

COMMITTED NEUTRALITY IN THE RATIONAL MIND*

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07 / 22

Scott Sturgeon’s new book, *The Rational Mind* (TRM) brings together and expands on ideas he’s been writing about for the past decade or so.¹ At its core this book is about the attitudes that are central to epistemology — what are often called the ‘doxastic attitudes’, and what Sturgeon calls ‘epistemic attitudes’. Part I of TRM offers in-depth critical discussions of two central formal models of the doxastic attitudes: one ‘fine grained’ (Bayesianism), and one ‘coarse grained’ (AGM). For Sturgeon, each of these formal models models something psychologically real: Bayesianism is a formal model of our states of confidence — doxastic attitudes that come in degrees or can be ranked or ordered in terms of strength, and AGM is a formal model of our non-degreed doxastic attitudes, viz. belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment. This first part of the book fleshes out both models in detail and raises concerns about each. Part II of TRM is focused on the relationship between fine- and coarse-grained doxastic attitudes. Sturgeon ultimately argues that coarse-grained doxastic attitudes are reducible to fine-grained ones. But, crucially, these more fundamental fine-grained confidences cannot be understood (just) as Bayesian point-valued subjective probabilities. Instead, Sturgeon proposes a new, ‘force-based’ model of confidence according to which we can understand degrees of confidence as built up from mixtures of what Sturgeon calls ‘cognitive force’.

At the start of TRM Sturgeon claims that the book does not ‘aim to establish a single major hypothesis or perspective’ (TRM: 1). While this may capture something true about Sturgeon’s intentions, it is hard not to see the final few chapters and Sturgeon’s force-based theory of the doxastic attitudes as the centrepiece of the book. That said, it is certainly true that the chapters that come before those final few — the ones that make up the bulk of the book — cannot be read as merely setting the stage for what’s

*Critical Notice of Scott Sturgeon’s *The Rational Mind*. Forthcoming in *Analysis*.

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¹All references to TRM: Sturgeon (2020).

to come. Sturgeon says that a major goal of TRM is to provide something useful for budding undergraduates, his colleagues working in epistemology, and everyone in between. Amazingly, he has managed to pull this off.

Much of my discussion of TRM will focus on Part II of the book, and in particular the account of suspension of judgment that emerges there. Before getting there though, I want to say a little bit about Part I.

Part I consists of six chapters (about two-thirds of TRM). In this part of the book, we get chapters that introduce both Bayesianism and the AGM model in ways that are largely appropriate for even beginner epistemologists. People more familiar with these theories will find the expected parts and their relations. Which is not to say that they won't find any new insights. Those familiar with Sturgeon's work will find some of the usual Sturgeonian elements: novel diagrams, imaginative examples, and ways of talking about these models that you simply will not find in anyone else's work. These are largely meant to help the beginner, but Sturgeon's unique creative vision meant that I turned things over in new and unexpected ways, too. In the early parts of the book, chapter 4 stood out for me as one of the most philosophically rich discussions of Bayesian updating I've read, digging into its relation to inference and basing and the somewhat strange rigidity of conditional credence.

These early chapters display Sturgeon's commitment to a model of our doxastic states that accurately represents the facts on the ground. In the introduction, he takes what he calls the *Matching-Models Assumption* to be a starting point for the discussion to come. This assumption says that, 'A formal model of rationality is fully acceptable only if it matches its target domain' (TRM: 8). And one of his main complaints about both the Bayesian and AGM models is that they do not match their target domains (viz. fine-grained doxastic attitudes for the former, and coarse-grained doxastic attitudes for the latter). For instance, one of Sturgeon's main gripes with the Bayesian model is that it models all of our degrees of confidence as credences — precise, point-valued subjective probabilities. But, he argues, our degrees of confidence aren't always nearly so precise. Besides our precise, point-valued degrees of belief (the ones we have in, e.g. propositions where precise, point-valued chances are known), we also have less precise levels of confidence — what Sturgeon calls *thick confidence*. If I know that the chance that some event e will occur is between 80% and 90%, then I will (or at least should) be 80-to-90% sure that e will occur. These thick confidences are not credences strictly-so-called (Sturgeon reserves 'credence' for point-valued probabilities), and since standard Bayesianism only models credences, it fails to match its target domain.

