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Rejecting the Question

ABSTRACT: *This article argues that the traditional taxonomy of doxastic attitudes leaves out an important alternative. That is the attitude of* rejecting the question. *Sundry examples of the phenomenon are presented and their unifying features are identified. One rejects a question when one treats it as if none of its answers were true. One can reject not only non-polar questions, but also polar ones (questions of the form* whether p*). The stance of rejecting a question is further distinguished from interrogative attitudes in general, and from the third stance of the traditional taxonomy in particular.*

KEYWORDS: Doxastic attitudes, suspended judgment, rejection, interrogative attitudes, questions

1. Introduction

How many kinds of doxastic attitudes can one have regarding whether p, for any p?

The traditional taxonomy of doxastic attitudes is widespread and familiar. It states that there are three different attitudes that one can have regarding whether p: one can believe that p, disbelieve that p, or be on the fence as to whether p (the latter is sometimes phrased 'suspend judgment about whether p'—more on this below).

When one believes that p, one treats p as true. When one disbelieves that p, one treats p as false. When one is on the fence as to whether p, one is rather divided regarding whether p, neither treating p as true nor treating it as false. Many authors characterize this third stance as an attitude of *neutrality* regarding whether p, in contrast to the attitudes of belief that p and disbelief that p (though that should not imply that a subject who holds the third stance regarding whether p has exactly the same degree of confidence in p as they have in *not-p*—see Sturgeon 2010 and Friedman 2013 for more on this).

Some epistemologists endorse the view that, once one considers whether p, one is bound to adopt one of those three categorical attitudes regarding whether p. For example, here is Richard Feldman (2003, p. 16) in his epistemology textbook:

> 'When you consider any statement, you are faced with a set of alternatives: You can believe it, you can disbelieve it, or you can suspend judgment about it […] At any given time, if you consider a proposition, you will end up adopting one of these three attitudes' (Feldman 2003, p. 16).

That view relies on the traditional taxonomy—but the traditional taxonomy is not committed to it. Endorsement of the traditional taxonomy is compatible, for

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example, with holding that one can have *no* doxastic attitude whatsoever regarding whether *p*, even though one has considered the issue of whether *p* (see Turri 2012).

Notice too that many epistemologists (like Feldman above) often frame their taxonomy in terms of attitudes that one can take toward a *proposition p*. While convenient, this is an imprecise way of talking—if anything, because many of those same epistemologists take disbelief that *p* to simply be belief that *not-p*, which is an attitude toward the proposition that *not-p*, if any. The more precise way of putting it is that there are three alternative categorical stances that one can have regarding *whether p*, as we did above, using the interrogative 'whether *p*'. I don't know that a subject who believes that *not-p* has an attitude 'toward *p*'—but they surely have a stance regarding whether *p*. So does any subject who believes that *p*, and any subject who is on the fence regarding whether *p*. This is the more precise way of talking, and it clearly includes all the three categorical attitudes that traditional epistemologists meant to talk about.

The traditional taxonomy of doxastic attitudes is widespread and familiar, but that doesn't mean it is free of problems. Indeed, there are reasons to think that it is not *inclusive* enough, and that it therefore fails to capture important aspects of our doxastic lives. The contention here is that there are more ways in which to be opinionated or to have a stance on a given issue than the traditional taxonomy acknowledges.

A well-known criticism of this sort is the following. The traditional taxonomy is supposed to be concerned with categorical or 'flat-out' doxastic attitudes. But it seems that our minds also admit of many different *degrees of confidence*. I am more confident that I exist than that there is water in Mars, for example, though I believe both of these things. Once we start thinking of our doxastic lives through the lens of degrees of confidence, however, the possibility that a subject has a doxastic stance on whether *p* without believing, disbelieving or being on the fence regarding whether *p* becomes salient. Say I am more confident that it will rain later than not, but not too confident. Within the usual scale from 0 to 1, let us suppose, I have a degree of confidence of 0.75 that it will rain later. Do I believe that it will rain later? Or am I on the fence or divided as to whether it will rain later? I feel inclined to answer 'no' to both questions. Answering 'yes' to either seems to decide more things about me than I myself am ready to decide (see Schwitzgebel 2001 and Christensen 2004, among others, for this point).

