UNDERSTANDING SINGULAR TERMS*

This paper unfolds as follows. §1 argues for a biconditional connecting the 'aboutness' of ordinary beliefs with what I call 'cognitive focus'. §2 sketches a kindred account of our understanding of one another's uses of the singular terms we use to express these beliefs: understanding is joint cognitive focus. §§3 – 4 use the phenomenon of 'felicitous underspecification' involving demonstratives to argue for the view sketched in §2, and gesture towards some additional applications to puzzles about our understanding and use of singular terms. Though these gestures will be preliminary, I shall try to do enough to provide a backdrop for the following immodest claim: the view introduced in this paper – understanding of singular terms is joint cognitive focus – promises to generate a new and rewarding route across this boggy and uncertain terrain.

§1 Aboutness and cognitive focus[1]

Consider the following cases:

Case 1 You are in an ordinary situation where you have no reason to doubt the deliverances of perception. Looking at an orange on the table in front of you, you form, by uptake from perception, a body of beliefs you would express using sentences containing 'that': 'That is rolling' you think; 'That is orange'; 'That is spherical'; 'That is about to fall'.

Case 2 You have not heard the name 'Aneurin Bevan' before. Somebody begins to explain who Bevan was: 'Aneurin Bevan was a British Labour Party politician. He was a long-standing member of parliament, and a cabinet minister in the 1940's and 50's. He was instrumental in the foundation of Britain's National Health Service.' Nothing about the situation leads you to doubt your informant's reliability. You take the utterances at face value, forming a body of beliefs you would use the name 'Aneurin Bevan' to express.

In each of these cases, I take it that there is a clear (intuitive…) answer to the question 'Which object are your beliefs about?'[2] In *Case 1* they are about the orange. In *Case 2* they are about the politician Aneurin Bevan. I also take it that there are uncontroversial initial answers to the following question: '*Why* is this the thing your beliefs are about?' In *Case 1*, your beliefs are about the orange because it is at the end of your perceptual-attentional channel. In *Case 2* they are about Aneurin Bevan because formed by uptake from a stream of utterances themselves about him – the aboutness of your beliefs is inherited from aboutness in the testimony stream on which they are based. But to allow that these relations *do* secure aboutness is to say nothing about *how* they do so: how perceptual attention to objects enables thought about them; how aboutness is transmitted in ordinary cases of uptake from testimony.

This 'how?' question was the focus of the traditional theory of reference – the question to which 'descriptivist' and 'causalist' views of reference-fixing were answers. Descriptivists said that the aboutness-fixing relations do their work by generating a description that the object satisfies and to which the subject is appropriately related. Causalists attempted to find a causal relation present in all and only cases of aboutness.

This section argues for a new approach to this traditional question. The new approach is most easily introduced using a toy example. Consider an astronomer (hereafter '*A*')

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[1] This section provides a new version of the central line of thought of Dickie 2015 ch 2.
[2] I consider the role of this kind of intuitive judgement in philosophical theorising at Dickie 2015 pp 19-22. I am taking it that it is built into these cases that there *is* an object the subject is thinking about, but the framework I am about to defend also generates a distinctive account of aboutness failure.

compiling a report from the data delivered by a telescope focussed on distant object *o*. *A* has no reason to doubt that the telescope is working as it should. The telescope delivers a stream of data: detection of motion; detection of fluctuating temperature; and so on. *A* compiles her report: 'It's moving. Its temperature is fluctuating between such-and-such values….' The fact that the telescope is focussed on *o* obviously does not guarantee that *A*'s report will match what *o* is like. Some unlucky spoiler might intervene: a concealed fault in the workings of the telescope; a rare data-distorting anomaly in *o's* part of the sky. But the fact that the telescope is focussed on *o* does guarantee the following: *A*'s report will match what *o* is like *unless some unlucky spoiler intervenes*.

The approach to the theory of reference that I am about to propose treats the aboutness of our ordinary thoughts as a kind of focus – what I shall call 'cognitive focus'. Consider the 'how' question for *Case 1*: How does an attentional perceptual link with an object put you in a position to think about it? I am going to propose that the perceptual link does its aboutness-fixing work by making available a means of justification – uptake from the perceptual channel – whose deliverances will match what the attended object is like unless some unlucky spoiler intervenes. And I shall propose that something similar holds for *Case 2*: a *Case 2*-tyoe testimony link with an object enables thought about the object by making available a means of justification – careful uptake from the testimony channel – such that the subject will be unlucky if beliefs justified in this way do not match what the object is like, and not merely lucky if they do.

The rest of this section argues for the central load-bearing component of this new approach. The argument begins with two principles which I shall take to be basic:

ABOUTNESS AND TRUTH - If a belief is about an object, its truth or falsity depends on what the object is like. (If my belief that Jack has fleas is about my dog, it is true iff he has fleas.)

TRUTH AND JUSTIFICATION (approximate version) – Justification is truth conducive: the factors that secure justification for a belief also secure the result that the subject will be unlucky if the belief is not true.

Given these two principles – one connecting *aboutness* and *truth*, the other *truth* and *justification* – it will be disappointing if we cannot cut the intermediate term and find a third principle connecting *aboutness* and *justification*. This principle will bring out the significance for the traditional theory of reference of the fact that justification is truth-conducive. Here is the aboutness-and-justification principle that I am going to propose:

ABOUTNESS AND JUSTIFICATION (approximate version) – A subject's body of <α> beliefs[3] is about object *o* iff their associated pattern of justification is conducive to getting *o*'s properties right, so that the subject will be unlucky if beliefs justified in this way do not match what *o* is like.

A full-dress defence of the framework would go into details here concerning the notion of a 'pattern of justification' associated with a body of beliefs. For the cases I have used to illustrate ordinary belief-forming activity, this notion is relatively straightforward: in *Case 1*, beliefs are justified by a specific kind of uptake from perception: the kind of uptake

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[3] I use '<>' to stand for propositions and propositional constituents. A body of <α> beliefs is a body of beliefs the subject treats as about a single thing, and would standardly express using singular term **α**, where '**α**'is a schematic letter ranging over the singular terms that figure in talk about ordinary things. So the body of beliefs you form in *Case 1* is a body of <that> beliefs; the body of beliefs you form in *Case 2* is a body of <Aneurin Bevan> beliefs; and so on.

from an attentional perceptual channel that standardly generates our bodies of <that> beliefs. In *Case 2*, they are justified by a specific kind of uptake from linguistic input: what I shall call 'careful uptake from testimony'. (I am assuming that standard uptake from an attentional perceptual channel is automatically careful, which is why only the testimonial case is getting a 'careful' rider.) Complications arise when it comes to generalising the framework beyond this kind of 'pure' – single pathway to justification – case. I shall ignore these complications here for the sake of brevity. This note[4] gives an indication of the issues arising.

ABOUTNESS AND JUSTIFICATION is a biconditional linking aboutness on the left hand side, and what I have called 'cognitive focus' on the right. To establish the biconditional, we shall argue for each direction in turn.

Here is an argument for the left-to-right direction – if aboutness then cognitive focus.

1 S's belief that <α is Φ> is about *o*. [Supposition]

Add ABOUTNESS AND TRUTH:
2 If S's belief that <α is Φ> is about an object, the belief is true iff that object is Φ.

1 and **2** entail
3 S's belief that <α is Φ> is true iff *o* is Φ.

Add TRUTH AND JUSTIFICATION:

4 Justification is truth conducive – the factors that secure justification for a belief also secure the result that the subject will be unlucky if it is not true.

3 and **4** entail

5 Justification for the belief that <α is Φ> secures the result that the subject will be unlucky if *o* is not Φ.

So we have the left-to-right direction of the ABOUTNESS AND JUSTIFICATION biconditional:

6 If S's <α is Φ> belief is about *o,* factors that secure justification for the belief also secure the result that the subject will be unlucky if *o* is not Φ.