Sturgeon’s discussion of suspension of judgment begins in chapter 6, when he turns his focus to the AGM model. Finding a model of our doxastic attitudes that gets suspension of judgment right is a major theme of TRM, and Sturgeon touts the account of suspension of judgment that his force-based model provides as one of its major benefits. The AGM model, Sturgeon claims, marks, ‘no difference between suspending judgement in P and failing both to believe and to disbelieve P’ (TRM: 161). He finds this an unacceptable result,

Suspended judgement is not the absence of belief and disbelief. It is the presence of a proprietary kind of neutral commitment, something more than a mere absence or lack. Suspended judgement is the propositional attitude of *committed neutrality*. (TRM: 182; emphasis Sturgeon’s)

Sturgeon started using the phrase ‘committed neutrality’ to describe the attitude of suspended judgment in 2009.² Since then, it has appeared in a number of discussions of suspension of judgment (including my own).³ While the phrase has captured some imaginations and been a helpful organizing idea in thinking about suspension of judgment (as compared to the mere lack of any belief, especially), as McGrath (2021) shows, there are many ways of being neutral — and even many ways of being committedly neutral. It is not clear that these all count as ways of suspending judgment or being agnostic, at least not if we’re using those terms in ways we typically do in and outside of philosophy. One of the questions I want to address here is whether the sort of Sturgeonian committed neutrality that emerges from TRM aligns well with either our pre- or post-theoretic accounts of suspension of judgment.

Sturgeon’s main reason for rejecting the AGM model’s identification of suspension of judgment with a mere lack of belief is a familiar one: lack of belief is extremely easy to come by, but suspension of judgment takes more work. For instance, if S lacks some concept *c*, then they won’t have any *c*-involving beliefs, but that won’t mean they’ll have suspended judgment about the relevant *c*-involving issues; the latter seems to require something more (or different). For Sturgeon, we only suspend judgment on some matter when we make a particular kind of doxastic commitment with respect to that matter — a neutral doxastic commitment. In one sense then suspension of judgment is importantly akin to believing and disbelieving for Sturgeon.

²See Sturgeon (2009, 2010).

³For instance: Friedman (2013c, 2017), Sylvan (2016), Archer (2018), Lord (2020).

He describes believing as a ‘settled endorsement’, disbelieving as a ‘settled denial’ and suspending judgment as a ‘settled neutrality’ (TRM: 184). Crucially, suspension of judgment is or involves a committed neutrality rather than a mere de facto neutrality (say, due to conceptual lack). More generally, part of what emerges in Part I of TRM is a case for what Sturgeon calls, *intra-level anti-reductionism*. With respect to the coarse-grained attitudes, the conclusion is that none of, ‘belief, disbelief, or suspended judgement is more basic than its coarse-grained cousins’ (TRM: 221). And in Part II of TRM, the focus shifts to thinking about the inter-level case: do the coarse-grained doxastic attitudes reduce to the fine-grained ones? Sturgeon argues that the answer is ‘yes’.

I want to make one point about the dialectic here before moving to a discussion of Part II. One very helpful distinction Sturgeon makes in TRM is between confidence and credence, where ‘credence’ (as far as I understand) is being reserved for a very specific kind of confidence: a point-valued subjective probability. Opening up this space between confidence and credence naturally leads one to wonder about entirely non-probabilistic ways of modelling confidences. Maybe our (rational) degrees of belief aren’t the sorts of things that should be modelled with anything like probability functions? Unfortunately, TRM does not take up this question. The discussion in Part II of the relationship between the different kinds of doxastic attitudes is largely a discussion of the relationship between subjective probabilities on the one hand and belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment on the other. Of course there is plenty to say about this relationship, and Sturgeon’s discussion is excellent. But a possibility I thought had been opened up in Part I seemed closed at the start of Part II as subjective probabilities take centre stage rather than a more general kind of (possibly non-probabilistic) fine-grained confidence. Given the extent to which Sturgeon frames TRM as answerable to our actual psychologies, this felt like a bit of a missed opportunity to me.⁴