That is not the only way in which the traditional taxonomy arguably fails to be inclusive enough. We seem to use the verb 'believe' not only to ascribe *surety*, for example, but also to ascribe a stance of merely *thinking* that something is the case (Goodman and Holguín 2022). But then why should epistemologists spend so much time and energy talking about belief, when they could actually be more precise by directly assessing states of thinking and being sure that something is the case? Why lump two fairly differentiated stances into one wonky category of 'belief', as it is done by the traditional taxonomy?

The details of such criticisms need not occupy us here. The point of the article is not to evaluate their merits—but to add new considerations to the effect that the traditional taxonomy of attitudes is not inclusive enough.

I will in fact argue that there is yet a *fourth* kind of doxastic stance that one can have regarding whether *p*, in addition to the three already countenanced by the

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traditional taxonomy. This fourth kind of doxastic stance has yet to be examined in more detail by epistemologists.[1] We need to ascribe it in order to assess the situations of subjects who are faced with what they take to be *defective questions*. We are easily led to consider this stance once we move away from the paradigm of thinking of the categorical attitudes as attitudes toward *propositions*, and think of them also as stances on *questions*, as already suggested above.

2. Rejecting the Question

Besides believing that *p*, disbelieving that *p* and being on the fence as to whether *p*, one can also *reject the question* whether *p*. Let me reach that conclusion in a step-by-step manner.

Consider the idiom 'What is your stance regarding …?'. We can substitute not only 'whether'-complements for the ellipsis in that linguistic context, but also any other interrogative complements, such as 'where'-, 'who'-, 'what'- and 'how'-complements. Not only can a person have a stance on *whether* The Strokes are playing tonight, for example, they can also have a stance regarding *where* The Strokes are playing tonight, and a stance regarding *who* is going to the concert, etc.

Now consider: What is your stance regarding how bananas fly?

It isn't, I take it, the stance of believing that bananas fly by flapping their wings, or anything of the sort. Neither are you on the fence or divided regarding how bananas fly. In fact, you deny that bananas fly, which is a presupposition of the question under discussion (see Belnap and Steel 1976 and van Fraassen 1980 for this notion of presupposition). So you *reject* the question how bananas fly, and that is your stance on it. From your perspective, the question itself is defective, in that no direct answer to it can be true.

The *direct* answers to the question of how bananas fly are answers that explain how bananas fly. You don't believe any such answer. You actually disbelieve or at least you are disposed to disbelieve any of them (there are infinitely many). What you do have, however, is a *corrective* answer to the target question, namely: that bananas do *not* fly. But that you have a corrective answer to the question (as opposed to a direct one) just means that, from your perspective, the question itself calls for correction.

Something similar can be said about the question when David Hume wrote the Critique of Pure Reason, the question who squared the circle, and the question why everyone loves McDonalds. If you are like me, you reject all these questions, for you take it that they rely on false presuppositions.[2]

One can reject a question by denying its presuppositions—and that is one kind of stance that one can have with respect to it, alongside the stances of believing one of the question's direct answers or being on the fence as to which of them is true.

[1] See Millson (2021) for a related notion of question-rejection, albeit different from the one I explore here. Discussion of how the present notion and Millson's compare to each other extrapolate the confines of this article.

[2] For discussion about norms of *inquiry* on questions with false presuppositions, see Rosa (2024), Falbo (2024), Willard-Kyle, Millson and Whitcomb (forthcoming).

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That doesn't yet show us that the traditional taxonomy of attitudes is not inclusive enough—at least not *directly*. For the traditional taxonomy is offered as an answer to the question which kinds of doxastic stance one can have regarding *whether p* (and not regarding *why* it is that *p*, or *when* it became the case that *p*, etc.). The complement 'whether *p*' expresses what semanticists call a *polar* question, that is, a yes-or-no question. But the interrogative complements explored in the previous paragraphs express *non-polar* questions (see Roelofsen 2019). Unlike polar questions, non-polar questions admit of more than just two direct answers.

But we are just one step away from attacking the traditional taxonomy.

