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THE AIM OF BELIEF AND SUSPENDED BELIEF

ABSTRACT: In this paper, I discuss whether different interpretations of the 'aim' of belief – both the teleological and normative interpretations – have the resources to explain certain descriptive and normative features of suspended belief (suspension). I argue that, despite the recent efforts of theorists to extend these theories to account for suspension, they ultimately fail. The implication is that we must either develop alternative theories of belief that can account for suspension, or we must abandon the assumption that these theories ought to be able to account for suspension. To close, I briefly consider some of the reasons we have in favour of pursuing each of these options, and I suggest that it is worth exploring the possibility that suspension is best understood as its own attitude, independently of theories of belief's 'aim'.

KEYWORDS

Aim of Belief; Suspended Belief; Withhold Belief; Suspend Judgment; Aims; Norms

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INTRODUCTION

Teleological and normative theories of belief currently dominate debates about the nature of belief. Both accounts, which offer different interpretations of Bernard Williams's (1973: Ch. 9) remark that 'beliefs aim at truth', hope to explain certain descriptive and normative features of belief. The teleologists achieve this by appealing to a genuine aim or *telos*, commonly said to be the truth; and the normativists achieve the same by appealing to a normative requirement, also commonly said to be truth. In this respect, the teleologists interpret Williams's claim quite literally: there really is an *aim* of belief; while the normativists take a metaphorical approach—talk about the 'aim' of belief stands in for what is actually a normative requirement.¹

In this paper, I do not assess the merits of these theories as theories of *outright* belief. Instead, I assess how and whether they can be extended to account for another doxastic attitude: suspended belief (suspension). The underlying assumption is that any comprehensive theory of belief should also provide the basis for a theory of suspension—an assumption shared by at least some teleologists and normativists, such as Ernest Sosa (2010) and Pascal Engel (2013a), whose work I discuss later. However, as I will argue, the efforts of these theorists to extend their theories of belief to suspension fail. This leaves us with two options: either we must find alternative (or differently elaborated) theories of belief that can account for suspension, or we must abandon our initial assumption that they ought to be able to—perhaps suspension is just an altogether different kind of attitude.

¹ Influential teleologists include McHugh (2011, 2012), Sosa (2010), Steglich-Petersen (2006, 2009), and Velleman (2000). Influential normativists include Boghossian (1989, 2003), Engel (2005, 2007, 2013a, 2013b), Shah (2003), Shah and Velleman (2005), Wedgwood (2002, 2007, 2013), and Whiting (2010). For a useful collection of papers on the topic see Chan (2013).

In Section 1, I begin by outlining the features of suspension that are central to this discussion. These are features that, I suggest, any plausible theory of suspension must be able to explain. In Section 2, I argue that both the teleological and normative theories of belief fail to account for these features. And in Section 3, I close the discussion with some tentative remarks about whether we really should expect theories of belief to account for suspension. In general, my hope is to draw attention to the fact that considerably more work is to be done if we wish to establish the place of suspension in a contemporary theoretical framework.²

1. SOME FEATURES OF SUSPENSION

Like outright beliefs, suspension has its own descriptive and normative features, that we should expect any theory of suspension to explain. Descriptively, we want to know what suspension *is* (in contrast to other attitudes); and normatively we want to know when (if ever) it is appropriate to suspend.

To begin with the descriptive features, it is important to realise that suspension is an attitude, distinct from the mere *absence* or *lack* of a belief (following Friedman, I call this absence a ‘non-belief’). Friedman (2013) make this clear with a number of illuminating examples. For example, despite holding no belief on such matters, we were not born suspending about ‘whether bumblebees hibernate during the winter’, and cavemen were not suspending about ‘whether the Large Hadron Collider would find the Higgs boson’ (p. 168). Hence, there is more to suspension than the absence of belief—indeed, ‘even rocks and numbers’ are in that state, as Ralph Wedgwood (2002, p. 272) has observed.

² Jane Friedman (2013, 2017) makes steps in this direction with her recent, in depth inquiries into the nature of suspension. A number of important points in this paper draw on her efforts.

This suggests that theories of suspension must be able to say something about what suspension is – *as an attitude* – insofar as this attitude is distinct from other attitudes and, moreover, from the mere absence of belief.

Moving onto suspension's normative features, we should expect our theory to tell us something about when it is appropriate to suspend. If we reflect for a moment on the different normative requirements of suspension and belief, it is apparent that there are times when suspension is (and is not) an appropriate attitude to hold. Consider that when your evidence for p and for not- p is unclear, such that neither p nor not- p can be established with any confidence, then it is not appropriate to form an outright belief in either p or not- p ; rather, suspension is appropriate. While, conversely, when your evidence is sufficiently strong to support p (or not- p), then an outright belief that p (or not- p) is appropriate, and suspension (ordinarily) is not.³ These are some of the basic normative requirements of suspension. In particular, we can note that suspension is subject to its own normative requirements, and these requirements are not equivalent to those we would typically associate with outright belief.

To summarise, as a minimum, theories of suspension should be able to account for:

- i. The descriptive features of suspension, such that we can distinguish suspension from other attitudes and non-belief.

And,

³ There is perhaps some overlap between the normativity of belief and suspension, such that believing that p and suspending towards p can occasionally both be appropriate under the same conditions. This seems to be a consequence of new forms of limited pragmatism about belief, such as McHugh's (2012, 2015). According to such theories, the evidence for p can be sufficient for belief, but we might nonetheless suspend toward p for pragmatic reasons. In this sense, pragmatic reasons can (at least on occasion) have the final say on whether we believe that p or suspend toward p . As it happens, this kind of pragmatism presents the teleologists with a problem when it comes to explaining suspension, which I will get to later. However, for now, my point is just that the normative features of belief and suspension cannot be identical. I expect that even the pragmatist would agree that if the evidence supported p beyond all doubt (e.g. with Cartesian certainty), then belief (and not suspension) would be appropriate.

- ii. The normative features of suspension, such that we have some understanding of the conditions under which it is appropriate to suspend.

Any theory that fails on either of these counts thereby fails as a theory of suspension. In the following section, I outline teleological and normative theories of belief, and I argue that they fall short as theories of suspension in both of these important respects. Moreover, this remains the case even when these theories are explicitly extended to account for suspension.

2. THEORIES OF BELIEF AND SUSPENSION

Teleological theories of belief hold that beliefs are characterised by a genuine aim. This aim is typically explained in terms of the mechanisms involved in belief formation and maintenance, which are said (in some sense) to aim at the truth. At the intentional level, in doxastic deliberation, the aim is usually said to manifest in our intention to believe only truths; and at the subintentional level (as not all beliefs are formed intentionally), it is said to manifest in our underlying cognitive mechanisms, which regulate for truth. The teleologists then appeal to this aim to explain the descriptive and normative features of belief.⁴

To be precise, the teleological thesis can be stated as follows:

Teleological Thesis: A propositional attitude ϕ is a belief if and only if ϕ aims (in virtue of the mechanisms involved in belief formation and maintenance) to have content p only if p .⁵

⁴ It is sometimes added that the truth-directed mechanisms involved in belief production have most likely arisen as the result of natural selection (e.g. see Steglich-Petersen 2006, p. 510, and Velleman 2000, p. 253, fn. 18). This is in keeping with the naturalistic tendencies of the teleologists. Nevertheless, we don't need to be committed naturalists to be teleologists – perhaps God created us with truth-directed belief forming mechanisms.