Part II of TRM explores the vexed issue of the relationship between belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment on the one hand and credence on the other. Here Sturgeon makes some familiar moves, e.g. he lays out a standard threshold view, goes into detail about the problems that the lottery and the preface pose for such a view, and rejects various extreme

⁴This is especially true given the range of ways Bayesianism has been accused of being psychologically unrealistic, e.g. it models (rational) doxastic subjects hyper-opinionated, logically omniscient, unable to accommodate old evidence, unable to forget, and so on. Sturgeon rejected AGM because it modelled suspension of judgment as the lack of belief. Perhaps Bayesianism got off a bit too easy?

reactions to those puzzles. But in this part of TRM Sturgeon also makes some truly novel moves with potentially far-reaching consequences, e.g. he sketches an entirely new model of confidences. According to this *force-based view*, ‘all types of confidence—point-valued subjective probability (i.e. credence), interval-valued subjective probability (i.e. sharp thick confidence), mushy credence (i.e. vague thick confidence)—are all built from mixtures of what we’ll call *cognitive force*’ (TRM: 272; emphasis Sturgeon’s). With this new model of fine-grained doxastic attitudes in hand, Sturgeon argues that coarse-grained doxastic attitudes are indeed reducible to fine-grained ones.

There are so many rich discussions in this second part of TRM, but I want to largely focus on one key thread: Sturgeon’s discussion of suspension of judgment. Sturgeon calls the view that belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment are reducible to credences, *Credal-Based Lockeanism* (CBL). According to CBL, ‘Belief is nothing more than sufficiently strong credence, disbelief is nothing more than sufficiently weak credence, and suspended judgement is nothing more than middling-strength credence’ (TRM: 255-6). Sturgeon has a number of (plausible) objections to CBL (as well as some nice defences of the view against some others), but one of his main complaints is about its handling of suspension of judgment.

According to CBL, one suspends judgment in p iff one has a ‘middling credence’ in p . (Personally, I don’t love the locution ‘suspends judgment *in p*’, but I will follow Sturgeon’s preferred construction in this discussion.⁵) I agree with Sturgeon that this sort of account of suspension of judgment doesn’t work. Sturgeon’s main worry is different from mine though.⁶ Sturgeon’s concern here is largely with the sort of attitudinal precision this view entails. Take some proposition about which one has little evidence either way — Sturgeon’s example is the proposition v : that there’s a foul-smelling vinegar factory in Slough. I have no idea if this is true, maybe though. So I suspend judgment. But, Sturgeon argues, I do not invest any precise credence in v . Why would I? I have no real evidence either way and nothing that would tell in favour of such precision about v . So we have a counterexample to CBL since in this case I suspend in v but do not have middling credence in v .

This said, Sturgeon does ultimately want to say that suspending judgment is a matter of having some degree or kind of confidence — as is believing and disbelieving. But we need to turn to his force-based account of confidence to understand how this reduction works. According to Sturgeon’s

⁵See Friedman (2013a, 2017) for some discussion.

⁶For some of mine, Friedman (2013b).

force-based account of the doxastic attitudes, there are three main kinds of *cognitive force*: attraction, repulsion, and neutrality. He compares these cognitive forces to gustatory forces: some foods attract us, some repel us, and some we're neutral about. These gustatory forces come in degrees (e.g. we find some foods strongly repulsive, others just a bit), and our disposition towards some food can be a manifestation of some combination of these (e.g. some attraction, but also a bit of repulsion). For Sturgeon, cognitive forces are akin to these sorts of gustatory forces. Take some claim p . We can be drawn/attracted to p (Canada is bigger than Hawaii) or repelled by p (All palm trees should be cut down) or neutral about p (The Sonoran desert is about twice the size of the Mohave desert).

Sturgeon's proposal is, first, that levels of confidence (all of them: sharp, thick, interval, fuzzy, mushy, etc.) are 'nothing but stable configurations of cognitive force' (TRM: 276). And second, that once we adopt this force-based account of confidence we can more easily reduce belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment to confidences as well. The resulting view is what Sturgeon calls, *Force-Based Lockeanism* (FBL). According to FBL, belief, disbelief, and suspension of judgment are also nothing but configurations of cognitive force. This force-based account of our doxastic lives is drawn out in a couple of chapters of TRM. This means it's not much more than a sketch, and there are plenty of questions about the picture the reader may have. But, as a sketch it is certainly intriguing and is bound to leave a reader wanting to think more about it and see how the details might be worked out.