For now we just have to observe that subjects can reject *polar* questions, too. I can reject the question whether Alice likes porridge, for example. The Alice in question is the Alice from *Alice in Wonderland*. No mention is made in Lewis Carroll's work of fiction as to how Alice stands with respect to porridge. That is why I reject the question. (See Kroon and Voltolini 2023 for an overview of the literature on fictional entities and the semantics of fictional names.)

I do not believe that Alice likes porridge. I do not disbelieve that Alice likes porridge, or believe that she doesn't. And I am not on the fence as to whether Alice likes porridge, either. I am not divided between treating the proposition that Alice likes porridge as true and treating it as false. From my perspective, *there is no fact of the matter* as to whether Alice likes porridge—so there is nothing for me to be in doubt about here. I rather treat the proposition that Alice likes porridge as neither true nor false.[3]

So I reject the question whether Alice likes porridge, and that is my stance on it.

Other examples of the phenomenon are possible which do not hinge on the rejector's views about fiction or the ontology of fictional characters. One can reject the question whether Jack is bald, for example, on account of one's thinking that Jack is a borderline case of baldness. One can reject the question whether there is going to be a third world war, because one thinks that the future is less than fully determined by the past (future contingents).

It may be a *mistake* for one to reject any of these questions, of course—but that doesn't invalidate the point, namely, that rejecting the question whether *p* is a possible stance for one to have regarding whether *p* (compare: *p* doesn't have to be true or supported by the evidence in order for one to believe that *p*).

So, again, in addition to believing that *p*, disbelieving that *p* and being divided as to whether *p*, one can also reject the question whether *p*. That makes four different categorical attitudes that one can have regarding whether *p*.

3. What all Cases of Question-Rejection Have in Common

Which features do all cases of question-rejection have in common? What is it that unifies its various instances?

[3] This is a situation familiar to many of us who accept the existence of truth-value gaps. What about those who think that every proposition is either true or false, such as Williamson (1994)? Could *they* reject polar questions? They could, though it would be *incoherent* for them to do that. The rest of us can coherently reject polar questions, however. For an overview of the costs and advantages of postulating truth-value gaps, see Keefe (2000, Ch. 4).

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In the previous section, initial examples of question-rejection were given which featured *non-polar* questions, for example, the question of how bananas fly. In examples of this kind, the subject rejects the question because they take it to rely on false presuppositions. Then further examples of question-rejection were introduced where the subject does *not* take the question to rely on false presuppositions—and these were examples involving *polar* questions.

So taking the question to rely on false presuppositions is not a feature that is shared by *all* cases of question-rejection.

To make the point clearer, let us say again that I reject the question whether Jack is bald. I identify Jack as a borderline case of baldness and I think that there is no fact of the matter as to whether he is bald. The question whether Jack is bald relies on the presupposition that *either Jack is bald or Jack is not bald*. But I do not take that presupposition to be *false*. It is just that, from my perspective, that presupposition is *not true*. In fact, I treat the target presupposition as if it were *neither true nor false*.

Is this then a feature that is shared by all cases of question-rejection, namely, that the subject takes the question to rely on a presupposition that fails to be true (even though it need not actually be false)? That gets closer, but it is not quite there yet.

A supervaluationist might think that the target disjunction is true, for example, even though neither of its disjuncts are true. That is, they take the presupposition that *either Jack is bald or Jack is not bald* to be true, while at the same time regarding both the answer that *Jack is bald* and the answer that *Jack is not bald* as not true (these answers are neither true nor false). Our supervaluationist identifies truth with supertruth and, whereas the disjunction is supertrue, neither of its disjuncts are supertrue (see Fine 1975, Lewis 1982).

To be more precise and inclusive, then, the feature that is shared by all cases of question-rejection, no matter whether involving a polar or a non-polar question, is that the subject treats the question as if it there weren't any true direct answers to it.