⁵ Not all teleologists (listed in fn. 1) explicitly commit to this statement of the teleological thesis, however it captures what I believe most teleologists would be happy to agree with. An exception is McHugh (2011), who suggests that *knowledge*, and not (merely) truth, is the aim of belief. Nonetheless, since McHugh takes the truth aim to be 'derivative from' the knowledge aim, the truth aim is still at least a necessary feature of belief on his account (p. 382).

This thesis asserts that belief *just is* the attitude that aims at the truth; this is how we satisfy the descriptive goal of demarcating beliefs from other attitudes. And the normativity of belief is explained in instrumental terms, such that true beliefs are correct because they achieve belief's aim, and believing according to our evidence is rational because evidence indicates truth.⁶

As for normative theories of belief, the central claim is that beliefs are essentially norm- (in contrast to aim-) governed. This norm, as with the alleged aim of belief, is usually said to be truth, such that beliefs are subject to a truth norm. Both the teleologists and the normativists agree that there is an intimate relation between belief and truth, however they disagree about the essence of this relation. For the normativists, the truth-centric nature and normativity of belief cannot be reduced to descriptive properties of believers—i.e., to the mechanisms of believers that regulate for truth. Instead, they hold that beliefs can only be properly understood by appeal to a distinctly normative component, such that believers are subject to a requirement to believe only truths, independently of what believers are actually *doing*.

It turns out to be quite difficult to pin down an exact formulation of the 'normative thesis', as we have for the teleological thesis, which is agreeable to most normativists. This is because normative theories have become extremely complex and multifaceted in response to various objections, arguably much more so than their teleological counterparts.⁷ For this reason, I will simply stipulate that I am interested in the following version of the normative thesis, with a few words of justification to follow:

⁶ Of course, there is a lot of debate about the plausibility of this thesis, with two notable objections raised by Owens (2003) and Shah (2003). For developments in the literature following Owens' objection, see [Author Removed], McHugh (2012, 2015), Steglich-Petersen (2009, 2017), and Sullivan-Bissett & Noordhof (2013, 2017); and for developments following Shah's objection see Shah & Velleman (2005) and Steglich-Petersen (2006). For my purposes, I overlook these important discussions here, as I am interested in whether this thesis can account for suspension, and not in the plausibility of the thesis *per se*.

⁷ For two influential objections to normativism, see Krister Bykvist and Anandi Hattiangadi (2007), and Kathrin Glüer and Åsa Wikforss (2009).

Normative Thesis: A propositional attitude ϕ is a belief if and only if there is a normative requirement to hold ϕ with content p only if p .

For the most part, I take this thesis to be neutral between various different interpretations of normativism. In particular, it takes no stand on whether the ‘normative requirement’ is a prescription, a permission, or an ideal.⁸ It also only makes truth a necessary condition for correct belief, which I believe most normativists would agree with, even though some would argue that beliefs should additionally be justified or amount to knowledge.⁹

With the teleological and normative theses clearly stated, we can now begin to focus on the central question of this paper, which is whether these theories have the resources to account for suspension.

2.1. DIRECT APPLICATION OF THESES TO SUSPENSION

It is immediately evident that, when taken at face value, the teleological and normative theses do not tell us anything interesting about suspension. As theories of outright belief, neither has the resources to *directly* account for the nature and normativity of suspension, as they have been outlined above. Bernard Mayo (1963-4) first took note of this contention with early normative theories of belief. He wrote:

‘An immediate consequence of the thesis that believing is what it is fitting to do with a truth is... [that] one ought never to suspend judgment, since there is nothing that it is right not to believe, except the false, the negation of which, being true, one ought to believe.’ (Mayo 1963-4, p. 144)

From Mayo’s perspective, the problem is that the proposed normativity of belief leaves no room for suspension. If truth is the only thing ‘fitting’ for belief, then it is never appropriate to suspend. This leaves us with a problem: when the relationship between belief and truth is stated in this

⁸ The norm is a prescription for Boghossian (1989), (2003); Shah (2003); Shah & Velleman (2005); and Wedgwood (2002). For Whiting (2010) it is a permission. And for Engel (2013a) it is an ideal. For a general survey of issues surrounding normativism about belief, see McHugh and Whiting (2014).

⁹ For instance, Engel (2005) takes knowledge to be the most fundamental norm of belief.

way, suspension is excluded from the scope of the theory – a problem that appears to remain in light of our more recent theories of belief.

For the normativists, both their descriptive and normative projects fail, because suspension is simply not the attitude that we are required to hold 'with content p only if p '. That would be a very strange requirement to set for suspension. And the same is true for the teleologists, since it would be equally as strange to suggest that, when we suspend, we do so with the aim to suspend towards p only if p . Indeed, insofar as these theories are plausible, the conditions they set are far more congenial to outright beliefs, which should not be too surprising, given that they were originally intended as theories of outright belief, not suspension. To recognise this is really just to acknowledge that belief and suspension are not exactly the same attitude, so they cannot be explained in exactly the same terms. Nonetheless, Mayo's objection has important implications; it implies that any theorists who draw such a close connection between belief and truth, as the teleologists and normativists do, have more work to do when it comes to accounting for suspension. Their theories do not get a free pass in this regard.

That brings us to the next question: *can* the necessary work be done in order to make these theories account for suspension? To this end, the first thing to notice is that neither the teleological nor the normative thesis categorically rules out suspension. Given that each thesis is formulated with truth as a necessary (and not sufficient) condition for belief, neither prohibits suspension toward p even when p is true.¹⁰ In fact, according to each thesis, suspension is always allowed, in any situation. This point, in itself, doesn't tell us anything interesting about suspension, for it is also true of imagining that p , desiring that p , and even non-belief in p , etc. – none of

¹⁰ It is generally recognised that truth cannot be a sufficient condition for belief, whether beliefs are construed as teleological or normative. In the teleological case, this would mean that we have the impossible aim to believe all truths – an aim which we clearly do not possess (Sullivan-Bissett and Noordhof 2013). And in the normative case, this would mean that we are subject to the impossible requirement to believe all truths, which violates the principle of *ought-implies-can* (Boghossian 2003; Bykvist and Hattiangadi 2007).

these attitudes are ruled out by the aim or norm of belief. Nevertheless, it does mean that there is room for a logically consistent account of suspension to be subsumed under either thesis. In this way, it is perhaps possible to derive an aim or norm of suspension from a more fundamental aim or norm of belief, thus demonstrating that the teleological or the normative thesis can be extended to provide a theory of suspension.

In the following two subsections, I turn my attention to two attempts to show that the teleological and normative theses do, in fact, give rise to their own aim and norm of suspension. Sosa (2010) defends a teleological account, and Engel (2013a) defends a normative account. For the reasons to be discussed, I suggest that both of these theorists fail in their respective efforts to establish a plausible theory of suspension.