In touting the virtues of FBL in particular, Sturgeon says that it can, 'give a *much* better story about suspended judgement than its credal-based cousin' (TRM: 286; emphasis Sturgeon's). I'm not sure this is right. It seems to me that FBL falls short in a similar sort of way to CBL: it doesn't account for an important range of cases in which subjects are suspending judgment. The cases that FBL doesn't capture are different from the ones CBL doesn't, but neither seems to me to be getting the range of cases we want covered quite right.⁷

What does FBL say about suspension of judgment? To get there we should first see what Sturgeon's force-based account has to say about the fine-grained doxastic attitudes, and in particular how it models credences vs. thick confidences. Recall, credences are precise, point-valued subjec-

⁷To be fair, this sort of complaint is often levelled against my own view of suspension of judgment (in Friedman (2017)). Still, book reviews are as good a glass house as any from which to throw your stones.

tive probabilities, and thick confidences are not. While Sturgeonian ‘thick confidence’ is a novel, pre-theoretic construction, it is closely related to some familiar elements of contemporary Bayesian epistemology — mushy/ imprecise/interval-valued credence. Sturgeon’s thick confidence is a bit more expansive than these others, but it’s worth making clear that the archetype of thick confidence in TRM is confidence spread out over a subinterval of $[0, 1]$.⁸ So, what does the force-based account say about credence and thick confidence? Sturgeon says,

[O]ur proposal is that credence is the result of mixing attraction, repulsion, and neutrality in a way that involves no neutral force. Put another way: each grade of credence involves a level of neutrality that is literally nothing, mixed with blends of other cognitive force. We further propose that this is what sets credence apart from thick confidence: the latter involves non-zero neutrality potentially mixed with blends of other cognitive force. (TRM: 277)

Neutral cognitive force shows itself in degree of confidence thickness. If your level of confidence in p is a precise real number in the unit interval then that level of confidence expresses or involves no neutral cognitive force at all. Alternatively, if your confidence in p is thick, then the degree of spread or thickness of your confidence is an expression of your degree of neutrality towards p . How neutral you are about p is expressed in how spread out your confidence for p is.⁹ When Sturgeon turns to fleshing out FBL, it is this very same neutrality that grounds suspension of judgment. Here is what he says about FBL’s version of suspended judgment,

A good way to think of suspended judgement, on this approach, is by appeal to a thickness threshold. For every level of confidence there will be an amount of thickness associated with that level, ranging from 0% with credence to 100% with fully thick

⁸That said, in chapter 3 Sturgeon rejects the standard ways of extending Bayesianism to accommodate mushiness/thickness, e.g. using sets of probability functions rather than a single one. This discussion is subtle and interesting and rewards careful reading.

⁹Proportionality is key here for Sturgeon. Say your confidence in each of p and q is $[0.2, 0.4]$. It does not follow that you are directing identical amounts of neutral force at each of p and q . What does follow is that whatever amount of neutral force you are directing at p , that amount makes up $1/5$ of the total cognitive force you are directing at p ; and whatever amount of neutral force you are directing at q , that amount makes up $1/5$ of the total cognitive force you are directing at q . A bit more on this proportionality to come.

confidence. We can say that suspended judgement is thick confidence that happens to be thick enough, just as Lockeans say that belief is confidence that is strong enough, and disbelief is confidence that is weak enough. On this force-based approach to suspended judgement, such judgement is thick confidence that involves proportionally enough neutrality to make the grade. Just as we have belief- and disbelief-making thresholds for confidence, then, we have a suspended-judgement threshold too. The former have to do with strength of the relevant attitude maker. The latter has to do with its level of thickness, i.e. the relative proportion of reserve or neutrality involved in its constitution. (TRM: 286-7)

So, according to FBL, S suspends judgment in p iff S's confidence in p is sufficiently thick. Sturgeon also says that, 'suspended judgement springs from stable mixtures of cognitive force *dominated by neutrality*' (TRM: 282; emphasis mine). Sturgeon does not go into very much detail about the exact form of this 'neutral domination', but I think we can take the overall proposal to be this: one's thick confidence in p is sufficiently thick to make for suspended judgment in p just in case the stable configuration of forces from which that thick confidence is built has (proportionally) more neutral force than either of the other forces.