And here we see that rejecting a question isn't just abstaining from holding any attitude, either. For, when one simply abstains from holding any stance on the question whatsoever, one is *not* treating the question as if there were no true answers to it. In the example from the previous section, I treat both, the answer that *Alice likes porridge* and the answer that *Alice does not like porridge* as if they were neither true nor false, therefore not true. And those two propositions are the only direct answers to the question whether Alice likes porridge. Similarly, in rejecting the question whether Jack is bald, I treat both the answer that *Jack is bald* and the answer that *Jack is not bald* as if they were not true. And those are the only two direct answers to the question whether Jack is bald. In either case, the corresponding question doesn't admit of a true direct answer, as seen from my own perspective.

Does treating the question as if there weren't any true direct answers to it consist of *believing* that there isn't any true direct answer to the question?

It really depends on how lax we want to be with our ascriptions of belief. If behaving and cognizing as if that were so is enough to make it the case that the question-rejector believes the target proposition, then yes. For treating the question as if there weren't any true direct answers to it is nothing but behaving and cognizing as if there weren't any true direct answers to it. For example, when it comes to verbal

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behavior, one will be disposed to reply 'There is no one answer to this question', or something to that effect, when someone asks them the target question. But if the subject has to token a sentence in the language-of-thought, or have explicit thoughts that express a proposition in order to count as believing it, then not all cases of question-rejection will involve believing that there isn't any true direct answer to it.

Either way, however, the main point stands. Even if rejecting the question whether *p* is reducible to believing that there is no true direct answer to the question, it is still a stance one can have *regarding whether p*, other than the stances of believing that *p*, disbelieving that *p* and being divided as to whether *p*.

Compare this with disbelief again: many think of the stance of disbelieving that *p* as the stance of believing that *not-p*. So disbelief is simply belief. Belief and disbelief are the same kind of attitude when *abstracted away from their contents*. Still, disbelieving that *p* is one of the possible stances that one can have *regarding whether p*—and here it is an alternative to the stance of believing that *p*. Believing *that p* and disbelieving *that p* are not the same attitude *regarding whether p*, even though belief and disbelief are the same kind of attitude *period*.

4. Isn't Question-Rejection Just a Special Case of the Third Stance?

Many authors use the expression 'suspend judgment' to ascribe the third stance of the traditional taxonomy of attitudes.[4] And it doesn't seem obviously incorrect to say that, when one rejects the question of whether *p*, one suspends judgment about whether *p*. So isn't question-rejection just a special case of the third stance from the traditional taxonomy?

There is of course an admissible interpretation of 'suspend judgment' under which the following comes out true: when you reject the question whether *p*, you thereby suspend judgment about whether *p*, or at least you are disposed to suspend judgment about whether *p*.

Here we use 'suspend judgment' to describe someone as quite literally *suspending* something, namely, their *judgment*. To suspend judgment about whether *p* here is to prevent one's judgment on whether *p* from taking place: one prevents oneself (for whatever reason) from judging either way, either that *p* or that *not-p*. And, when one rejects the question whether *p* one does prevent oneself, or one is at least disposed to prevent oneself from judging whether *p*. For example, upon considering the question whether Jack is bald, I prevent myself from judging either way, that is, I stop myself from either judging that *Jack is bald* or judging that *Jack is not bald*. For I think again that there is no fact of the matter as to whether Jack is bald.

[4] Of course, that is not the only expression they use in an attempt to individuate a third stance. Chisholm (1989) and Bergmann (2005) for example use of the verb 'withhold' with a proposition as complement—as in 'withholding *p*'. Turri (2012) uses 'withholding judgment' instead. Smithies (2012), Jackson (2019), among others, use 'withholding belief'. Van Fraassen (1989) and Hájek (1998) use 'suspending belief', and both of them also use 'being agnostic about'. Friedman (2013a, 2013b), among others, uses 'suspending judgment about' and 'being agnostic about' interchangeably.

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That line of argument sounds perfectly reasonable. But the problem is that, when 'they suspend judgment about whether *p*' is interpreted in that literal way, that sentence does *not* ascribe a doxastic stance or attitude to the subject, on a par with the stances or attitudes of believing that *p* and disbelieving that *p* (see McGrath 2021 for more on this point). It rather describes the subject as *doing* something—it describes them as preventing themselves from judging (contrast to 'they believe that *p*', 'they disbelieve that *p*', 'they are on the fence as to whether *p*', 'they think there is no fact of the matter as to whether *p*').