The argument for the right-to-left direction (if cognitive focus then aboutness) needs two additional elements. The first is a claim about what we are trying to do when we engage in what I shall call 'ordinary belief forming activity' – the kind of activity that generates the

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[4] Note first that there is no suggestion that the notion of justification is to be explained in terms of that of a pattern of belief formation taken as prior, so familiar worries from the literature on 'reductive reliabilism' (compare Conee and Feldman 1998) do not bite. However, the notion of a 'pattern of justification' still needs an explanation. My current preferred option is to explain it away, leaving a reformulation of the principle that looks something like this: Consider subject S engaged in maintaining a body of <α>-beliefs. These beliefs are about object *o* iff, for all <Φ>, across the situations σ where S forms <α is Φ> beliefs by rationality-securing pathways involving the smallest deviations from or extensions to S's actual belief-forming activity, either *o* is Φ and the match between S's belief and *o* is secured by S's pathway to the belief, or σ is rationally irrelevant (where the 'for all <Φ> quantifier ranges over a contextually relevant range of property-representations (roughly, those such that S is in the business of forming whether <α is Φ> or <α is not Φ> beliefs), and '<Φ>' and 'Φ' are braced together – representation <Φ> represents property Φ).

beliefs in *Cases 1 and 2* from the start of the section. I defend this claim elsewhere.[5] Here I shall state it, then provide some explanation.

The claim Part of the aim of ordinary belief-forming activity is to secure and maintain aboutness relations with particular things.

In treating ordinary belief-formation as an 'activity', I am joining the long tradition of recognising the forming of ordinary beliefs as something we do – as a response we make to input from perception and testimony, as opposed to something that merely happens to us. It is important not to confound this suggestion – ordinary belief formation is something we do – with a stronger suggestion which I take to be obviously false: the claim that it is something we *choose* to do. There is a once-widespread view of the difference between things we do and things which happen to us which collapses the first claim into the second. This is the view that the things we do just are the things with respect to the doing of which we have a choice, so that 'S performed action A (or engaged in A-ing activity)' entails 'S could have done otherwise'[6]. But a now more widespread alternative view rejects this 'could have done otherwise' criterion. According to the alternative view, what is distinctive of action or activity is that these are guided by motivational states of the subject, while mere happenings are not.[7] Suppose you intend to close the door. According to the 'action only if guidance' view, what makes closing the door an action of yours is that the movements you make in doing it are guided by your intention: your intention selects a train of movement which will generate its fulfilment unless your situation is unlucky. This is the view I assume here.

It is crucial to *the claim* that, though an activity must be guided by a motivational state of the subject, it need not be guided by an intention. An intention is a propositional attitude – a motivational state at the same level of cognitive sophistication as a belief. Since an intention is a propositional attitude, to intend to A you must have the conceptual sophistication to recognize, at the level of thought, what A-ing is. But it is a familiar part of folk psychology that there are motivational states which are not propositional attitudes. I shall call these states 'needs'. Like an intention, a need has fulfilment conditions – it is a need *for* something. But a subject might be motivated by a need while lacking the conceptual sophistication to recognize, at the level of thought, what it is a need for. The most familiar needs from a theorist's point of view are needs we share with other animals – the needs to feed ourselves; feel secure; avoid loneliness; and so on.[8] But there are conclusive empirical grounds for the conclusion that we are also motivated by rational or intellectual needs.[9] *The claim* is a claim with respect to what I am suggesting is one such rational need: part of what motivates ordinary belief-forming activity is the need to lock on to particular things as subject matter for thought. (I intend to allow that this need might be emergent from other less

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[5] In Dickie (forthcoming).

[6] One pathway to this view is the 'causalist' claim that actions are distinguished from happenings by their causes, together with the view that the causes distinctive of actions are choices made by the subject. Compare Davidson 1980a and 1980b.

[7] The move to this kind of model is explicit in Frankfurt 1978.

[8] The distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual motivational states (intentions and needs) parallels the distinction between conceptual and non-conceptual representational states as drawn in Peacocke 1992 ch3. There is a decent-sized empirical literature on motivation by what I am calling 'needs'. Berridge 2004 provides a start.

[9] The extant empirical case is tied up with the empirical study of curiousity. The literature on this topic in empirical psychology goes back many decades. As long ago as 1961 Jones et al. wrote '…information deprivation functions as a drive variable in the same sense as the well-studied homeostatic drives of hunger, pain, and thirst' [Jones et al. 1961 p 135]. Loewenstein 1994 is an important review article. For something more recent see Golman et al. 2019.

fancy-sounding needs: perhaps our most basic needs are less fancy (we need freedom from hunger and fear and pain and cold; we need companionship; and so on) and the need for subject matter for thought is derivative from these more basic motivational states.[10])

The second additional element required by the argument for the right-to-left direction makes explicit the connection between competence at an activity and non-lucky success at the activity – that is, non-lucky fulfilment of the activity's guiding motivational state. I shall say that a behaviour is an 'exercise' of competence at fulfilling a motivational state iff it is guided by the state, and is a non-lucky generator of this state's fulfilment. I shall gloss the notion of 'non-luckiness' in terms of success-conduciveness across relevant circumstances: the 'relevant' circumstances are those across which a behaviour guided by a motivational state must guarantee success if it is to count as an exercise of competence at fulfilling the state. (So an exercise of competence might fail to deliver success, but only if some unlucky spoiler intervenes, in which case the circumstance is irrelevant.) Finally, I shall say that a behaviour 'manifests' the competence iff it is an exercise of the competence in relevant circumstances – in which case the result will be success secured by the subject's exercise of the competence. (Think about Andy Murray playing a shot at tennis. He is 'exercising' his competence iff everything goes well with respect to his information processing, so that he will be unlucky if the ball does not go where he intends to put it. He is 'manifesting' his competence iff he is exercising it and his circumstance is not unlucky: the ball goes where he wants it to because the circumstance is within the range across which exercise of competence guarantees success.)[11]

For the case of ordinary belief formation, I shall take it that the notion of exercise of competence is coordinated with the notion of justification: an instance of ordinary belief-forming activity is an exercise of ordinary belief-forming competence iff the resulting beliefs are justified. And I shall take it that the notion of 'unluckiness' as it occurs in TRUTH AND JUSTIFICATION is coordinated with the notion of relevance from the point of view of ordinary belief formation: non-luck-involving circumstances (I shall say 'rationally relevant circumstances') are those where exercise of belief-forming competence also manifests this competence; unlucky circumstances are those where exercise of the competence does not secure this result.[12]

Now consider a subject maintaining a body of ordinary beliefs in such a way that the cognitive focus condition is met with respect to object o – suppose the beliefs are justified, and their means of justification guarantees a match with o across non-luck-involving circumstances. Could these beliefs fail to be about o? We shall suppose 'yes', and use materials now in place to derive a contradiction:

1 It is not sufficient, for S's <α> beliefs to be about o, that the cognitive focus condition be met with respect to o. [Assumption for *reductio*]

Given **1**, the following scenario is coherent. S has a body of justified <α is Φ> beliefs. There is no spoiler interfering with any 'detection of *Φ*-instantiation' aspect of S's path to these beliefs. There is a unique object, o, upon whose *Φ-ness* or not S's *Φ*-detecting procedures are

[10] For more discussion of the issue of whether this need might be emergent, see Heck (2017); Dickie (2017a).
[11] I adopt the terms 'exercise' of a competence and 'manifestation' of a competence from Sosa's 'virtue reliabilist' framework. See for example Sosa 2015 ch. 2.
[12] Again, this is consistent with Sosa's 'virtue reliabilist' epistemology, but I make no claim that the traditional epistemological notion (justification) is to be explained in terms of the practical notion (exercise of a competence) taken as prior.

picking up. (More precisely, o is the object such that, for all $<\Phi>$[13], S's justification for believing $<\alpha$ is $\Phi>$ eliminates o's non-Φ-ness across relevant circumstances.) But S's $<\alpha>$-beliefs are not about o.

2 In the scenario just described, S's circumstance is either rationally relevant to S's belief-forming activity or it is not (where the 'rationally relevant' circumstances are those across which exercise of belief-forming competence also manifests this competence, which is to say, guarantees success at the aim of belief-forming activity).

But given *the claim*, we have an argument for **3**:

3 The circumstance is not rationally relevant to S's belief-forming activity (it is not a circumstance where exercise of competence guarantees success).