To understand this proposal it will help to better understand how specific configurations of forces amount to specific confidences for Sturgeon. Say one's degree of attraction to p is a , one's degree of repulsion from p is r , and one's degree of neutrality towards p is n . We can get from those forces to a confidence interval $[l, u]$ as follows: $l = a/(a + r + n)$ and $u = (a + n)/(a + r + n)$. So, while we cannot read the raw strength of the various forces off of a confidence interval, we can read the 'proportional strengths' of those forces off of that interval. If we label those degrees of proportional force a^* , r^* , and n^* , we can say that $a^* = l$, $r^* = (1 - u)$, and $n^* = (u - l)$.^{10,11}

So, if suspension of judgment always involves proportionally more neutral force than either pro or con force, then S's confidence in p amounts to suspension of judgment in p if and only if: $n^* > a^*$ and $n^* > r^*$. And given this we can also say that if S's thick confidence in $p = [l, u]$, then that thick

¹⁰ $a^* = a/(a + r + n)$, $r^* = r/(a + r + n)$, and $n^* = n/(a + r + n)$.

¹¹ See TRM section 11.4 for discussion. I leave aside whether this is an intuitive way of measuring cognitive attraction and repulsion. For instance, if my confidence in $p = [l, u]$ why not think my (proportional) degree of attraction is u and my (proportional) degree of repulsion l ?

confidence amounts to S's suspending judgment in p just in case: $(u - l) > l$ and $(u - l) > (1 - u)$.

Even if one's agrees with Sturgeon that suspension of judgment is a kind of committed neutrality, one might wonder whether it is this kind. One clear result is that S's having a sharp credence in p never amounts to S's suspending judgment in p . It's not just that we can suspend judgment despite having no sharp credence in p (as in the case of Slough's vinegar factories), but that credal precision is in a crucial sense not compatible with suspension of judgment. No one with a sharp credence in p is suspending judgment in p .¹² So, no one who has the expected credence that the (fair) coin will come up heads can suspend judgment about whether it will come up heads. No one who has a ticket in a lottery they know to be fair and they know to have x -many tickets, can suspend judgment about whether their ticket will win. No matter if x equals two, or twenty or twenty-thousand. So long as these ticket holders have the credences that match the known chances, they cannot be agnostic (in the Sturgeonian sense at least) about whether their ticket will win.

And if we take Sturgeon's thought that suspending judgment in p requires that n^* be greater than both a^* and r^* seriously, then it isn't only those with sharp credences who cannot be agnostic. For instance, say S has thick confidence $[l, u]$ with midpoint 0.5 in p . Unless $(u - l) > 1/3$, then S is not suspending judgment in p . If S's confidence in p is $[0.45, 0.55]$ or $[0.4, 0.6]$, S is not agnostic about p . In general, no one with a thick confidence whose thickness is less than $1/3$ can be agnostic, even if that thick confidence has a middling midpoint.

¹²Strictly speaking this way of stating the incompatibility might be too strong. What can never be the case according to FBL is that one's sharp credence in p itself amounts to suspension of judgment in p . If Sturgeon's account of our doxastic states allowed for significant enough fragmentation, then perhaps FBL could allow that there are cases in which, according to one doxastic fragment one has credence 0.5 in p , and according to another one is suspending judgment in p . Sturgeon discusses doxastic 'compartmentalization' in light of his force-based view (see TRM: 287). I don't know that anything he says there opens up the possibility of the sort of more radical fragmentation that would be required to get a case in which S is suspending judgment about p at t and also has a sharp credence in p at t . Either way, this would be a subject who, for Sturgeon, is in a doxastically conflicted state, having a sharp credence in p according to one fragment and a thick credence in p according to another. If this subject were possible for Sturgeon, they would have to be irrational. I'm mostly going to leave the possibility of this sort of radical fragmentation aside in what's to come since I'm not sure Sturgeon wants to make room for it and I don't think it helps much as a response to the general objection here (which can be easily be recast in terms of the rationality of 'sharp suspending' rather than its possibility).