In fact, when interpreted in that more literal way, 'they suspend judgment about whether *p*' doesn't even carry the implication that the subject is on the fence or divided as to whether *p*.

A subject can suspend judgment in that sense even though they are simply avoiding the question whether *p*—say, because it is unpleasant for them to think about whether *p*—without so much as having any *doxastic* stance or opinion on the issue. For to suspend judgment about whether *p* here is just to perform some cognitive act whereby one prevents oneself from judging, and there is no specific stance regarding whether *p* that one needs to have in order to do that (in fact, one can even *believe* that *p*, unconsciously as one may, and suspend judgment about whether *p* in the present sense).

So, when interpreted literally, 'suspend judgment' doesn't ascribe a doxastic stance that constitutes an alternative to belief and disbelief. But only when it is interpreted in that literal way can we say that a subject who rejects the question of whether *p* suspends judgment, or is at least disposed to suspend judgment, about whether *p*. That question-rejection entails suspension or disposition to suspend judgment does not mean that question-rejection is a special case of the third stance regarding whether *p* (the third stance from the traditional taxonomy). For suspension of judgment and the third stance from the traditional taxonomy are not the same thing, either.

We could still look at other idioms that philosophers use to ascribe the third stance, such as 'suspend belief' and 'withhold belief'—which look better than 'suspend judgment', in that the latter contrasts to 'judge', whereas the former ones contrast to 'believe' (and it is usually assumed that judgment involves explicit, person-level thoughts, in contrast to belief—see Cassam 2010 for more on this). But similar morals apply also to these other idioms. The interpretation that allows them to correctly apply to cases of question-rejection is not the interpretation under which they ascribe a *doxastic attitude* of being divided between treating a proposition as if it were true and treating it as if it were false. And, as soon as we interpret them in such a way that they *do* ascribe such an attitude, they do not correctly apply to cases of question-rejection anymore. For again, when one rejects the question whether *p*, one treats *p* as if it were neither true nor false, rather than being divided between treating *p* as if it were true and treating it as if it were false.

But let us not get distracted by these partly terminological (albeit important) issues. Choice of idioms aside, we can draw a clear distinction between rejecting the question whether *p* and being on the fence as to whether *p*. And these are two different stances that one can have regarding whether *p*.

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My stance on the question whether *Alice* likes porridge, for example, differs from my stance on whether *Arnold Schwarzenegger* likes porridge. I think that there is a fact of the matter in the latter but not in the former case. From my perspective, the fact of the matter may be that Arnold likes porridge, or that Arnold doesn't like porridge—it could be either way. In contrast, again from my perspective, there is neither a fact that Alice likes porridge nor a fact that Alice doesn't like porridge. My attitudes toward these two different questions are radically different, and clearly so, regardless of which idioms we use to ascribe them.

If the traditional taxonomy lumps *both* of those attitudes together under a single wonky category under the label 'suspended judgment' or 'suspended belief', then it gives us just one category when it should give us two.

5. Question-Rejection and Interrogative Attitudes

Is rejection an *interrogative* attitude? Philosophers have mentioned wondering and being curious as paradigmatic examples of interrogative attitudes (Friedman 2017, Carruthers 2018, Willard-Kyle 2023).

We could say to a first approximation that an interrogative attitude is any attitude that is expressible through the utterance of an interrogative sentence—through the speech act of *asking* (Hawthorne 2004, Whitcomb 2017).

The stance of being on the fence or divided as to whether p is an interrogative attitude in that sense. The divided subject has a *question* to raise, but no answer to it. When you hold the third stance regarding whether p, you're in doubt or uncertain as to whether p. The question *whether p* is the content of your very attitude. You express that attitude by asking the question—by sincerely uttering an interrogative that has that question as its content—as opposed to asserting any of its answers.[5]

Arguably, however, not every attitude *toward* a question is an interrogative attitude, and rejection is a case in point. I reject the question whether Jack is bald, for I think again that there is no true answer to that question. But this attitude of mine is not an interrogative attitude. Instead of expressing my state of mind by uttering 'Is Jack bald?' here, I get to express it by uttering 'There is no answer to that question', or something along these lines.