For on the face of things, in the scenario as described, S is exercising belief-forming competence in her formation of $<\alpha$ is $\Phi>$ beliefs. We are supposing that she is forming a body of $<\alpha$ is $\Phi>$ beliefs which she treats as about a single object, on the basis of positive tests for Φ-ness which are indeed picking up on the Φ-ness or not of some one particular thing. (If the reader thinks competence at ordinary belief-formation involves some factor in addition to this, the author demands that it be produced.) But it is also built into the scenario that S's $<\alpha>$-beliefs are not about o, and that o is the unique object for which the cognitive focus condition is met with respect to these beliefs. And we have already established the left-to-right direction of the biconditional: if there is an object S's $<\alpha>$-beliefs are about, it is an object for which the cognitive focus condition is met. This entails that if S's $<\alpha>$-beliefs are about anything, they are about o. Since they are not about o, they are about nothing. So if the circumstance is rationally relevant, it is a rationally relevant circumstance in which ordinary belief-forming competence generates beliefs about nothing. But given *the claim*, part of the aim of ordinary belief formation is to secure and maintain aboutness relations. So if the circumstance is rationally relevant, it is a rationally relevant circumstance in which competence in the activity of ordinary belief formation is exercised, but the aim of this activity is not fulfilled. Contradiction.

And we also have an argument for **4**:

4 The circumstance is not rationally irrelevant to S's formation of the belief.

To see the argument for **4**, note first that the circumstance is not rationally irrelevant to S's formation of the corresponding beliefs that $<$Something is $\Phi>$. For in the circumstance as described, there is nothing devious interfering with S's detection of Φ-instantiation: in forming a $<$Something is $\Phi>$ belief on the basis of the means of Φ-detection that underpins justification for her $<\alpha$ is $\Phi>$ beliefs, S would be manifesting belief-forming competence, and a circumstance in which formation of a belief by rationality-securing means manifests belief-forming competence *just is* a circumstance rationally relevant to the belief's formation.

Given that the circumstance is rationally relevant to S's formation of $<$Something is $\Phi>$ beliefs, to deny **4** is permit the following combination:

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[13] The 'for all $<\Phi>$' quantifier should be read as ranging over the property-represesnations such that S is in the business of deciding whether or not $<\ldots$ is $\Phi>$ should be added to the body of beliefs. Compare note 4 above. This introduces a contextually variable parameter into the account of aboutness. I shall say a little more about this is §4.

A circumstance rationally *irrelevant* to formation of the belief that <α is Φ> may be rationally *relevant* to formation of the corresponding belief that <Something is Φ>.

And to endorse this possibility is to suppose that the conditions for the rationality of a <Something is Φ> belief might be more demanding than those for the rationality of the corresponding ordinary <α is Φ> belief. For example, it is to suppose that it might be rational to believe <That is square> by uptake from a perceptual link, but irrational to believe <Something is square> on the same justification (because the rationality of the <Something is square> belief requires the elimination of extra 'nothing square there' circumstances – circumstances that must be guarded against if it is to be rational to move to <Something is Φ> on the basis of perception, but may be ignored in moving to <That is Φ>). And this just gets things the wrong way around. In ordinary belief formation – illustrated by *Cases 1 and 2* from the start of the paper – justification for believing <α is Φ> automatically generates justification for believing <Something is Φ> too.

Having established **3** and **4**, we have eliminated both disjuncts of **2**. But the choice at **2** is generated by a situation whose coherence is entailed by **1**, so **1** must be rejected, giving us **5**:

5 If the pattern of justification associated with a body of beliefs is such that, for all <Φ>, justification for believing <α is Φ> guarantees that o is $Φ$ across rationally relevant circumstances, these beliefs are about o.

So we have both directions of the ABOUTNESS AND JUSTIFICATION biconditional: if there is aboutness, there is cognitive focus; if there is cognitive focus, there is aboutness.

The argument for ABOUTNESS AND JUSTIFICATION is only a first step towards an account of how the relations that enable us to think about ordinary things do their aboutness-fixing work.[14] But it is perhaps already possible to see how we have opened up a new approach to this traditional problem. Given ABOUTNESS AND JUSTIFICATION, explaining aboutness-fixing for perceptual demonstrative thoughts will be a matter of explaining how an attentional perceptual link with an object generates a relation of cognitive focus with the object – making available a means of justification such that beliefs justified in this way will match what the object is like unless some unlucky spoiler intervenes. And explaining transmission of aboutness from the speaker using a proper name to a hearer taking up its use will involve something similar: explaining how the transaction transmits cognitive focus, so that if the speaker is using 'NN' as a name for o, uptake from the speaker's 'NN' testimony provides the hearer with a means of justification which tends to get o's properties right.

2 From thought to language

§1 established a blueprint for accounts of how the relations to ordinary things that enable us to think about them do their aboutness-fixing work. The rest of the paper extends the discussion to our capacity to use language to communicate about these things.

In the broadest terms, here is what I am going to propose. Thinking about an object is something each of us might do alone.[15] Talking about objects is something we do together.

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[14] Dickie (2015) applies the new approach to a range of questions about aboutness and singular thought.

[15] Note that, though the discussion of §2 did consider aboutness fixing for beliefs formed by uptake from someone else's uses of a proper name, for all I have said so far the epistemic contribution of a stream of testimony is on a par with the contribution of the deliverances of an attentional perceptual channel: nothing said so far takes a stand on the issues about communication with which I am about to engage.

The solo activity of thinking about an object involves maintaining a solo aboutness relation – a relation between a thinking subject and a thing thought about. The activity of talking about an object involves maintaining a joint one: a relation between two or more communicating subjects, and a thing about which they are communicating. A solo aboutness relation is a relation of solo cognitive focus: a relation between a subject and a thing holding in virtue of how the subject's information-marshalling strategies position her relative to the thing. There is linguistic communication about an object when there is joint cognitive focus: the parties to a communicative exchange interact with one another and with their informational environment in ways that add to a joint justification-conferring information-marshalling activity where the means of justification converges on some particular thing.

Obviously there are many details to be filled in here, and multiple directions from which the general approach might be motivated. I shall manage to fill in only some details and explore only one direction of motivation. But I hope to say enough to give a general flavour of what I have in mind.

The motivation for the 'joint cognitive focus' proposal that I shall explore takes its rise from a puzzle about communication using demonstratives. §3 introduces the puzzle and explains why I think extant attempts to address it fail. §4 motivates the 'joint cognitive focus' framework as providing an alternative solution, and considers further applications.

3 Demonstratives and underspecification in a conservative setting

This section introduces the puzzle of so-called 'felicitous underspecification' as it arises for demonstratives, both simple ('this', 'that') and complex ('that book'), and explains why I think this puzzle is not solved by what I shall call the 'conservative' strategy.

It is a widespread observation that, in most instances, appropriate conversational use of a demonstrative requires either that the speaker *do something* to indicate a specific object (pointing; looking-towards), or that the features of the context take up the 'which object is it?' slack instead. (In Kaplan's framework, this is the requirement that use of a demonstrative be accompanied by a 'demonstration'[16].) For example, consider 1 and 2:

1 This shouldn't be here.
2 That book is going to the charity shop.

I might utter 1 while doing something to make a specific thing salient: pointing at it; staring fixedly at it; or picking it up and showing you. Or it might be that a specific object makes itself salient (it is a dirty coffee cup, clearly visible to us both, abandoned beside the department's photocopier). Similarly, I might utter 2 pointing at a specific book, or when I see that you have picked up a specific book, or when a specific book has just fallen to the floor or…. But if I simply utter either 1 or 2 while neither myself doing anything to make a specific thing salient, nor exploiting the fact that one thing *just is* salient in the context, my remark will be 'infelicitous'. In intuitive terms, the hearer will not understand me, and it will be my own fault. (Though there are other dimensions of felicity for utterances, in this section I shall use 'felicitous' as equivalent to 'understandable by a competent hearer in the context'). The usual diagnosis is that there is understanding of a token declarative sentence only if the hearer's linguistic competence generates recognition of what the sentence says, and a token demonstrative contributes to what is said by a sentence containing it by combining with

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[16] Kaplan (1989a) pp 489-491; (1989b) pp 582-584. There are complications concerning what counts as a demonstration, but these are orthogonal to the issues discussed in this paper.

features of the context to select a specific object for the rest of the sentence to say something about. This usual diagnosis generates what I shall call the 'specificity criterion' for felicitous uses of demonstratives:

The specificity criterion – An utterance containing a token demonstrative is felicitous only if the context-invariant contribution of the demonstrative combines with features of the context (including features generated by the speaker) to determine a specific referent for the demonstrative.