There is a serious question now about what to say about the coarse-grained attitudes of these sorts of subjects. If my credence that my ticket will win the two-ticket lottery or that the coin will come up heads is 0.5, then, force-wise, I am attracted to and repelled by these propositions to equal degrees (0.5), with no neutral force in the picture. So we know this can't be suspension of judgment according to FBL. It's also hard to see how it could be belief or disbelief given that neither of the pro or con force dominates and both forces are equal in strength. So none of these? If my credence is 0.5, then I don't have any coarse-grained attitude according to FBL? And we will have to say mostly the same about the middling thick confidences mentioned in the last paragraph. For instance, if my thick confidence is $[0.4, 0.6]$, then n^* (0.2) is less than both a^* and r^* , but those latter two are equal (0.4). Again this seems to rule out all coarse-grained attitudes.

While there is something strange about having to say that subjects like these have no coarse-grained attitudes, I think that the heart of that strangeness is that we have to say that they are not suspending judgment. If my credence that my ticket will win the two-ticket lottery is 0.5, it's innocuous enough to claim that I don't believe I'll win and that I don't believe I'll lose. But why can't I be suspending judgment about whether I'll win or lose? In replacing CBL with FBL we've gone from a view according to which suspension of judgment largely occupied the middle of the unit interval to one according to which it's largely banned from that middle. While I'm sympathetic to complaints about CBL's account of suspension of judgment, I don't think this is the right reaction. Or at least it's not one that gets at the sort of neutrality that is central to suspension of judgment. I can rationally suspend judgment about whether the fair coin will come up heads.

While Sturgeon doesn't directly address this sort of concern, he does speak to it in his general discussion of the association of suspension of judgment with his neutral force. There he says,

[S]uspended judgement is a kind of considered reserve. Yet the hallmark of reserve is a refusal to take a stand, yea- or nay-wise, so to say, on the truth of a claim. Yet nothing like that seems to be involved with any level of credence, for they all seem to involve an exact spread of confidence across every niche of epistemic space. Being 50% sure that it will rain, for instance, is tantamount to a thumbs-up for rain in half your epistemic possibilities and a thumbs-down for rain in the other half. There's no hesitation or reserve in that, so it looks as if credence as such—

and thus middling-strength credence—is something rather the opposite of suspended judgement, rather than anything which could make for such judgement. Since credence involves a pro- or a con-stance across all of epistemic possibility, just like a truth-value, it is the wrong sort of thing to make for suspended judgement. (TRM: 286)

If Sturgeon is claiming that S's actually having credence 0.5 in p is a matter of S's having various less middling opinions about p in their epistemically accessible worlds, then I'm not sure why we should accept that. Less controversial is the claim that part of what it is for S to have credence 0.5 in p , is for it to be the case that half of S's epistemic possibilities/epistemically accessible worlds are ones in which p is true and half are ones in which p is false. But it's not clear to me why that is incompatible with reserve or hesitation. Quite the reverse. Saying that some epistemically accessible worlds are p -worlds and some are $\neg p$ -worlds seems to me one nice way of representing my actual reserve: both p and $\neg p$ are epistemically open; the matter of whether p is not settled for me; both answers are live options for me. But even setting this aside, as we've already seen, Sturgeon's account rules even some imprecise confidences incompatible with suspending, e.g. [0.4, 0.6]. Why this should be is not clear even if we accepted the above argument.

That some thick confidences are not compatible with suspended judgement depends in part on some details of FBL that Sturgeon could, in theory, modify while retaining the basics of the view. Sturgeon argues that some mixture of forces can only count as coarse-grained attitude α if that mixture is (proportionally) dominated by the α -relevant force in the sense I've drawn out. In the case of suspension of judgment, this means we only have suspension of judgment when neutrality dominates in the relevant sense — when there is proportionally more of that force than attraction or repulsion. Modifying that constraint could change which fine-grained attitudes counted as suspendings. For instance, if we said instead that suspended judgement sprang from stable mixtures of cognitive force not dominated by attraction or repulsion, then FBL could allow that a subject with confidence (e.g.) [0.4, 0.6] is suspending judgment.¹³