In cases of question-rejection, it is not as if the subject thinks that there is a true answer to their question, though they cannot yet decide which one (as in case of the third stance). It is rather that they think that no such answer is to be found to begin with.

Rejecting the question whether p is one of the stances that one can have regarding whether p—much like believing that p, disbelieving that p and being on the fence

[5] The notion of an agent's *expression* of their attitudes through their speech acts plays an important role in expressivist theories of our assent and dissent patterns—see for example the works of Gibbard (1992) and Schroeder (2008). The expression of an attitude through a speech act is to be distinguished from the expression relation that holds between a declarative sentence and a proposition, or between an interrogative sentence and a question. See Bar-On (2015) for more on this distinction. Minimally, I take it that in order for a speaker to express one of her attitudes through a speech act, their utterance must be *evidence* that they hold that attitude, or their utterance *signals* that they have that attitude to potential hearers (without necessarily *saying that* they hold the target attitude).

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regarding whether *p*. But, unlike the attitude of being on the fence regarding whether *p*, the attitude of rejecting the question whether *p* is not an interrogative attitude, and in that it is similar to the attitudes of believing and disbelieving that *p*.

There are other ways of drawing a contrast between question-rejection and interrogative attitudes, other than through the expressiveness of speech acts. Here is one such way, which I can only sketch at this point, and leave the details for a more thorough investigation. It deploys the notion of *doxastic possibility*. It is doxastically possible that *p* relative to subject *S* when, among the possible worlds compatible with what *S* believes, there is a world where *p* is the case (Hintikka 1962, Lewis 1986).

For example, it is doxastically possible relative to me that there is an açaí shop in the town of Bendigo, Australia. I haven't been there yet and I didn't search the internet about it. Relative to everything I believe, there is a possible world where the city of Bendigo features an açaí shop. There is also a possible world compatible with everything I believe where the city of Bendigo does *not* feature an açaí shop. So, from my perspective, there might be an açaí shop in Bendigo, but there might also not be one. Both possibilities are open from my perspective. Accordingly, I have an interrogative attitude regarding whether there is an açaí shop in Bendigo—I am on the fence or divided as to whether there is one. I just can't tell which one of those two possibilities is the one I'm actually in.

But now consider my take on the question of whether Jack is bald. I think there is no fact of the matter as to whether Jack is bald (and that it would be a matter of legislation whether we should classify Jack as bald or not bald, etc.). From my perspective, the world I'm actually in is *neither* one where Jack is bald *nor* one where Jack is not bald. I'm ruling out *both* possibilities, as opposed to not ruling out any of them.

Notice, however, that a non-classical use of negation is made in that description of my situation (the negation at play at 'neither… nor…' and 'ruling out'). In particular, that Jack is neither bald nor not bald does not entail that Jack is at the same time bald and not bald (Field 2003). Furthermore, 'it is not possible that *p*' read as deploying non-classical negation does not entail 'it is necessary that not-*p*' read as deploying classical negation, so that, in describing the situation in the way I did, I do not commit myself to the claim that, from my perspective, it is necessary that Jack is not bald (see Kooi and Tamminga 2013 for more on the interaction of modalities with negation in a semantics featuring truth-value gaps).

The contrast drawn in the way just sketched can be summed up as follows. When I hold an interrogative attitude regarding whether *p*, from my perspective, either possibility may be the one I am actually in: the one where *p* is true and the one where *p* is false. But, when I reject the question whether *p*, I rule out *both* possibilities at the same time.

There should still be other ways of distinguishing question-rejection from interrogative attitudes in general, and from the stance of being on the fence in particular. But the points made above should suffice for now. If anything, they make it clear that *there is* a distinction to be made (in some way or other, even if none of the above) between two different kinds of doxastic stances regarding whether *p*, besides the stance of believing that *p* and the stance of disbelieving that *p*.

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6. Questions and Interrogatives

Once the option of rejecting the question becomes salient, along with the three other doxastic options that traditional epistemologists present us with, we start seeing the phenomenon everywhere.

Every time a subject takes a question to rely on *false presuppositions*, again, they will tend to reject that question (barring perhaps cases of irrationality). And similarly with respect to cases where subjects take a *fact of the matter* to be missing.