(Note that the specificity criterion leaves it open which kinds of objects can be the referents of demonstratives. For example, given a suitable demonstration the referent might be a specific ordinary object; a specific collection of objects; a specific object-type; and so on.)

However, it is an old, though less widespread, observation that there are cases that make the specificity criterion look too strong. Consider 3:

3 That car is a status symbol.

Suppose I utter 3 while nodding towards a fancy car parked among the shabbier usual inhabitants of the faculty car park. On the face of things, there is no infelicity here. But the context-invariant contribution of 'that' and the features of the context do not combine to determine a specific referent for the demonstrative: it might refer to either the car token or the car type.

Here is a similar case which does not depend on the fact that a demonstrative might refer to either a token or a type to which the token belongs:

4 This arrived today.

Suppose I utter 4 pointing at a parcel in an ordinary situation. (The person to whom the parcel is addressed has just come home, and so on.) The context-invariant contribution of 'that' and the features of the context narrow down a potential referent for the demonstrative to either the parcel itself or its contents, but no further. But, on the face of things, my remark is perfectly understandable.

In either case, a pedantic hearer *might* demand that the speaker clarify: 'Do you mean *that particular car* or *that model of car*?'; 'Do you mean the parcel or what is inside it?'. But the request for clarification would be…unusual. And it is not an admission of fault for the speaker to reply 'Well, neither, both, I don't know. I hadn't made up my mind'. These are cases of 'felicitous underspecification': the speaker has done enough to enable understanding *without* having done enough to determine a specific referent; the specificity criterion fails.[17]

The failure of the specificity criterion forces us to revisit what I called the 'usual diagnosis' of the fact that, in most cases, use of a demonstrative in a context where no specific object is made salient is infelicitous. Though I couched the usual diagnosis in semi-technical terms ('linguistic competence'; 'what is said'; 'contribution to what is said'), I suggest that what really lies behind it is a picture of what the information-processing that generates linguistic understanding is in the business of doing. I shall call this picture the 'traditional picture' (note that the traditional picture is a *picture*, which is why I have allowed myself to talk about information processing as 'in business'):

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[17] There is an extended discussion of this phenomenon in Dummett *Frege Philosophy of Language*. MacFarlane (2016) seems to deny the phenomenon, though only in passing (p 265). The issue has been revived by King (2018; MS) and Charlow (forthcoming).

The traditional picture For the case of declarative sentences, the information processing that generates language understanding works on an utterance, and on relevant features of the context, with the goal of calculating the claim about the world that the speaker is making. There is understanding only where this goal is fulfilled. The resulting claim about the world is then presented to the hearer's belief-forming mechanism as a candidate for addition to the hearer's account of what the world is like.

Given the traditional picture, the road to the specificity criterion lies plain. On this picture, there is understanding only where the hearer's information-processing generates a verdict as to how the speaker is claiming the world to be in making the utterance. So to deny the specificity criterion, we would have to say that for a declarative sentence containing a demonstrative, this verdict need not be a 'the speaker is claiming a specific object to have such-and-such property' verdict. It might be a verdict which leaves open a set of candidate objects any of which the speaker might be talking about, or which treats the speaker as characterising the world at a level of resolution at which the distinction between candidate objects does not matter. But, given the traditional picture, this move would leave us without an account of what goes wrong in the cases that figure in the initial widespread observation: cases where infelicity and the speaker's failure to do enough to secure a unique referent apparently go hand in hand.

I have tried to sketch this path to the specificity criterion in a way that suggests an obvious move for someone who wants to jump off while minimising departure from the traditional picture. Keep the traditional picture – almost. But allow the level of specificity required for understanding to vary with context. In particular, allow it to vary with what we might call, loosely, the utterance's 'communicative purpose'[18]. This move will enable the combination that the phenomena as described so far seem to demand: in most cases, understanding a sentence containing a demonstrative *does* require calculation of a specific referent; in others it does not. The difference between cases – according to someone making this move – traces to differences in communicative purpose. In most cases a speaker using a demonstrative has a communicative purpose that will be fulfilled only if the hearer's calculations deliver a specific object as referent – hence the widespread observation. But there are also cases where the speaker's communicative purpose does not require this level of specificity – hence the exceptions. I shall call this move the 'conservative move'[19]. And I shall call the modified version of the traditional picture that it generates the 'conservative picture':

The conservative picture For the case of declarative sentences, the information processing that generates language understanding works on an utterance, and on relevant features of the context, with the goal of calculating the claim about the world that the speaker is making *to the degree of resolution required by the purpose of the utterance*. There is understanding only where this goal is fulfilled. The resulting claim about the world is then presented to the hearer's belief-forming mechanism as a candidate for addition to the hearer's account of what the world is like.

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[18] There are various ways of tightening up this notion, but I do not think the differences between them will make a difference here. For one skeleton account see Roberts 2004 p 215 on 'Domain Goals' and 'Questions under Discussion'.

[19] This is King's move in his (2018) and (MS). I take it to be an application of the general strategy described in Yalcin (2018), following Lewis (1998).

If we start with the traditional picture, the conservative move seems, as the most modest available response to the phenomena, to hold the high ground from the point of view of plausibility. But it is not hard to find examples which bring the move into doubt.

Suppose the following backstory. I have been complaining about how expensive everything has become because of the economic woes caused by the constitutional crisis. You have suggested that various things are still as cheap as ever. I have dismissed each of your suggestions. The discussion has become acrimonious, and you have accused me of being a misery-guts who will complain that everything is expensive just as a matter of miserable principle. I reply by uttering 5 while looking over your shoulder towards a part of the room containing a dozen or so different things any of which might be described as expensive or cheap, then looking away again before you have time to follow my gaze:

5 Nonsense. That's cheap. And that's cheap too.

I take the utterance of 5 in this situation to be infelicitous: I have not done enough to enable you to understand my remark. And I take it that this is a case of infelicity where underspecification is to blame: you do not understand me because I do not provide (as it were) *enough of a demonstration* to enable you to isolate which of the various candidates I am claiming to be cheap. But, given the backstory, what is important for communicative purposes is whether I am prepared to admit that *anything* is cheap. So this is a case where I have done enough to enable you to home in on a referent to the degree of resolution required by communicative purposes, yet the lack of (full) specificity makes the utterance infelicitous: a combination inconsistent with the conservative move.

Again, suppose Professor Y visits Professor X's graduate seminar. Over lunch, X expresses the view that it takes only one or two good students to make a seminar feel worthwhile. But Y's visit to the seminar does not go well: the students who speak up seem not to be engaging with the material in any real way. As they are leaving the room, with the students still in their places, Y says (quietly) to X 'So, does this seminar feel worthwhile?'. X replies by uttering 6, without looking back into the room:

6 She's a really good student – it's a pity she didn't say anything.

(Suppose there were several students in the room who might be the referent of a token of 'she' and who did not say anything.) Again, this looks like a case where there is infelicity of an utterance containing a demonstrative, even though the features of the context suffice to narrow down the potential referents to the degree of specificity communicative purposes require.