2.2. SOSA ON SUSPENSION: A TELEOLOGICAL READING

Sosa (2010) takes believing to be a kind of performance, with an aim, like any other aim-motivated behaviour. For this reason, he regularly draws analogies between the aim of belief and other, more ordinary, aims. One analogy he makes extensive use of, and which we will focus on here, is between belief's aim and the aim of a hunter stalking his prey. It is through this analogy that Sosa hopes to show how a teleological account of belief can give rise to a similarly teleological account of suspension.

To see how this works, we can begin by reflecting on Sosa's (2010, pp. 5-7) analysis of the hunter. The first thing to notice is that, in the act of hunting, the hunter has two related aims. He has the primary aim *to hit his target*, and he has the secondary aim *to choose his shots well*. The first of these aims requires the hunter to have a good shot, if he is to demonstrate his competence. This means that when the hunter shoots, he must be able to hit his targets with some sufficient level of consistency. In this respect, when we assess the hunter's performance, we do so based on his ability to satisfy this primary aim. However, with this primary aim, comes the secondary aim. To be a good hunter, the hunter must also choose to shoot at the right

time — that is, he must choose his shots well. (It is quite possible for a hunter with a good shot to be bad at choosing when to shoot, and vice versa.) To thus achieve this secondary aim, the hunter cannot just shoot at random, hoping to hit some targets. Rather, he must sometimes *forbear* from shooting. This, of course, will mean that he occasionally misses potential targets (due to not shooting); but it will increase his chances of hitting a target when he does shoot (that is, of satisfying his primary aim). The primary and secondary aims of the hunter are therefore related in the following way: the secondary aim is in the service of the primary aim, since it is in virtue of trying to competently satisfy the primary aim that the hunter has his secondary aim. In turn, given that this secondary aim is distinct from the primary aim, it also comes with its own standard of assessment (its own normative requirements). We can assess the hunter's performance according to whether he chooses his shots well, in addition to whether he has a good shot. Both of these assessments arise due to these two respective aims.

In general, Sosa's point is that the primary aim to achieve a certain goal often comes with a secondary aim, and this secondary aim typically involves *avoiding failure*. The hunter must choose his shots well, such that he decreases the chances of failing to satisfy his primary aim. And this, Sosa notes, is a common feature of many aim-motivated behaviours, 'whether athletic, artistic, academic, etc.' (p. 6). From the primary aim to achieve success follows the secondary aim to avoid failure.

The next point to take from Sosa's analysis is that attempting to avoid failure often requires *inaction*; yet this inaction is still a kind of performance. There is a crucial difference between *aim-motivated* inaction and *mere* inaction. Consider again the hunter: when he assesses a shot situation, and decides that now is *not* a good time to shoot, his decision not to act is *intentional*. By carrying out his secondary aim (to avoid failing to hit his target), the hunter, in Sosa's words, 'intentionally and even deliberately forbear[s]' from taking a shot (p. 6). In contrast, if he doesn't take a shot

because he has, say, fallen asleep, his inaction is not aim-motivated (Sosa's example, p. 6) – in this respect, his inaction is not intentional.¹¹ Accordingly, then, an instance of inaction may or may not be aim-motivated. The important thing to note is that when inaction is aim-motivated, the aim involved is just like any other aim: it gives rise to all of the usual dimensions of instrumental normativity that we should expect from an aim. This allows us to assess how well inaction is achieved, in instrumental terms, when that instance of inaction is aim-motivated (we might ask: did the hunter choose not to act at the right time?).

That gives us the two important insights that we need to take from Sosa. The first is that aim-motivated behaviours often have two related aims. There is the primary aim to achieve success in a certain domain, and this is typically related to a secondary aim to avoid failure. The second is that inaction, which is often the result of attempting to satisfy a secondary aim, can be genuinely aim-motivated, and can therefore be subject to the same criteria of assessment as other aims. With these two points in mind, we can begin to see how Sosa's teleological account of suspension develops. In essence, Sosa suggests that suspension is the doxastic analogue of aim-motivated inaction, such that the aim of suspension derives from the more fundamental aim of belief.

To go into detail, as we have seen, the (primary) aim of belief is to believe only truths. In line with Sosa's analysis, we can say that this aim gives rise to a secondary aim, which is to avoid failure (in this case, to avoid failing to believe only truths). Suspension is then associated with this secondary aim, in the following way. If we cannot establish the truth of either p or not- p , then we avoid failing to believe only truths by intentionally forbearing from belief. The hope is then that this *intentional forbearance* from belief enables us to characterise the nature and normativity of suspension (for ease of expression, I will sometimes refer to this as 'doxastic forbearance'). The idea

¹¹ The hunter's decision to go to sleep might've been intentional, but his inaction with respect to taking a particular shot while he is asleep is not.

is that we can distinguish suspension from other attitudes and non-belief on account of suspension being uniquely subject to this aim, and we can explain the appropriateness of suspension in instrumental terms (we can ask whether a subject carried out this aim well). The result is that, from the aim of belief, we can derive an aim of suspension, such that the teleological theory of belief gives rise to a closely related teleological theory of suspension. What we want to know now is whether this theory of suspension is going to work.

To assess the merits of this proposal, it helps to first recognise that, if this teleological account of suspension is to be successful, it must make the aim of suspension both a necessary and sufficient condition for an attitude to count *as* suspension (just as the aim of belief is said to be both necessary and sufficient for belief). It must be necessary, otherwise there could be instances of suspension that are not described by the aim; and it must be sufficient, because the aim alone is intended to describe suspension. However, on closer inspection, it's difficult to see how this proposal can meet either of these requirements. I begin by considering the sufficiency condition.

2.2.1. THE SUFFICIENCY CONDITION

There is a fairly obvious sense in which we can satisfy this secondary aim of belief without entering into a state of suspension. That is when we intentionally forbear from holding beliefs on a topic, by simply not inquiring into that topic. For instance, we might decide not to inquire at all into whether p or we might decide to cease our present inquiry into p . In both cases, we can successfully avoid holding false beliefs, by intentionally forming no beliefs. However, it would be strange to say that we are suspending on the topics that we have decided not to inquire into. It makes more sense to say that we remain in a state of non-belief about those

topics.¹² In a very general sense, then, doxastic forbearance is not sufficient for suspension.