We must be careful, however, not to over-ascribe the stance of question-rejection. This is particularly relevant to our ascriptions of attitudes in certain contexts of inquiry—for example, in philosophy and the natural sciences—where subjects transition more or less seamlessly from non-linguistic to linguistic considerations. They start off inquiring into what life is, for example, and end up talking about the meaning of the word 'life'. Then at some point one of them judges the question of what life is to be a bad question, on the grounds that the word 'life' is ambiguous—and here it looks like they are rejecting the question of what life is.

But not every such verdict is a manifestation of question-rejection.

That you reject the question means that *there is a question* that you reject.

Think here of the question as the semantic contribution or content of an interrogative sentence, much like a proposition is the content of a declarative sentence.[6] A question can be construed, for example, as the set of its maximal complete answers, which are in turn propositions. So the question expressed by an interrogative such as 'Is Mars bigger than Earth?' is a set containing two propositions: the proposition that Mars is bigger than Earth and the proposition that Mars is not bigger than Earth (see Hamblin 1973, Groenendijk and Stokhof 1984, and Ciardelli et al. 2019 for different ways of constructing questions as sets of answers). The question itself is that set, not that interrogative.

Now many times when we issue a 'bad question' verdict, what we mean to refer to is the *interrogative* itself, which we take to *fail* to express any particular question. That is, we take the interrogative to be contentless. It is not that there is a question that is bad. It is rather that there isn't a question to begin with.

There are different reasons why an interrogative may fail to express a question, as already hinted at, for example: (a) the interrogative deploys ambiguous expressions that haven't been disambiguated by a relevant speaker or conversational background, or (b) the interrogative deploys constructions that only have content when paired with certain elements of the context of utterance (time, speaker, place, threshold, scope of quantification, etc.), but it was uttered at a context that does not provide the relevant elements. In the case of (b), using the semantic categories from Kaplan (1989), we can say that the interrogative has a *character*—that is, a function from contexts to contents—but it doesn't spit out a *content* in its context of utterance.

So we have to distinguish the stance of rejecting the question from the belief that no specific question is expressed by the utterance of an interrogative. For example,

[6] This is not to say that interrogative sentences and complements *always* have questions for their contents in *any* linguistic context where they can occur—see Belnap (1983), Groenendijk and Stokhof (1984, Ch. 2) and Theiler et al. (2018) for more on this.

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instead of saying that the logical positivists rejected metaphysical *questions*, it may be more accurate to say that they took certain interrogative constructions to lack content.

In the examples of rejection given in §3, we have assumed that a particular question *was* presented to the subject. The subject takes it that there is no fact of the matter as to whether *p*, but they are still faced with the question whether *p*. For example, I don't think that no question is expressed by 'Is Jack bald?'. I understand that interrogative perfectly, and I can conceive of possible worlds where one of the direct answers to that question is true (worlds where Jack is bald), as well as possible worlds where the alternative direct answer to it is true (worlds where Jack is not bald). It is just that the world I'm in is neither of those, as seen from my own perspective. *There is* a question, I take it, and correspondingly a particular set of direct answers—but none of those answers are true.

One can only reject a question when there is one. (Similarly, one can only believe a proposition when there is one.)

7. Are We Thereby Committed to Denying Bivalence?

It may be objected that, in countenancing the possibility of rejecting *polar* questions (questions expressed by 'whether'-complements), we commit ourselves to denying the principle of bivalence, according to which every proposition is either true or false.[7]

For example, when we grant that subject can reject the question whether Alice likes porridge, it seems that we ourselves take it that there is no fact of the matter as to whether Alice likes porridge—and so the proposition that Alice likes porridge is neither true nor false. And similarly with respect to the question whether there is going to be a third world war, say, or whether Jack is bald, as the case may be. So suddenly, as a result of including question-rejection among the possible stances that a subject can have regarding whether *p*, for any *p*, we are led to endorse controversial views in logic and philosophy of language.

But notice that one doesn't need to *agree* with the subject who rejects a polar question in order to acknowledge that this is exactly what they are doing: rejecting a polar question. That this is a *possible* stance for the subject to adopt doesn't entail that this is the *correct* stance for them to adopt (this was already hinted at in §2 above).