What might a proponent of the conservative move say about 5 and 6 (that is, about 5 and 6 uttered with the backstories provided)? The obvious gambit is to attempt to refine the notion of 'communicative purpose', left rough-and-ready in the discussion so far, so that the level of specificity available in the contexts comes in – after all – as what communicative purposes require. But consider how difficult it would be to find a non-*ad-hoc* notion of 'communicative purposes' which functions as this gambit requires. The backstories to 5 and 6 entail that the level of specificity available in the contexts meets any demands generated by the usual notion of 'Questions under Discussion' (roughly – the set of questions to which a remark by speaker or hearer might be treated as an answer given what has gone before[20]). In the 5-case, the only obvious Question under Discussion is whether I am prepared to admit

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[20] Compare Roberts 2004 p 215: the set of 'Questions under Discussion' in a discourse is 'the set of those interrogative moves that have been accepted by the interlocuters and have not yet been satisfactorily answered.'

that anything is cheap. In the 6-case it is whether there are any good students in the class. And given the backstories, there are no obvious practical goals[21] which might generate demands for specificity to explain the infelicities (we have not agreed that you are going to put a sticker saying 'Regarded by Dickie as cheap!' on anything I admit to be cheap; Y has not offered to give a book voucher to any student who makes X's seminar feel worthwhile). If the claim is going to be that in the 5/6 cases there are 'communicative purposes' that require enough of a demonstration to determine specific referents, the 'purposes' must be to do with what is required if an utterance of the token sentence is to be a coherent conversational move aside from the obvious practical goals and Questions under Discussion. But it is very hard to see how to maintain that there are 'coherence of contribution' constraints which could generate the desired result (requiring specificity in cases 5 and 6) without collapsing the conservative account of the initial felicitous underspecificity examples (3 and 4). (Most obviously, the suggestion that the demand for specificity in 5 and 6 arises from the mere presence of the demonstratives in the sentences leaves us with the – wrong – result that 3 and 4 are infelicitous.)

It is tempting to reach at this point for what is surely a pertinent difference between 5 and 6, on the one hand, and 3 and 4, on the other. In each of 3 and 4, the predicate is one which, if satisfied by one potential referent, is also satisfied by the other (the token car is a status symbol iff the type car is; the contents arrived today iff the package did). In 5 and 6 this is not the case. But the conservative picture lacks the resources to make this difference count in explaining why the underspecificity is felicitous in the one kind of case but not the other. For consider the conservative view of what the hearer's language-understanding information processing is in the business of doing: this information-processing is looking for a representation at a level of resolution high enough for communicative purposes. Assume this view, and suppose that, for communicative purposes, it does not matter whether the speaker is regarded as claiming that o is Φ or o^* is Φ. Then the fact that the speaker does enough to let the hearer get to the verdict *she's ruling out situations in which neither o nor o^* is Φ* should suffice for understanding. The fact that o might be Φ and o^* not is shut out from any possible account of where the infelicity in the utterances of 5 and 6 is coming from.

I suggest that this line of thought at least forces the diagnosis that the conservative account of felicitous underspecification is much less plausible than it might first have appeared, so that it is at least worth looking for an alternative account of the phenomena. But, as the reader may have surmised, my real target here is not just the conservative move as an account of felicitous underspecificity, but the conservative picture as a model of language understanding. So I shall step back, for now, from details concerning cases, to consider the conservative picture itself.

Why think that the conservative picture should be accepted? One reason is that it is a minimal step away from the traditional picture. Obviously this is not a 'reason' in any particularly respectable sense of that term. I am going to suggest that a *better* reason, maybe even the *main* reason philosophers have been drawn to the conservative picture has to do with normativity. Let me explain.

As I see it, the central commitment of the conservative picture – retained from the traditional picture – is a claim about the relationship between 'updating' and 'representation', where these notions are glossed in terms of correlative questions:

The updating question What is the update to the hearer's total cognitive state that is generated when the hearer understands the speaker's utterance and finds no grounds to doubt the

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[21] That is, there is no demand for extra specificity coming from what Roberts (2004, 215) calls the 'Domain Goals' of the context.

speaker's sincerity or reliability? (I say 'total cognitive state' rather than 'set of propositional attitudes' to leave open the possibility that there are cognitive updates which are not changes in the hearer's propositional attitudes.)

The representation question How does the hearer's total cognitive state represent the world as being (a) before the update, and (b) after it?

The conservative picture treats the answer to the representation question as prior in order of explanation to the answer to the updating question. According to this picture, the hearer's information processing works on the utterance in the context to determine a representation. If, in addition, no sincerity or reliability alarm is tripped, this representation is added to the hearer's account of what the world is like: though there might be other things tagging along, updating is fundamentally a matter of modification of representation.[22]

And there is an initially-powerful-looking argument for the conclusion that this orientation – the conservative orientation; explaining updating in terms of representation – is right. I have supposed, with many others, that whatever else we say about updating, we should say that the central result of updating upon a declarative sentence that you understand, in a situation where no sincerity-and-reliability alarm is triggered, is a justified belief. (This is the claim that careful uptake from testimony confers justification.) And surely (the argument continues) in saying this much we are already treating updating as explained in terms of representation. In fact, this conclusion is over-determined: there are *three* reasons why this initial supposition entails the conservative orientation.

Firstly, the supposition acknowledges that the primary output of the update is a belief. But a belief represents the world as being one way rather than another.

Secondly, the supposition treats the belief as formed by a mechanism which involves checks for the *sincerity and reliability* of the utterance. And checking for the sincerity and reliability of the utterance *just is* checking whether the speaker is sincere and reliable in claiming the world to be as she says it is.

Finally, the supposition takes it that the belief which is the primary output of the update is justified. But justification is truth conducive. And how can responding to your utterances be, for me, a truth-conducive path to belief? It is hard to see room for more than one kind of story here. It must be that my language-understanding information processing, combined with (or including) sincerity-and-reliability checks, rules out the rationally relevant situations where the belief is not true. But in that case, what my processing is doing *just is* tracking when to treat your utterance as a reliable and sincere claim that p. And to acknowledge this fact is to endorse the conservative orientation.

I suggest that this is the line of thought that gives the conservative picture its (considerable) initial plausibility[23], and which must be turned aside if this picture is to be abandoned. And I suggest that the shape of the argument makes plain what much be done to fight it. The argument is a 'there is no alternative' argument. To overturn it we must find…an alternative. That is the task of the final section.

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[22] This leaves open which aspects of the world are represented, so, for example, Gibbard's (1990) framework which incorporates representations of plans for action into the story about how the subject represents the world as being is still 'conservative' in this sense.

[23] Consider how deeply a version of the line of thought is embedded in Stalnaker's (1984) framework, where updating is reduction in the set of worlds that count as live, and an updating move is justified insofar as the worlds that are eliminated when you make the move are a subset of the worlds that are inconsistent with the signal in response to which they are formed.

4 Language understanding and joint cognitive focus

The previous section argued that the puzzle about underspecification brings the conservative picture of language understanding to an impasse. This section extends the model of aboutness in thought from §1 into an alternative approach.

To get the alternative up and running, we need three further ingredients.

The first is a claim about the information processing that generates language understanding. As is to be expected since we are looking for an alternative to the conservative picture, this claim rejects the conservative view of what the information processing that generates language understanding is in the business of doing. According to the conservative picture, this information processing is in the business of looking for a representation of a way the world is. According to the alternative picture I am about to develop, it is in the business of achieving and sustaining relations of cognitive focus: when I listen to what you say, I am trying to achieve cognitive focus on you as another subject of consciousness, and to join you in relations of shared cognitive focus on things in the world.

As in the discussion of belief-formation as an activity in §1, the suggestion is not that the information-processing that generates language understanding is guided by the hearer's *intention* to achieve cognitive focus on the speaker or shared cognitive focus on other particulars. Rather, it is that the guiding motivational state is a need. We have something like a need to see others and be seen by them as fellow travellers, and to stand with others and look out at a shared world: a need to sustain relations of mutual cognitive focus with other people, and to join other people in relations of shared cognitive focus on things in the world.

There is considerable empirical evidence for the claim that our psychological makeups do include a need with this general profile.[24] But to avoid prolonging the discussion I shall let the initial case for this claim rest with its plausibility from the point of view of folk psychology. Even a brief glance at the folk psychological terrain yields tell-tale signs of a need in this vicinity – motivational pressure high when we are not getting what we need, and falling away when we are getting too much of it. Think about how we gravitate – to a certain extent – towards people we are able to see as similar to ourselves; how the standards for similarity (for seeing someone as a fellow traveller) drop with deprivation of company; the damage often done to people's mental health by enforced solitude; how even small interactions in which you share a joke or an observation with someone can make you feel 'at home' or 'at ease' in an environment; how alienating the failure of such an interaction can be; how we like to reminisce with those with whom we have shared experiences in the past, and how we often look for someone to tell when we are experiencing something new or striking: 'Look, there's a rat right there' you say to a stranger on the subway platform, for no reason in particular.