Now, the teleologists will be quick to respond that this initial criticism doesn't undermine Sosa's central claim. This is because the kind of doxastic forbearance that Sosa is talking about is not completely general, but is restricted to a certain domain. To reflect again on Sosa's example of the hunter. The hunter might decide not to go hunting, or he might decide to cease presently hunting, and thus forbear from shooting any targets; but this kind of forbearance is not what Sosa has in mind. The hunter's decision not to hunt is not motivated by his aims *as* a hunter – that is, by his aim to hit his target or to choose his shot well. These aims only arise *within* the context of the hunt (i.e. while he is actively hunting), and *not* when he has already decided that he will not take part in the hunt. This is apparent when we consider how we would assess the hunter's ability as a hunter: we would base our decision on whether the hunt is going well *when he is hunting*, and not on whether he decided to go hunting or not. The thought is that something similar is true of suspension. As the hunter's aims (as a hunter) occur within the restricted context of the hunt, the proposed aim of suspension only occurs within the context of doxastic deliberation (that is, the analogue of the hunt). When we avoid inquiry, we do not 'activate' the aim of suspension (so to speak), but instead give it up in favour of some other pursuit. The kind of doxastic forbearance that is relevant, therefore, does not include intentional forbearance from inquiry, but is the kind of intentional forbearance that results *within* doxastic deliberation; that is, when we are actively involved in belief formation and maintenance. Thus, it is within this more restricted domain that we must focus our criticism, as

¹² Friedman (2013, p. 170) makes a similar point regarding ceasing to inquire. She observes that finishing considering a proposition is not sufficient for suspension, for we might become distracted during our deliberations and thus stop thinking about that proposition. In this sense, we might already be inquiring into a proposition, and intentionally stop inquiring, yet not enter into a state of suspension.

it is only within the context of doxastic deliberation that the aim of suspension is said to have a role.

Focusing our analysis accordingly, then, does Sosa's account fare

any better? I think not. Even within doxastic deliberation, it's difficult to see why doxastic forbearance would always give rise to suspension. One concern is that, for the proposal to hold, the relation between doxastic forbearance and suspension must be one of conceptual or metaphysical necessity. It cannot be the case that sometimes doxastic forbearance gives rise to suspension and sometimes it does not, as a matter of contingent psychological fact. If this were the case, then, of course, doxastic forbearance would not be sufficient for suspension, as there would be the *possibility* of instances of doxastic forbearance that do not amount to suspension. But this is not the result that the teleologists are after. They are not making a contingent claim about human psychology—they want a sufficient condition for all possible instances of suspension. However, it's dubious to suppose that doxastic forbearance necessitates suspension in this way. At least, it seems conceivable that a subject could intentionally forbear from belief, and yet not enter into a state of suspension.

For example, we can imagine a race of creatures who, upon concluding that their evidence for p and for not- p is inconclusive, intentionally drop all doxastic attitudes towards p , and instead return to a prior state of non-belief about p . These creatures, call them Deliberites (some say they are the distant cousins of Jonathan Bennett's (1990) Credamites), could have evolved (or perhaps have been programmed) not to hold indeterminate doxastic attitudes towards propositions. In this respect, they are an *all or nothing* type of creature when it comes to belief. When they deliberate what to believe, if they take the evidence to sufficiently support p , they go ahead and (just as we do) believe that p —and they may even do so by carrying out an aim to believe only truths. However, when they determine that the evidence is not sufficient to support either p or not- p , they finalise their deliberation by

intentionally dropping any kind of doxastic attitude toward p , and then move on to whatever it is they are planning to deliberate next. The Deliberites might at some point find themselves deliberating the same proposition on multiple occasions, because circumstances might motivate them to do so; but for some period of time after concluding their deliberation, they intentionally put themselves into a state of non-belief. The relation they then have toward the proposition that they forbear from believing, is thus equivalent to the caveman's non-belief about the Higg's boson.

At this point, it might be questioned whether such creatures are really possible. It isn't entirely clear that *we* (as human deliberators) could intentionally force ourselves into a state of non-belief about p after concluding a process of deliberation. Having considered the evidence, and having made up our mind (at least for the time being), it seems like we would be in quite a different position than the caveman who has never considered p . However, while this has some plausibility as a psychological claim about humans, that is, at best, all it appears to be – a contingent claim about our psychology, rather than a conceptual or metaphysical truth about what it means to suspend. In contrast, the Deliberites are, under the same conditions, able to intentionally enter into a state of non-belief, because (we can suppose) their psychology is completely different from ours. This possibility is perhaps easiest to see if we imagine the Deliberites as complex machines that have been programmed to consider various propositions *as they present* to the system, one after another, and to assess their truth.¹³ They have the ability to then assign truth values (i.e. T or F) to the propositions considered, based on the evidence supporting those propositions, but they have no option for an indeterminate state. If they determine the truth value for the proposition to be T, they believe it; if F, then they don't believe it (i.e.

¹³ How the propositions 'present to the system' will depend on the system. For instance, the machine could receive perceptual inputs from the environment which prompt deliberation; it could be responding to a pre-programmed list of propositions; or it could be responding to information that a programmer inputs manually.

they believe its negation); but in the case of a proposition for which the evidence is indeterminate, any reference to that proposition in the operating system of the machine is dropped – i.e., they return to the state they were in before they deliberated it; a state equivalent to the non-belief of the caveman. If this is conceivable, as I think it is, then intentional forbearance from belief is not sufficient to give rise to suspension.

Another problem for this account of suspension is that doxastic forbearance is not a fine-grained enough condition to distinguish suspension from another closely related attitude. The difficulty here depends on a distinction between *suspension* and (what we can call) *withheld assent*.¹⁴ In the Introduction to his translation of Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, Benson Mates (1996, p. 32) touches on the idea that when a subject suspends belief (or 'suspends judgment' in his terminology), this seems to suggest that the subject understands the proposition in question, but has not yet made up his mind about whether the evidence is strong enough to believe it; however, when a subject withholds assent from a proposition, this could be because he simply does not understand the proposition and for that reason is unable to form a belief, independently of the evidence that is available to him. To again use Friedman's example, consider the scientist who is deliberating whether to believe the proposition that *the Large Hadron Collider will find the Higgs boson*. Presumably, the scientist understands what it *means* for this proposition to be true or false. He understands what evidence is relevant to the truth of the proposition, what the implications of the veracity of the proposition are, etc. In this sense, when he decides to intentionally forbear from belief, he makes an *informed decision*. Now, contrast this with a non-scientist who, let's suppose, doesn't understand the proposition in question. The non-scientist might spend some time trying to figure out what it means for the Large Hadron Collider to find the Higgs boson (what it means for that proposition to be true). Nonetheless, he might

¹⁴ Where 'assent' is understood to mean mental assent (as opposed to public assent). As a reviewer has kindly pointed out, one can mentally assent to *p* but wish not to publicly assent to *p* (or vice versa) for various pragmatic reasons.

ultimately realise that he is simply unable to grasp the proposition (he doesn't have the necessary scientific knowledge), and on that basis intentionally forbear from holding a belief on the matter. In this way, there is (arguably) an important difference between the attitude of the scientist and that of the non-scientist, even though they both intentionally forbear from believing the same proposition. On the one hand, the scientist holds an informed attitude, while, on the other, the non-scientist is, in the Pyrrhonian sense, 'at a loss'.¹⁵

For the purpose of this discussion, the implication is that two distinct attitudes can, in principle, arise from doxastic forbearance. The first requires some level of understanding, and in our terminology fits better with the notion of suspension. The second, in contrast, occurs when understanding cannot be attained, and this we can call, following Mates, 'withheld assent'. The labels we apply here are, to a large extent, not important. The point is that there are two logically distinct attitudes, and Sosa's appeal to doxastic forbearance to establish the nature of suspension does not distinguish between them.

In response to this difficulty, there are (broadly) two ways that the teleologist can go. They can deny that there is a substantial difference between these two attitudes, or they can attempt to show that the teleological thesis can account for the difference.

