a pre-stance state of mere or uncommitted indecision and has no opinion about the correct answer to the question (yet). In contrast, Agnes is in a committed state of indecision because she committed to her de facto indecision as the outcome of her inquiry, thereby settling the question without answering it. Jane is also in a qualified state of indecision, but unlike Agnes, she committed to remain undecided about the answer to the question until all witness reports are in. While Agnes suspended agnostically and formed a neutral opinion, Jane suspended precautionarily, conditionally upholding her indecision to be in a better position to form an informed opinion later.

Luke, unlike any of the previous three subjects, is *not* in a doxastic state of indecision but commits to inquire into a question $Q^?$ as if he were undecided regarding a $Q^?$-relevant proposition *p*. In this sense, Luke hypothetically suspends (or brackets) his $Q^?$-relevant *p*-belief for the duration of his inquiry into $Q^?$. For special cases like belief assessment and double-checking, *p* may even be a possible answer to $Q^?$ that is temporarily set aside during re-inquiry.

Against the standard view in epistemology, which considers suspension of judgment *the* third doxastic position, I have argued that there are multiple ways of suspending judgment, each with distinct relationships to inquiry. Nonetheless, it remains appropriate to view all these forms as instances of the same genus, "suspension of judgment." This approach reveals suspension of judgment as an act of committing to one's de facto indecision, allowing for different commitments to be made.

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[1] Peels (2020) identifies six varieties of ignorance, two of which are assertable by the subject: "undecided indecision" and "suspending indecision." Peels points out that "undecided ignorance is relatively close to suspending ignorance, so it might be hard—at least, it requires a bit of work—to explicitly assert that one is in a state of undecided rather than suspending ignorance" (p. 614). In this contribution, I will address exactly this distinction.

[2] For a unified way of conceptualizing indecision, I will frame alternative courses of action as answers to practical questions (such as what to do in a specific situation), though this framing is not essential for the points I aim to make about doxastic indecision. For readers skeptical about thinking of actions as answers, practical indecision can simply be understood as a relation between a subject and at least two possible, mutually exclusive courses of action.

[3] This point has often been made to explain the asymmetry between suspending judgment and belief/disbelief (Friedman 2013a, b). I suggest that indecision's relation to options is the root of this asymmetry. In the next section, I will explain how suspension and indecision relate to each other.

[4] For the purpose of this paper, I will not delve into the details of partial versus complete answers to a question. I will assume that the answers discussed here are complete answers to the respective question.

[5] A hypothesis partition might even include elements that, semantically speaking, are not possible answers to the question but are only treated as such by the subject. Just think about Pluto. I will set this problem aside for now.

[6] I take this to be analogous to Audi's (1994) suggestion to distinguish between having a stored, dispositional belief and having a disposition to believe a proposition one has never previously considered. *Pace* Rosa (this volume, Chapter 3), I also think that being disposed to be in doubt about a question or proposition is *not* sufficient to be actually in doubt about it.

[7] For convenience, I will use "indecision" and its cognates as shorthand for "doxastic indecision" in what follows, unless stated otherwise.

[8] This framework allows for an accurate description of Friedman's (2019) Detective Morse, who only pretends to inquire by acting as if he had the question of who the murderer is on his research agenda whilst knowing that he himself committed the crime.

[9] I will not delve into the debated question of whether knowledge, truth, or some other aim is what the inquirer seeks when trying to determine the correct answer to the question.

[10] *Pace* Ferrari & Incurvati (2022) and Ferrari & Susanna (this volume, Chapter 7), I also exclude a commitment to not being committed. The most basic state of neutrality–doxastic indecision–is not an attitude adopted for a reason and is thus commitment-free.

[11] In Wagner (2022), I argued that the attitude providing the necessary commitment to indecision is one of *endorsement*, with the object of this evaluative, higher-order attitude being the subject's de facto state of indecision. Here, however, I will adopt a broader scope and refer more generally to attitudinal commitment to indecision without detailing the specific attitude involved.

[12] The idea that Agnes, unlike Uriah, is in a stable, committed, and settled state is supported by various philosophers, such as Sven Rosenkranz (2007), Scott Sturgeon (2010), and Kurt Sylvan (2016). "True Agnosticism [...] is stable enough to generate commitments with respect to the debate's future course, and thus is more than a mere refusal to adopt any stance at all" (Rosenkranz 2007, p. 101). "[S]uspended judgment is a non-trivial kind of judgment, a non-trivial kind of committed neutrality. The joint absence of belief and disbelief is no kind of judgment at all, no kind of commitment" (Sturgeon 2010, p. 136). "Agnosticism consists in settled resistance to belief on the evidence—a committed neutrality relative to one's evidence" (Sylvan 2016, p. 1653).

[13] Confirmation bias is a cognitive bias in which individuals tend to search for, interpret, favor, and recall information in ways that confirm their preexisting beliefs or hypotheses. This bias can lead individuals to ignore or dismiss information that contradicts their beliefs while selectively accepting information that supports them. The order in which information is presented can also impact perception and processing, known as the primacy and recency effects.

[14] In the U.S. legal system, jurors are commonly instructed to withhold judgment until all evidence has been presented and the case is fully argued by both sides. This guideline aims to ensure impartiality and prevent premature conclusions that could bias the final verdict.

[15] For a similar account see McGrath (2021a, b).

[16] One might think that Luke is now considering a different question than before, namely whether the defendant is guilty given the *admissible* evidence, which explicitly excludes the tape recording. Even if this is the question Luke is pursuing, it still needs to be explained how the exclusion of evidence operates psychologically. What does it mean to exclude some of one's beliefs in an inquiry? The notion of hypothetical suspension is intended to provide an explanation and could be understood as the relevant psychological intervention that helps subjects pursue tricky and somewhat unnatural questions like the one stated above.

[17] Not only beliefs are proper targets of hypothetical suspension. John Rawls' (1971) *Veil of Ignorance* suggests that by temporarily setting aside personal views, biases, and knowledge of our own and others' circumstances, we can foster fairness and impartiality in decision-making. For many cases, we may lack actual ignorance or indecision, but we can still inquire and decide *as if* we were ignorant or undecided. Moreover, hypothetical suspension seems to play a role for particular instances of disbelief: audience members willingly suspend disbelief to enjoy illusions performed by magicians or immerse themselves in fictional adventures.