The second extra ingredient required by the argument of this section is a notion of justification which is tied up with activities – what I shall call 'practical justification'. This notion is most easily introduced using an example. Let us stay with Andy serving at tennis. He throws the ball, swings his arm and so on. The serve goes well, the ball hitting the ground where and how Andy intends it to.

Though there are hard questions of detail, I take it to be a straightforward observation that we can identify two levels of positive normative status for the movements which, in this scenario, add up to Andy's execution of his serve. Firstly, these movements are guided by one of Andy's motivational states (his intention to serve the ball hard to a particular spot). Secondly, given Andy's skill, the movements guided by his intention are reliable generators

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[24] One major strand of evidence comes from psychologists' and anthropologists' work on cooperation. See, for example, Tomasello 2014..

of its fulfilment. And I take it that there is nothing particularly special about Andy's serve in this regard. Every action or activity is guided by a motivational state of the subject, so has the first kind of positive normative status. And every action or activity is assessable relative to the second kind of positive normative status, that is, relative to whether it is performed in a way that is a reliable generator of its guiding motivational state. I shall call these levels of positive normative status 'weak' and 'strong' practical justification respectively[25]:

Weak practical justification – A behaviour has weak practical justification in virtue of being guided by a motivational state of the subject.

Strong practical justification – A behaviour has strong practical justification in virtue of (i) having weak practical justification, and (ii) being a reliable generator of fulfilment of its guiding motivational state.

The third extra ingredient is a reliability claim concerning what I have called 'careful uptake from testimony': the process by which a hearer who understands a speaker's declarative utterances forms beliefs in response to them while deploying appropriate checks for reliability and sincerity. The reliability claim incorporates a distinction that the notion of careful uptake from testimony carries with it. This is the distinction between two outputs of careful-uptake-from-testimony processing: the output when an utterance *passes* the tests for sincerity and reliability, and the output when it does not.

Consider first cases where the utterance does pass the tests – cases where no 'Insincere!' or 'Unreliable!' alarm is tripped. In these cases, the output of careful uptake from testimony is formation of the belief which registers as proffered by the speaker's utterance. I apologise for this awkward turn of phrase, which is intended to avoid the suggestion that the sub-personal processing involved in careful uptake from testimony generates only a candidate belief (the belief proffered), which the subject must then decide whether or not to form. Though I shall not pause to go into details on this point, I take this suggestion to be incompatible with the empirical facts about our everyday responses to one another's utterances. In a case where no alarm is tripped, the upshot of careful uptake from testimony is not presentation of a candidate belief which the hearer then decides to form. It is formation of a belief, with registration of the fact that the grounds for the belief lie with the speaker's utterance. I shall call this kind of output of careful uptake from testimony the 'default output'.

What about cases where the utterance fails the 'careful uptake' tests for sincerity and reliability? Here the output of careful uptake from testimony is formation of a belief which registers as at a remove from the belief proffered by the utterance. In one kind of case, the output is a belief as to what the speaker *believes* – these are the cases where the mechanisms of careful uptake from testimony have registered the utterance as sincere but unreliable. In another kind of case, the output on the hearer's side is a belief as to what the speaker is *claiming* – these are the cases where the utterance has registered as insincere. I shall call this kind of output of careful uptake from testimony the 'arm's length' output. (I shall take it that the factors which trip what I have called 'sincerity' and 'unreliability' alarms *just are* the factors which turn the mechanisms of careful uptake from testimony towards one or other kind of arm's length output. This is why the fact that careful uptake from testimony involves checks for reliability and sincerity does not entail the conservative picture.)

With this distinction in place, the reliability claim can be stated like this. Suppose that speaker S is using term α to talk about object o and hearer H forms a body of beliefs that she treats as about a single thing by 'careful uptake from testimony' processing. These will be

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[25] I motivate this distinction in more detail at Dickie 2015 pp 86-99.

either default beliefs or arms-length beliefs. In either case, given the mechanisms of careful uptake from testimony, these beliefs will reliably match what o is like. (Does the reader suspect that in making this reliability claim the author is helping herself to too much? Note that the claim comes only to this. Firstly, the 'reliability and sincerity' precautions built into careful uptake from testimony are sufficiently stringent that you will usually form a default belief in response to my utterances only in cases where I actually am a reliable and sincere source with respect to what a particular thing is like. Secondly, it is reliably the case that, given the adjustments for perspective that are also built into careful uptake from testimony, the property you take me to be attributing when I make an ⌜…is Φ⌝ [26] utterance is the property I am in fact attributing. Note also that, given TRUTH AND JUSTIFICATION, ABOUTNESS AND TRUTH, and ABOUTNESS AND JUSTIFICATION, to deny the claim is to deny that careful uptake from testimony is a justification-conferring path to belief.)

Given these three extra ingredients, the alternative to the conservative picture that I want to propose can be approached by way of the following question: *how* are $<\alpha$ is $\Phi>$ beliefs formed by careful uptake from testimony justified? I have supposed throughout that these beliefs *are* justified. The conservative picture supposes one kind of view of how they are justified. Here is another.

Consider hearer H forming a body of $<…$is $\Phi>$ beliefs by careful uptake from a speaker's stream of ⌜α is Φ⌝ utterances, where these utterances express beliefs of the speaker's about object o.

1 The information processing that generates H's beliefs is guided by H's need to generate relations of shared cognitive focus on things outside the mind. [From the first extra ingredient]

2 Given that they are generated by pathways that are guided by a motivational state of the subject, the resulting beliefs are weakly justified. [From the second extra ingredient]

3 The beliefs reliably match what o is like. [From the third extra ingredient]

4 A body of beliefs treated by the subject as about a single thing is about o iff its associated pattern of justification generates beliefs that reliably match what o is like. [ABOUTNESS AND JUSTIFICATION, established in §1]

And now put these elements together. **2** says that beliefs formed by careful uptake from testimony are justified. **3** says that they reliably match the properties of the object the speaker is talking about. So **2**, **3**, and **4** entail **5**

5 A hearer's beliefs formed by careful uptake from a stream of α-testimony[27] are about the object that the speaker is using α to talk about.

And given **1** and the definition of 'practical justification' we can recognise these beliefs as enjoying a stronger kind of justification:

6 Beliefs formed by careful uptake from testimony are also strongly justified. (In intuitive terms, they are formed by a route that is guided by the need to bring things in the world into

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[26] I use corner quotes in the usual way to form abbreviations of metalanguage expressions ' ⌜…is Φ⌝ ' abbreviates 'A sentence got by filling the argument place of predicate Φ'.

[27] That is, a stream of testimony containing singular term α.

shared cognitive view, and which, given our cognitive skill, is a reliable generator of this need's fulfilment.)

I shall pause for a clarificatory remark, then contrast what I have just proposed with the conservative picture from §3.

The clarificatory remark concerns what an impartial observer might regard as irresponsible and even *annoying* juggling with the notion of justification. Let me turn this impartial observer into a hostile objector who argues like this. 'The **1 – 6** story contains an obvious equivocation on the term "justified"/"justification". The notion in **4** is theoretical justification – justification for belief. So it is only given a "theoretical justification" reading of the claim at **2** that the move to **5** would be valid. But the notion of justification at **2** is practical justification – justification for behaviour. So the **1 – 6** story fails.'

To see the response to this objection, we must go back to TRUTH AND JUSTIFICATION and ask a broad-brush but delicate question about how it should be understood. Consider TRUTH AND JUSTIFICATION as introduced in §1:

TRUTH AND JUSTIFICATION (approximate version) – Justification is truth conducive: the factors that secure justification for a belief also secure the result that the subject will be unlucky if the belief is not true.