On the first reply, the teleologist might be reluctant to agree that our theory of suspension is obligated to distinguish between suspension and withheld assent. It might be suggested that both are similar enough to fall under the same label, for whatever reason. However, despite the fact that this response would, on the surface, lack philosophical rigour, it would also conflict with the general strategy of the teleologists for characterising

¹⁵ When making this distinction, Mates (1996, Introduction, §6) points out that, despite contemporary discussions, the Sextan Pyrrhonist is better described as someone who withholds assent from all propositions, rather than suspends belief. This is because Sextus repeatedly claims, not just to disagree with his opponents, but to be completely unable to comprehend what they are trying to say. It is for this reason that Sextus always finds himself 'at a loss' (*aporia*).

doxastic attitudes. The teleological approach attempts to characterise beliefs on the basis of the intentional (and subintentional) responses that we have to evidence. Beliefs are distinguished from other attitudes by the unique way in which we respond to evidence; we form beliefs by assessing the evidence we have for a proposition with the aim of believing the truth. In this respect, the teleological account can be understood as an ‘input’ theory of belief, since its definition of belief depends on the evidential inputs that support beliefs.¹⁶ This is important because, from an input perspective, we should be able to demarcate suspension from withheld assent, given that they are responses to different evidential situations. On the one hand, the subject who suspends is able to take the evidence for a proposition into account, but forbears from belief because he deems the evidence to be insufficient. On the other hand, the subject who withholds assent is unable to take evidence into account for the proposition (at least, he cannot directly assess the evidence for and against the proposition), since he admits that he cannot make sense of the proposition in the first place. From this perspective, we should expect ‘input’ methods of defining doxastic attitudes to be sensitive to distinctions that can be made based on the different types of input that those attitudes receive; such as between suspension and withheld assent.

The second reply accepts that there is a substantial distinction, but argues that the teleological thesis can account for it. One suggestion, in this regard, is to restrict the teleological thesis to range over only those propositions that a deliberator can understand. The derivative aim of suspension would then also be restricted to propositions that can be understood, thus distinguishing between suspension and withheld assent in line with how I have distinguished them. On the one hand, there would be doxastic forbearance from propositions that a subject can grasp. This would arise

¹⁶ This contrasts with ‘output’ theories of belief, such as functional theories, which characterise beliefs according to the outputs (or effects) they produce (i.e. according to their functional role). Functional theories of belief have a long and complex history, which I won’t go into here; however for a recent and concise statement of a functional theory of belief, see Van Leeuwen (2009).

due to the secondary aim of belief, and would amount to suspension. On the other hand, there would be doxastic forbearance from propositions which a subject cannot grasp, and which would amount to withheld assent. This attitude would not have any necessary connection to the (new, restricted) aim of belief, and would presumably be characterised by its own descriptive and normative features. If the teleologists were to make this move, it wouldn't be without justification. We cannot form an outright belief in p when we do not (by our own reckoning) understand p , so there is no danger of believing p , in this case, when p is false.¹⁷ From this perspective, talk about an aim to believe propositions that cannot be understood, and a derivative aim to avoid believing false propositions which equally cannot be understood, doesn't make much sense. So, arguably, both the aim of belief and the derivative aim of suspension only range over propositions that we can understand.¹⁸

Nonetheless, there are a couple of further concerns with this reply. The first question is where, on this view, withheld assent fits into the teleologists' scheme. In the same way that there are important relations between belief and suspension, there are also important (and similar) relations between belief and withheld assent. For instance, holding the belief that p and withholding assent in p simultaneously seems impossible, at least consciously; and, additionally, believing that p while also withholding assent in p would seem to put the believer into some kind of epistemic error. This suggests that, while there is an important difference between suspension and withheld assent, they should arguably still both fall under the same theoretical scheme. In other words, given the close relations between belief, suspension, and withheld assent, if we expect our theory of belief to account for suspension, then it is reasonable to expect it also to account for withheld assent. Restricting beliefs aim to propositions that we can understand helps to distinguish suspension from withheld assent, but

¹⁷ Thanks to an anonymous review for raising this point.

¹⁸ Notice that this is a claim about the psychological ability of a believer to grasp or understand a proposition. It is not the case that the proposition must be necessarily ungraspable.

it does so at the expense of evicting withheld assent from its theoretical framework. Ultimately, this might not be a fatal blow to the teleologists, since they could additionally argue that their theory ought to account for suspension, but not withheld assent. Nonetheless, this claim could not be taken for granted, so there would still be considerably more work for the teleologists to do.

The second concern, and perhaps the more worrying, is the strength of the justification for restricting belief's aim to propositions that can be understood. On first sight, the fact that we are not in danger of violating belief's aim, with regards to propositions that we are unable to believe (because we cannot understand them), seems like a good reason to suppose that belief's aim does not apply to such propositions. However, on reflection, it's not clear why the inability to believe a proposition – at least at a given time – should have any influence on the scope of belief's aim. While we are unable to believe propositions that we cannot understand (and so are not in danger of violating belief's aim), we are equally unable to believe propositions for which we do not have a certain amount of evidence – that is, unless we want to accept a fairly radical form of doxastic voluntarism. For this reason, limiting belief's aim to propositions that we have the ability to believe would appear to generalise too far. The teleologists want to explain belief forming practices; but restricting belief's aim only to propositions that can be believed would require us to leave out, not only withheld assent, but also suspension. For there is equally no danger of violating belief's aim when we suspend towards p , on the assumption that the evidential situation also rules out forming an outright belief in p or not- p .¹⁹

¹⁹ This touches on another potential difficulty with the teleological thesis generally. The teleological approach is, I believe, most promising when it comes to explaining the normative features of outright beliefs, and how to distinguish them from other propositional attitudes. Yet there are other descriptive features of belief that we might want our theories to explain, such as doxastic involuntarism. However, it's not clear why belief's aim, when characterised something like an ordinary aim, would prevent voluntary control over our beliefs.

These considerations suggest that, when we intentionally forbear from belief, this does not always result in suspension. As such, it is yet to be established that doxastic forbearance can count as a sufficient condition for suspension. Moreover, as I argue presently, doxastic forbearance is also problematic as a necessary condition for suspension.

2.2.2. THE NECESSITY CONDITION

The first problem with the claim that suspension is necessarily subject to the proposed aim, arises from a general concern regarding the necessity of carrying out aims in order to enter into doxastic states. If we adopt either of two main theoretical branches for understanding doxastic attitudes—representationalism or dispositionalism—it is curious why we would *only* be able to manifest certain doxastic states as the consequence of carrying out aims. If the state is a representation or disposition—something distinct from the aim itself—then why would we only be able to manifest this state by a singular means; that is, only by carrying out a particular aim? In her work on suspension, Friedman (2013) develops a related concern through her analysis of a proposed ‘consideration condition’, which she assesses as a possible necessary condition for suspension. The condition holds that it is only by ‘considering, deliberation, wondering, entertaining and so on’ (p. 171) that we can come to suspend belief. However, as she points out, the problem with this condition is that it severely limits the means by which we can enter into a state of suspension. In particular, it makes it impossible to suspend belief through ‘non-standard means’ (p. 171). The examples of non-standard means Friedman offers are being hit over the head, having your brain operated on, and even the possibility of a Swampman version of yourself spontaneously coming into existence already suspending about all kinds of things.²⁰ The difficulty is that in all of these cases, considering a proposition is not what takes the subject into a state of suspension—and it seems like a parallel case can be made against an ‘intentionality condition’.