But there is a deeper theoretical commitment on Sturgeon's part that pushes him to say that having any credence whatsoever in p is incompatible with suspending judgment in p . While there are some credences that can

¹³This is not to say that Sturgeon would want to endorse this modification to FBL (I'm pretty sure he wouldn't), or that it would be a plausible modification in the end.

make for belief or disbelief, no credence can make for suspension of judgment. This is thanks to his identification of the sort of neutrality that is at the core of suspension of judgment with the sort of neutrality that makes a credence mushy or a confidence thick. This sets Sturgeon's FBL apart from a sort of Lockeanism that associates suspending-neutrality with the neutrality of middling-strength credence. But, like other forms of Lockeanism, FBL keeps suspension of judgment tightly hewed not just to something more fine-grained, but to probabilities in particular, just thickness rather than middlingness this time. From my perspective, both FBL and CBL capture interesting ways of being 'committedly neutral', but neither is identical to the committed neutrality of suspension of judgment.

Suspension of judgment occupies a somewhat strange place in our epistemic theorizing. It makes up at least one-third of the 'tripartite' picture of the doxastic attitudes (maybe more depending on your view of disbelief). That picture is widely endorsed, making suspension of judgment a central component of contemporary epistemology. But, unlike some other elements of our epistemic theorizing, it is less prevalent in everyday thought and talk. This means it's a bit more post-theoretical than pre-theoretical perhaps. Still, we have some intuitions and theories to turn to, and I think those give us some constraints. I don't find a ban on 'sharp suspending' in those.

For instance, Sextus talked about suspension of judgment as the appropriate response to the 'equipollence of the matters in question'.¹⁴ Some of the cases in which there are equally credible reasons on both sides are cases in which credence 0.5 is appropriate. More generally, the Principle of Indifference recommends credal symmetry in certain kinds of cases in which evidence is absent. In these cases the same sharp credence for each possibility is permitted. But cases in which evidence is absent are also cases in which suspended judgment is typically permitted. A ban on sharp suspending seems to mean a ban on suspending in at least some cases in which evidence is absent.

Less theoretically, our most familiar agnostic is the religious agnostic. Is there any reason to think that this sort of person couldn't be convinced that the chance that their god exists is exactly 50/50? Or 51/49? Or something else close to that and pretty precise? Having the betting profile and general dispositions of someone with sharp, middling credence doesn't seem to me to do anything to make someone less agnostic than a person whose confidence is spread over a wide interval. Perhaps these two agnosticisms have slightly different shapes or textures, but the sharp agnostic is not obviously closer

¹⁴See Sextus Empiricus (2000).

to theism or atheism than the thick agnostic, so in what sense should we say that the former is less agnostic than the latter (or not suspending judgment at all, unlike the latter)? In general, both of these characters will give answers like ‘I don’t know’ or ‘I can’t say’ (and so on) in the expected cases and refrain from characteristic theistic or atheistic behaviour.¹⁵

Sturgeon starts TRM from a place of realism about the tripartite picture of the doxastic attitudes. Obviously I’ve expressed some doubts about whether his account of suspension of judgment lives up to this realism. That said, I hope it is clear that his treatment of suspension of judgment is only one element of his ambitious new picture of our doxastic lives. Sturgeon’s force-based account is sure to generate exciting new questions and discussion. But there is a way in which it is the blend of familiar and strikingly novel that is the book’s great achievement. One comes away from *The Rational Mind* feeling as though some basic questions in epistemology and philosophy of mind have been re-opened and new ways of answering them have been brought into view.¹⁶

¹⁵There’s nothing special about the religious agnostic here. This is a general thought about sharp vs. thick suspending. The sharp suspender needn’t be any ‘closer’ to believing or disbelieving; both will act in ways compatible with being agnostic; and so on.

¹⁶For written comments on and discussions of drafts of this critical notice I’m extremely grateful to Harvey Lederman and Scott Sturgeon. Thanks also to Cristina Ballarini for leading a reading group on *The Rational Mind* at NYU in 2021, and to everyone who participated. Those discussions were invaluable in shaping my thinking about the book.

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