One way to read this principle is to treat it as explaining one of its headlining notions in terms of the other: explain what it would take for a belief to be justified in terms of what it would take for it to be true (the usual realist way around); or explain what it is for a belief to be true in terms of central cases of justification (the 'verificationist' or 'intuitionist' alternative).

But there is another, non-reductive, way to see this principle as explanatorily significant. This is to treat the principle as capturing an essential feature of the relation between truth and justification-for-belief, and, therefore, as providing a standard that a kind of normative good order must meet if it is to count as theoretical justification. This standard can then be brought to bear as we look for accounts of justification, truth, or both across various kinds of inquiry. For example, consider the traditional argument against combining a pure coherentist theory of justification with a correspondence theory of truth. According to a pure coherentist theory, S is justified in forming the belief that p iff adding p to S's network of beliefs raises overall coherence across the totality. Such views allow that there might be whole subject matters upon which S and S* have opposing but equally justified beliefs. The traditional move was to point out that, if truth is correspondence with how the world is, it cannot be that both S's beliefs and S*'s beliefs are true, so to allow that they are equally justified is to fail to respect the fact that justification is truth-conducive. Someone arguing in this way is supposing neither that justification is to be explained in terms of truth, nor truth in terms of justification. Rather, the suggestion is that TRUTH AND JUSTIFICATION provides a standard that right accounts of both justification and truth must meet: we can object to either an account of justification, an account of truth, or an overall package which claims to treat both together on the ground that it does not respect the TRUTH AND JUSTIFICATION connection between them. This traditional objection carries no commitment to the claim that one of these notions is to be explained in terms of the other.

The **1 – 6** story is treating TRUTH AND JUSTIFICATION in this general kind of way. The story is an answer to the question 'How does careful uptake from testimony confer justification on the resulting beliefs?' The suggestion is that to find an answer to this question, we should first ask how careful uptake from testimony might count as conferring *any kind* of positive normative status, *then* ask whether, if we treat this kind of positive

normative status as theoretical justification, we will be respecting the standard for accounts of theoretical justification for belief that TRUTH AND JUSTIFICATION lays down. Summarising the **1 – 6** story from this perspective, the suggestion is that, given **1**, there is a kind of positive normative status that beliefs formed by careful uptake from testimony have – they are formed by steps that enjoy weak practical justification. The proposal is then to treat this kind of positive normative status as theoretical justification for belief, and see what happens. And *what happens* is that we end up with a a an account of theoretical justification which meets the essential test: if we treat the positive normative status for beliefs that enters the picture with **1** as a kind of theoretical justification, then combine ingredients as the **1 – 6** story lays down, we get an account of aboutness-fixing for beliefs formed by careful uptake from testimony, and of justification for these beliefs, according to which the subject will be unlucky if a belief justified in this way is not true and not merely lucky if it is. (This note[28] adds another round of detail to the author's defence against the 'You're equivocating!' objection.)

Now let me look back to compare the picture of language understanding towards which the **1 – 6** story is taking us to the conservative picture from §3.

The heart of the conservative picture is the contention that the information processing that generates language understanding is looking for representations of what the world is like: I hear your utterance; my language-understanding information processing goes to work looking for a claim about the world that you are to be regarded as making (a proposition you are to be regarded as asserting). This contention is what leads to the trouble about underspecification in the conservative framework. If our language-understanding information processing is looking for a representation of the world specific enough for communicative purposes, cases like 5/6 should not be possible. (Recall that these are cases where the speaker *has* put the hearer in a position to recover representational content specific enough for communicative purposes, but *has not* done enough for understanding.) But the contention is also what makes the conservative picture so initially plausible: if we deny this contention, it seems that we will be hard-put to explain how language understanding together with checks for sincerity and reliability can be a source of justified belief.

Though there are many details to be filled in, the **1 – 6** story is taking us towards an alternative picture. According to this alternative picture, the information-processing that generates language understanding is looking for relations of cognitive focus: the hearer is trying to achieve cognitive focus on the speaker, and to join with the speaker in achieving joint cognitive focus on things in the world.[29] (This information processing does generate beliefs: in default cases, beliefs as to what an object of joint cognitive focus is like; in arm's length cases, beliefs as to how the speaker is characterising the world. But this belief-

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[28] It is useful to consider a parallel case where the upgrade from practical to theoretical justification is not available. Suppose some people have a hard-wired need to believe in intelligent life on planets other than our own. A belief-forming strategy driven by this need will be weakly justified. And the strategy will be strongly justified iff it is also a reliable means to fulfilment of the need that drives it, which is to say, a reliable generator of belief in intelligent extraterrestrial life. So, for example, the strategy of applying much lower standards of evaluation to arguments for the conclusion that we are not alone in the universe than to those against it will be strongly justified (provided that the subject is likely to come across some arguments for extra-terrestrial intelligent life that meet the lowered standards). But this strategy, even though strongly justified, is not truth conducive. And there is theoretical justification only where there is truth conduciveness. So the beliefs generated by the stargazers' strategy will not be theoretically justified. (I say more about the equivocation objection for the general at Dickie (2015) 105-108 and (in response to Hofweber (2017) and Ninan (2017)) in Dickie (2017b).

[29] There is an obvious kinship relation with the Relevance Theorists' suggestion that the information processing that generates language understanding is trying to maximise 'worthwhile difference to the individual's representation of the world' [Wilson and Sperber (2004) 608]. But in the terms introduced in this paper Relevance Theory is a version of the conservative picture (because it explains updating in terms of representation taken as prior).

formation is not the goal of the activity.) The **1 – 6** story shows how this picture answers the conservative challenge about justification for the case where the hearer is forming <α is Φ> beliefs in response to a speaker's utterances about a particular thing: the basic story about justification for the hearer's beliefs rests with the fact that they are formed by a mechanism that is guided by a motivational state of the subject, and is a reliable generator of this state's fulfilment.

Because of the importance it accords to the fact that language understanding is an activity, and to the notion of practical justification, I shall call this new picture the 'practical picture'.

This contrast between the conservative picture and the practical picture generates an additional contrast concerning what I called in §3 the 'updating question': What is the update to the hearer's total cognitive state that is generated when the hearer understands the speaker's utterance and finds no grounds to doubt the speaker's sincerity or reliability? The conservative picture explains updating in terms of representational content taken as prior: the hearer recognises the speaker as proffering addition of the belief that p to the hearer's total cognitive state, and accepts or rejects the proffered update depending on whether the utterance registers as sincere and reliable. The practical picture entails a departure from this conservative account which is most easily brought out using an example. Recall *Case 2* from §1:

Case 2 'Aneurin Bevan' You have not heard the name 'Aneurin Bevan' before. Somebody begins to explain who Bevan was: 'Aneurin Bevan was a British Labour Party politician….'

Case 2 was introduced in §1 to raise the question 'How does this transaction transmit aboutness from the beliefs the speaker expresses using the name to those the hearer would use it to express?' Now let us ask a different question: What is the update to the hearer's perspective that the speaker proffers by making the utterance? Given the picture that is emerging in this section, we should recognise two components to the answer. The components can be read off the account of what happens in the case where the hearer fully accepts the update: the case where the hearer's response is the output of language understanding together with checks for reliability and sincerity, and no reliability-or-sincerity alarm is tripped. According to the practical picture, in this case the hearer *both* joins the speaker in a cognitive-focus generating information-marshalling activity, *and* goes along with a move the speaker has made in the activity (in *Case 2* you *both* join the speaker in tying property information together in a bundle labelled 'Aneurin Bevan', *and* add <…was a British Labour Party politician> to the bundle).