²⁰ There is some controversy about whether Swampman really has beliefs. Nonetheless, even if we don’t accept Swampman cases, the other examples serve the same purpose.

These examples show that we do not need to intentionally forbear from belief in order to suspend. If suspension is thought of as a kind of representational or dispositional state, much like belief, then it seems possible for a neuroscientist to induce such states, quite independently of whether you have carried out an aim.²¹

The second potential problem arises from the possibility that suspension might, on occasion (or, on a more extreme view, always), be guided by aims other than the epistemic aim of avoiding false beliefs, as dictated by the aim of belief. It has been suggested to varying degrees that suspension might not always be to do with the epistemic aims of a believer, but could also be to do with their pragmatic aims.

On the more extreme view, dating back to Pyrrho's scepticism (as we see it through Sextus), suspending belief has to do, fundamentally, with achieving *ataraxia*; that is, a kind of tranquillity or peace of mind. In this sense, if we were to interpret this as a teleological claim about the nature of suspension, then we would have the result that the aim of suspension is primarily pragmatic, and not epistemic. Indeed, the aim of *belief* could still be truth (an aim that is ultimately unachievable according to the Pyrrhonists), while the aim of suspension is, independently of that aim, pragmatic. We suspend so that we can avoid mental strife. If this kind of global pragmatism about suspension is true, then an epistemic aim is arguably not the primary aim of suspension, but the aim to have a tranquil mind is.

²¹ It's worth mentioning that the cases Friedman raises against the necessity of a consideration condition for suspension also generalise to outright belief. If suspension can result from non-standard means, then why not outright belief too? This possibility thus has the potential to create problems for teleological theories of belief generally, by detaching the nature of beliefs as fundamentally representational or dispositional states, from their proposed teleological cause in the agent. To my knowledge, this line of thought as a general critique of the teleological thesis has not yet been pursued in the literature, and it would be worth exploring. Nonetheless, for our purposes it is enough to note that, even if the teleological thesis holds for outright belief, it does not entail that the same is true of suspension. (Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to elaborate on this issue.)

Of course, this would be quite an extreme form of pragmatism to adopt, and we might not be so inclined to hold that epistemic considerations don't at least have something to do (fundamentally) with suspension. (Perhaps it could even be argued that, from a Pyrrhonian perspective, we achieve peace of mind (in part) *because* we don't have false beliefs, making the aim to avoid holding false beliefs a necessary means for achieving a pragmatic end.) Nonetheless, we need not adopt such a global form of pragmatism to see that pragmatic aims might have a role to play when it comes to suspending, independently of belief's truth aim. For example, Conor McHugh (2012, 2015), who defends a teleological account of belief, also argues that we can (at least sometimes) suspend for pragmatic reasons. This, he argues, is when the evidence 'psychologically *allow[s]* you to believe a proposition, without psychologically *compelling* you to believe it' (2015, p. 1122). In this respect, the evidential situation allows for the pragmatic aims of a believer to influence whether they, all things considered, believe a proposition outright or suspend towards that proposition.

An example McHugh offers involves deliberating about your friend's guilt in a criminal case. Several independent witnesses claim that your friend committed a terrible crime, and you have no reason to suspect a conspiracy. This gives you, we can assume, sufficient evidence to believe that your friend is guilty. However, given that there is some limited chance that the witnesses are wrong (or misleading you for whatever reason), you are not psychologically compelled to believe in your friend's guilt. Rather, you are able, the claim goes, to suspend belief about it, because you value your friendship, and do not want to ruin it if he does turn out to be innocent – i.e., you can ultimately decide to suspend for pragmatic reasons.²²

On this view, a pragmatic aim has the final say in whether you decide to believe in or suspend about your friend's guilt. In particular, your aim is to (say) preserve your friendship. Importantly, this means that your aim is *not*

²² For this example, see McHugh 2015, p. 1124.

to avoid failing to believe the truth—indeed, you take yourself to have sufficient reason to believe that your friend is guilty, without falling into error. The matter, then, is not error avoidance—the aim which dictates your decision to suspend is pragmatic, not epistemic.

The point is that, if a pragmatic conception of suspension is correct (either in a global or more restricted sense), then it is incorrect to suppose, as Sosa suggests, that suspension is always guided by the aim of error avoidance. From a pragmatic perspective, such as McHugh's, there are instances of suspension that are not characterised by Sosa's aim of suspension, such that this aim is not necessary to all instances of suspension. In this regard, McHugh's account is particularly important, because he explicitly endorses truth as the aim of belief, while holding that suspension can be influenced by pragmatic aims.

In summary, Sosa's attempt to develop the teleological position to account for suspension is problematic. It fails to give a sufficient condition for suspension, as the aim does not always give rise to suspension; and it is also not clear that such an aim is necessary. First, there is a potential disconnect between our aims and forming doxastic attitudes, and—at least on pragmatic accounts of suspension—there are cases of suspension that are not guided by the epistemic aim of avoid false beliefs. As the teleological account stands, then, it is unable to account for the descriptive and normative features of suspension.

2.3. ENGEL ON SUSPENSION: A NORMATIVE READING

That brings us to normative theories of suspension. Beginning with a normative interpretation of belief, Engel (2013a) develops and defends (albeit briefly) an account of suspension (in his terminology, *withheld belief*) that is essentially normative.²³ In doing so, he uses a strategy similar to

²³ In the previous section, I outlined a potential difference between suspension and withheld assent. Introducing a new term at this stage, 'withheld belief', would only generate confusion. However, when Engel mentions 'withheld belief', it's quite clear that he is talking about our notion of

Sosa's, in the sense that he begins with a more fundamental theory of belief, and attempts to extend this theory to account for suspension. The main difference in their approaches thus reflects the difference between teleological and normative theories of belief generally—for Engel, the nature and normativity of suspension, like that of belief, cannot be reduced to descriptive features of believers, unlike on the teleological view.

In response to Mayo's contention that normative theories of belief cannot account for suspension (outlined in Section 2.1.), Engel writes:

'It is false that the norm of truth allows only two doxastic attitudes. If one considers whether *p* is true, and does not have enough evidence for either *p* or not-*p*, the norm does not prescribe believing *p* or believing not-*p*. It prescribes withholding belief. But isn't withholding belief then under the governance of the evidential norm...? It is, but it is also under the governance of the truth norm, for there is no possibility of being governed by the truth norm unless one follows the evidential norm.' (p. 213)

In this passage, the suggestion is that belief's truth norm (as captured by the normative thesis) gives rise to an evidential norm, which in turn has the resources to account for suspension. In this respect, much like how Sosa begins with a fundamental aim of belief and derives a secondary aim of suspension, Engel begins with a fundamental norm of belief and derives a secondary norm (an evidential norm) of suspension. What we want to know is whether this approach to understanding suspension is more effective than that of the teleologists. My method is again to consider whether the condition offered—that of an evidential norm—is both necessary and sufficient for suspension.

suspension. With this in mind, I will continue to talk about suspension in the text, but will not edit Engel's references to 'withheld belief' – these two terms should thus be considered interchangeable.