It may indeed happen that some readers will not be convinced by the examples of question-rejection I gave *because* they themselves do not reject the target questions. They will think that *there is a fact of the matter* in all these examples—cases involving fictional characters, future contingents, or vagueness. It is perfectly consistent for them, however, to acknowledge that *other* agents reject questions that they themselves don't (and maybe even rationally so). Someone who agrees with Williamson (1994), for example, thinks that it is either true or false that Jack is bald. Presumably, however, that person is also aware that there are philosophers

[7] I thank an anonymous referee for the *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* for pressing me on this point.

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who *disagree* with Williamson on this issue (e.g. Fine 1975, Field 2003). Such philosophers think that it is neither true nor false that Jack is bald. In saying that some such philosophers reject the question whether Jack is bald, one does not thereby endorse their very position or commend their stance.

Compare this with ascriptions of the other doxastic attitudes: whereas I cannot bring myself to believe that the Earth is flat, for example, I am aware that other people believe that the Earth is flat. I think that they are *wrong*, but that is what they believe.

So, in order to agree with me that the traditional taxonomy of doxastic stances regarding whether p leaves out the stance of rejecting the question whether p, the reader doesn't have to think that some propositions are neither true nor false. No commitment to the denial of the principle of bivalence ensues from their agreement.

8. Conclusion

I have addressed the question of how many different kinds of doxastic stance regarding whether p one can have, for any p. The traditional taxonomy says: one can believe that p, disbelieve that p or be on the fence as to whether p.

But I have argued that the traditional taxonomy is incomplete, not inclusive enough, in that it neglects the option of rejecting the very question whether p. One gets to entertain this fourth kind of doxastic attitude once one thinks of the doxastic attitudes as stances on *questions*, and not only as attitudes toward *propositions*.[8] **Whenever there is a question, it is possible to reject it.**

Several examples of the phenomenon were given. First, there were examples of subjects who reject a question because they take it to rely on false presuppositions—e.g. how do bananas fly? Second, there were examples of subjects who reject a question because they take its answers to be neither true nor false—e.g. my stance regarding whether Alice likes porridge or my stance regarding whether Jack is bald.

When it comes to polar questions, I have distinguished the stance of rejecting the question from the stance of being divided or on the fence as to what its answer is. In the former but not the latter kind of case, the subject treats the question as if *none* of its direct answers are true. So, whether or not the traditional taxonomy deploys one single expression that serves to ascribe both, question-rejection and the stance of being on the fence, there are two different doxastic stances for us to distinguish here. More generally, question-rejection is not an interrogative attitude.

Finally, I have also distinguished question-rejection from a belief to the effect that an interrogative fails to express any particular question. Not every case where a person issues a 'bad question' verdict is a case where there is actually a question that the person rejects.

Many tasks are left for future extensions of this work. Like any other doxastic stance, question-rejection can be rational or irrational (this is related to the problem

[8] I do *not* mean to imply that these two ways of thinking about the issue are mutually exclusive. Questions and propositions are inextricable elements of the semantic realm, and we can always translate talk of one into talk of the other. Propositions are answers to questions, questions are answered or settled by propositions (in the type of framework mentioned in the previous footnote, questions just *are* sets of propositions). But the two ways of thinking facilitate access to different bits of information, for example, concerning doxastic attitudes.

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discussed in §7). Under what conditions is it one or the other? When is question-rejection a proper response to the *evidence*? When does it fail to *cohere* with other attitudes? Still related to these questions, which attitude should the subject adopt when they suspect but they are unsure whether a question lacks any true direct answers? Is that enough for them to reject the target question, or should they be 'in-between' rejecting it and adopting some other doxastic attitude? And what is the connection between question-rejection and inquiry? Does the fact that a subject rejects a question require them *not* to inquire into it?[9]

These are some of the admittedly thorny issues that need to be explored in subsequent extensions of the present investigation.[10]

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[9] See again Rosa (2024), Falbo (2024), Willard-Kyle, Millson and Whitcomb (forthcoming) for different views that bear on this.

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