2.3.1. THE SUFFICIENCY CONDITION

It's important to keep in mind here that the evidential norm we are dealing with, is one that has been *derived from* the more fundamental truth norm of belief. When delineated as such, it's apparent that such an evidential norm is not sufficient to distinguish suspension from, in particular, non-belief.

Engel informs us that belief's truth norm doesn't only prescribe outright beliefs, but that via the evidential norm it also 'prescribes withholding belief'. This is because, when we do not have enough evidence for p or not- p , we should, according to the truth norm, avoid holding a belief on the matter, lest our belief be false. However, given that this is an essentially normative requirement, and not a constraint on how we in fact go about forming and maintaining beliefs, we can simply note that this requirement is satisfied by remaining in (or entering into) a state of non-belief. On the surface, there is no reason to suppose that the truth norm prescribes anything other than non-belief, even when a subject has considered a proposition and determined the evidence for and against it to be insufficient. Both states equally allow a subject to avoid violating the fundamental requirement of the truth norm, which is to believe only truths.

In essence, the worry is that, from the proposed evidential norm, we are told nothing about the difference between suspension and non-belief. In contrast, this is not true of how the normativists distinguish beliefs from other attitudes, such as, say, imaginings. Normativism tells us that belief just is the attitude that is subject to a truth norm—a condition that is not true of imaginings (it is perfectly acceptable to have false imaginings); so imaginings are not beliefs. But we do not get a similar contrast between suspension and non-belief on the basis of Engel's evidential norm. The very reason, we are told, that we are committed to the evidential norm is to serve

the truth norm. That is, to avoid forming false beliefs – but we can achieve this whether we are suspending or in a state of non-belief.²⁴

For the normativists, the way around this problem is to claim that the evidential norm requires suspension (as opposed to non-belief) under certain evidential conditions. In fact, this appears to be what Engel has in mind when he writes that suspension is ‘under the governance of the truth norm, for there is no possibility of being governed by the truth norm unless one follows the evidential norm’. The point appears to be that, given the evidential norm, we must suspend when that is what the evidence demands. That is, we must form *some* attitude that accords with our evidence, given the requirements of the truth norm and its connection to evidential reasoning. Nonetheless, while believing according to our evidence might be essential for holding true beliefs, it’s still unclear why the norm requires us to do anything when our evidence is insufficient to establish the truth.

Let’s agree with the claim that we cannot conform our beliefs to the requirements of the truth norm, unless we believe according to our evidence. In this sense, we must follow an evidential norm if we are to satisfy the truth norm. On this assumption, evidential considerations are essential to the normativity of belief. However – and this is the difficulty – even if believing the evidence is essential to believing truths, such that some amount of evidential normativity flows from the truth norm, still nothing follows about what attitude we are required to hold when the evidence is insufficient to establish a truth; nothing, that is, *besides not holding an outright belief*. In other words, if believing only truths is the fundamental norm of belief, then there is no requirement (derivative of this norm) to do anything at all when, by your own lights, you are unable to believe a truth.

²⁴ Despite the difficulties mentioned in the previous section, the teleologists arguably fare better with this distinction between suspension and non-belief. The teleologists at least put a descriptive constraint on suspension that is not present when a subject is in a state of non-belief (that is, doxastic forbearance). The question, as we have seen, is whether this constraint really necessitates suspension – I’ve argued that it does not.

To press the point with an analogy: suppose that you are playing a ball game, such that the norm for taking a penalty is that you should *take the penalty only if you think you can score*. From the requirement that thinking you can score is necessary for taking the penalty, it does not follow that you should do anything (such as kick the ball half way) if you do not think you can score. In that situation, it follows that you, in fact, should not take the penalty. That is, you should not undergo any performance with regards to taking the penalty. The truth norm of belief is similar to this norm of taking a penalty in the following way. It gives us no reason to do anything if we do not take ourselves to be in a position to satisfy its requirement – and this fact remains the same even if we accept that we must believe according to our evidence in order to believe only truths. For this reason, we can accept Engel’s point that satisfying the truth norm requires us to believe the evidence, while still rejecting the proposed implication that *this* evidential norm would ever be able to distinguish the normative requirements of suspension and non-belief. All that the evidential norm requires, when it is described as being in the service of the truth norm, is that we must not hold beliefs for which we have insufficient evidence.²⁵

This demonstrates that there is an important disconnect between the alleged truth norm of belief and the normativity of suspension. If we are to explain suspension as an essentially normative attitude, then the normativity cannot be derived from a more fundamental truth norm.²⁶

²⁵ It is worth noting that Engel’s account arguably fares better with the distinction, raised as an objection to the teleologists, between suspension and withheld assent. Engel (2013a, p. 213) characterises the evidential norm as the requirement to suspend belief when we do ‘not have enough evidence for either p or not- p ’. Assuming that this is true of suspension, the normative requirement for withholding assent is, perhaps, distinct. For instance, we ought to withhold assent when we do not understand the proposition in question. In this sense, a normative requirement could, in principle, demarcate between suspension and withheld assent, in a way that ‘doxastic forbearance’, on the teleological account, does not. Nonetheless, we would still need a more precise account of the normativity of withheld assent – an interesting project in its own right.

²⁶ It might be suggested that Engel can supplement his normative theory by stipulating that, insofar as one forms a *doxastic attitude* towards p , when the evidence is indeterminate between p and not- p , then this attitude is one of suspension. In this respect, we stipulate that the truth norm (and the norms that we can derive from that norm) apply only to doxastic attitudes, thus demarcating between suspension and non-belief. The problem with this, however, is that, while it might aid our understanding of the normative dimensions of belief, it completely fails with regard to the descriptive ambitions of belief theorists. Normatively, there is something to be said for the claim

2.3.2. THE NECESSITY CONDITION

Finally, I want to assess whether an evidential norm, of the kind proposed by Engel, is necessary for suspension. A good place to start is with the problems that the teleologists encountered, with their suggestion that suspension is subject to a necessary aim. This will also allow for a contrast between the two theories, since the normativism appears to fare better with these particular objections.

The first problem for the teleologists, was the possibility of entering into suspension by non-standard means. The kinds of cases that undermine their position are, for instance, a neuroscientist inducing states of suspension and Swampman coming into existence already suspending. The reason these cases are problematic for the teleologists is that they put descriptive constraints on *how* a subject can enter into a state of suspension (they must carry out an aim) – but these constraints are easily circumvented by such cases. However, as the normativists do not put descriptive constraints on how we suspend, it doesn't matter how we enter into a state of suspension. What matters is that the state we are in, however we got into it, is characterised by an essential norm. In this sense, it is irrelevant whether a neuroscientist arbitrarily forces you to suspend, or whether you are a Swampman, your state of suspension can still be subject to a normative requirement, such that it is *wrong* in relation to your evidence. For this reason, the normativists have no trouble with instances of suspension that occurred via non-standard means.

Similarly, the normativists do not have much trouble dealing with the possibility of suspending for pragmatic reasons. If pragmatic reasons can influence suspension, in the way that McHugh (2012, 2015) suggests, then it looks like *not* all instances of suspension are characterised by an evidential

suspension is subject to an evidential requirement in a way that non-belief is not. But descriptively, if we want our theory (whether teleological or normative) to distinguish doxastic attitudes from other types of attitudes (or, as the case may be, the *absence* of an attitude), then we cannot – on pain of circularity – stipulate that our theory applies only to doxastic attitudes. (Thanks to an anonymous referee for motivating me to elaborate on this issue.)

aim, as the teleologists claim. Sometimes pragmatic aims can motivate us to suspend.²⁷ However, it is perfectly consistent with the normativists' position to agree that there are instances of suspension that are motivated by pragmatic aims, while at the same time holding that these instances are characterised by an (independent) normative requirement, such that they are *always* incorrect (because they violate the evidential requirement of the norm of suspension). This would allow for instances of suspension formed for pragmatic reasons, but would simply deny that it would ever be correct to suspend for such reasons—not an entirely implausible claim.²⁸ In contrast, the teleologists do not have this option, since they characterise suspension *by the aims* that motivates suspension. They cannot, that is, hold that there is a necessary evidential aim of suspension, while at the same time allowing that, in fact, we sometimes aim to suspend for pragmatic (and not evidential) reasons. The difference here between the teleologists and the normativists, again reflects the fact the teleologists put descriptive constraints on how we suspend, while the normativists do not.

So, is there a problem with Engel's suggestion that there is a necessary evidential norm of suspension? On one level, there isn't—I don't wish to deny that suspension is subject to *some kind* of evidential normativity. Instead, the issue I do want to raise is that—even if we agree that there is an evidential norm of suspension—it cannot be the case that this norm is derived, as Engel claims, from a more fundamental truth norm. As we have seen, the evidential norm, insofar as the truth norm gives rise to one, does not in turn provide us with conditions for suspension, over and above mere non-belief. As noted, we can satisfy *that* evidential norm by simply not believing. For this reason, we can agree that certain normative requirements apply to suspension, but maintain that these requirements cannot be derived from a more fundamental truth norm of belief, and therefore cannot

²⁷ As per McHugh's case of the guilty friend, discussed above in Section 2.2.2.

²⁸ It is not a stretch to think that you have committed some kind of error when, despite convincing evidence that your friend is guilty, you decide to suspend belief on the matter, just because he is your friend.

be necessary for suspension in the proposed sense. To argue otherwise, and to insist that we must go through the truth norm to reach suspension's evidential norm, would in effect be to accept that there is nothing more to suspension, neither descriptively nor normatively, than non-belief – a claim that would be in direct contradiction with the requirements that we set for a theory of suspension in the beginning. In other words, whatever the essential normativity of suspension, it must be able to distinguish suspension from non-belief; which is a requirement Engel's norm fails to meet.

My aim in this paper has been to consider whether different interpretations of belief's aim – the teleological and normative accounts – can explain the descriptive and normative features of suspension. If what I have said is correct, then they cannot – theorists on neither side of the theoretical divide have successfully shown how their theories can account for suspension, even when those theories are explicitly extended to do so. In closing, I wish to say a few words about what, I think, we should make of this conclusion.

3. CLOSING REMARKS

It seems that we are left with two options. We can either take the failure of the above theories to account for suspension as a failure of those theories, or we can give up on the assumption that these theories ought to account for suspension. According to this latter option, it might be better to characterise suspension as an altogether different kind of attitude from belief.

Clearly the intuitions of the theorists discussed in this paper are that theories of belief ought to be able to account for suspension, such that we should remain committed to our initial assumption. It is precisely this assumption that gives rise to the problem of accounting for suspension in the first place. This is no doubt because of the close descriptive and normative relations that belief and suspension do, as a matter of fact, share. For instance, as I have mentioned earlier, the belief that p seems to rule out

suspension towards p , at least in conscious awareness. Furthermore, both beliefs and suspension are responsive in apparently similar ways to evidential reasons. While the belief that p requires a sufficient level of evidence supporting p , suspension towards p occurs prior to the evidential threshold for belief being reached, with some important caveats.²⁹ Together, these kinds of relations do seem to support the intuition that belief and suspension occupy the same theoretical landscape, and that suspension should, therefore, be subsumed under a theory of belief. Despite these considerations, however, there are also some tempting reasons to abandon this assumption. The possibility that suspension is an attitude of its own kind also has some merit, and this idea is beginning to show precedence in the developing literature.³⁰

The first thing worth noting is the general success of the established teleological and normative theories of belief when it comes to explaining outright belief. Both approaches—the problem of suspension notwithstanding—have the potential to account for many features of belief, as they were originally intended. Probably the two most crucial aspects of these theories are their proposed ability to do the descriptive work of demarcating beliefs from other attitudes, and the normative work of explaining rational belief—each according to an aim or norm, respectively. Yet these are not the only benefits that have been associated with these theories. The suggestion that belief is subject to a truth-aim or -norm has been offered as an explanation of doxastic involuntarism (Williams 1973), as an explanation of exclusivity and transparency (Shah 2003 and Steglich-Petersen 2006, 2008), and as an essential component to our understanding of knowledge (McHugh 2011 and Wedgwood 2002). So, while these theories face some problems, they also promise to generate a lot of theoretical success when they are not specifically focused on suspension. This should therefore make us think twice before abandoning them in light

²⁹ This paper could in fact be construed as a discussion of the inability of the teleological and normative approaches to explain what these important caveats are.

³⁰ For instance, see Booth (2014) and Friedman (2013, 2017).

of the concerns raised in this paper. If we did decide to abandon these theories, in pursuit of theories of belief that also explain suspension, the task at hand would not only be to find an alternative theory that is capable of accounting for suspension, but one that is capable of doing this additional theoretical work as well. Indeed, the underlying difficulty is perhaps that there cannot be a single theory that is capable of explaining all of these features of belief, while at the same time explaining the required features of suspension.

Finally, recent developments in the literature support the idea that suspension is, after all, its own kind of attitude. For instance, it has been suggested that suspension could be a *sui generis* indecision-representing attitude or an attitude towards a question, rather than an attitude (like outright belief) towards a proposition (Booth 2014; Friedman 2013, 2017). And another possibility, which I have not seen developed in the literature, is that suspension could be characterised according to its causal role (i.e. its functions or outputs), which would be consistent with a more broadly functional theory of mind. In this respect, perhaps suspension has a unique functional role in our cognitive economy. Isolating this functional role could, again, give us insights into suspension's descriptive and normative features.³¹ If any of these different approaches to suspension prove successful, then they would establish that suspension and belief are distinct attitudes, with the demarcating line being as distinct as that between beliefs and other attitudes such as desires, imaginings, suppositions, etc.

³¹ I briefly discuss the functional properties of suspension in [Author Removed]. Undoubtedly, however, there is a lot more that can be said on the matter.

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