Generalising from the example, we get a two-component account of the update proffered by a speaker introducing a singular term into a conversation. The update has both a prescriptive and a descriptive component:

The speaker (a) proposes that the hearer join in a joint-cognitive-focus-sustaining information-marshalling activity (prescriptive component), and (b) proposes a move within the activity (descriptive component). [30]

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[30] Compare the following proposal about gradable adjectives (Charlow (forthcoming)): when I say 'John is tall' I am proposing an update which has a prescriptive component (I am proposing that we treat only thresholds which include John as acceptable thresholds for tallness) and a descriptive component (I am saying that John meets every contextually acceptable threshold for tallness). This proposal makes fully explicit the prescriptive aspect of the update proffered by the utterance which is trying to come to the surface at, for example, Ludlow (2014) p 113. Similarly, compare Charlow's account of imperatives (Charlow (2014), (2018)): If I utter an imperative ('p!') I am proposing an update with a prescriptive component (I am proposing that you adopt a plan

Though I shall not pause to explore this point in any detail, the obvious next move will be to recognise *different kinds of information-marshalling activities* associated with different classes of ordinary singular term. A ⌜This is **Φ**⌝ utterance (made in a case where the demonstrative is being used deictically) is typically associated with a joint perception-based information-marshalling activity (it is as if I say to you 'Join me in this activity of forming beliefs by uptake from an attentional link with an object. Oh look, it's rolling away…'). An of ⌜NN is **Φ** ⌝ utterance is typically associated with tying all the information that comes carrying an 'NN' tag together as information about a single thing. Introduction of a descriptive name is associated with the activity of using the description to harvest <…is Φ> elements from the informational environment (finding justification for <The Ψ is Φ> claims, and tying the resulting <…is Φ> results together into a single bundle).

If this view is right, we should expect to find marks of prescriptive language in our use of ordinary singular terms. I shall return to this point at the end of paper. But first I want to show how the practical picture addresses the underspecification phenomena.

To do this, I must make explicit an aspect of the notion of cognitive focus that has been bubbling along under the surface so far. Here is the approximate ABOUTNESS AND JUSTIFICATION principle from §1:

ABOUTNESS AND JUSTIFICATION (approximate version) – A subject's body of <α> beliefs is about object *o* iff their associated pattern of justification is conducive to getting *o*'s properties right, so that the subject will be unlucky if beliefs justified in this way do not match what the object is like.

A more precise version of this principle will make explicit a quantifier over <…is Φ> property representations. Very roughly, whether S's <α>-belief-forming activity is generating and sustaining cognitive focus on *o* depends on the properties with respect to which S is in the business of making <…is Φ> or <…is not Φ> decisions in forming these beliefs: a pattern of justification might sustain cognitive focus and (therefore) aboutness with respect to one range of properties but not another. (Compare a telescope: the telescope might be focussed on an object from the point of view of deciding one range of properties, but not from the point of view of deciding properties at a higher resolution.)[31]

And a similar point will apply to the notion of joint cognitive focus: we are communicating about *o* iff we are engaged in a joint information-marshalling activity which sustains cognitive focus on *o* across the relevant range of property representations. Though there is a hard question as to what determines what gets into the domain of this 'for all <Φ>' quantifier, *one* factor (among others) will be the Questions under Discussion in the context. So it is part of the cognitive focus framework that focus is focus at a resolution, and that the degree of resolution required for understanding varies with communicative purposes.

Now recall the problem-set from §3. We found the following combination. (i) There are cases of felicitous underspecification involving demonstratives. (ii) These cases are the exception rather than the rule: most of the time, felicitous use of a demonstrative requires that the context provide enough of a demonstration to determine a specific referent. At first sight, (i)+(ii) seem to point towards the conservative move: felicitous use of a demonstrative requires that the context furnish enough of a demonstration to narrow down the potential referent to the level of specificity that communicative purposes require. But (iii) there are

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P (relative to which p is to be preferred) and a descriptive component (I am saying that, relative to P, p is to be preferred)).

[31] I discuss the importance of this variable parameter to the theory of reference at Dickie (2015) 199-211.

cases where a use of a demonstrative seems to pass the 'indicate a referent specifically enough for communicative purposes' test, but there is infelicitous underspecification anyway.

The practical picture predicts each of (i) – (iii):

(i) The practical picture predicts that there will be cases of felicitous underspecification like 3 and 4:

3 That car is a status symbol.
4 This arrived today.

Consider o and o^* and range of property representations $\langle\Phi\rangle$ taken to be up for decision in the context (that is, within the domain of the 'for all $\langle\Phi\rangle$' quantifier). Whenever o and o^* are such that for all $\langle\Phi\rangle$, a pattern of belief formation that eliminates relevant circumstances where o is not Φ also eliminates relevant circumstances were o^* is not Φ, an information-marshalling activity which generates focus on o will generate focus on o^* as well. And this is what happens when 3 and 4 are uttered against the specified backstories. In 3, the predicates at issue are predicates pertinent to a car's being a status symbol or not (expense; showiness relative to others of its kind; and so on). Whatever justifies applying these predicates to the car token also justifies applying them to the car type. A single information-marshalling activity is focussed on two distinct things. And something similar applies to 4.[32]

(ii) The practical picture combines with the facts as to which properties we are usually in the business of deciding to predict that (i)-type cases will be the exception rather than the rule. Usually the range of property representation at issue is sufficiently rich that an activity focussed on o relative to this range or property representations will be focussed on o uniquely.

(iii) The practical picture explains why 5 and 6 are infelicitous:

5 Nonsense. That's cheap. And that's cheap too.
6 She's a really good student – it's a pity she didn't say anything.

In each case, the hearer's language-understanding information-processing works on the utterance in the context, looking for a perception-based, focus-generating information-marshalling activity such that (a) the utterance proffers *joining this activity* as an addition to the hearer's perspective, and (b) the utterance makes a move within this activity. But given the little the speaker has provided by way of a demonstration, there is no such activity on offer.

I shall close by returning to a point raised a few paragraphs ago: if the practical picture is right, we should find marks of prescriptive language in our ordinary uses of singular terms.

And in fact once we scratch the surface a little, the marks turn out to have been there all along. I take the gold standard for marks of prescriptive language to be these.[33] It is not permitted to make an utterance which carries a prescriptive update while at the same time forbidding or discouraging the prescribed activity. And it is not permitted to make such an utterance when you believe the prescribed activity to be impossible. Let us take these tests for

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[32] This allows that there are predicates for which the story will not work – Guy's point.
[33] Obviously this is not intended to be exhaustive. Compare Roberts 2015 §1.

prescriptive language, and consider some aspects of our everyday uses of ordinary singular terms.

First consider the following pair (suppose we are waiting for a meeting to start; the door is in my direct line of sight but not yours; as people file in, I turn to you and utter 7):

7 Don't look now, but that's our next dean.

I take it that 7 would be perfectly ordinary in the circumstances. But what about 8?

8 Don't look now, and that's our next dean.

I take it that 8 would be marked. The sole difference between 7 and 8 is that the conjunction in 7 ('but') implies a contrast, while that in 8 does not. The practical picture can explain what this contrast is: it is the contrast between an activity which is being prescribed by the use of 'that' (join with me in an activity of belief formation by uptake from a perceptual channel), and the proscription in the imperative in the first conjunct. (Compare – 'Don't you do it, but it would be great if *somebody* emptied the dishwasher'.)

Again, consider what is widely acknowledged as a feature of our uses of proper names: 'discourse-initial' use of proper names is marked (where this is use of a proper name at the start of a discourse with no provision of further information about the bearer).[34] The practical picture has an explanation for this phenomenon: a discourse initial use of a proper name carries a prescription (something like 'join me in this information-marshalling activity') while failing to provide the wherewithal for the activity to get started.

Finally, consider the fact that it is not part of our practice of using ordinary proper names to name everything. There would be something very strange about an ordinary middle class western household who had distinct names for every one of the hundreds of pieces of cutlery or crockery or furniture or clothing in the house. We would probably say that, whatever the status of the labels assigned to all of these objects by the household, they are not genuinely being used as proper names. The point is not that an ordinary household item cannot have a proper name. Rather, according to the practical picture, it is that introducing *too many names* is a way of creating a context in which the activity that is prescribed by name-introduction (hearer joins speaker in a cognitive-focus-sustaining information-marshalling activity) is just not going to happen.[35]

So we see that there is an alternative to the conservative picture, and also that there is some independent evidence for the account of updating that the alternative involves: the alternative treats introduction of a singular term as carrying a prescriptive update, and there is a range of phenomena involving our uses of these terms that this claim could be used to explain. (Obviously in each case there are alternative possible explanations, so the case here is developing by coherence across the whole.)

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[34] For discussion see Cumming (2014).

[35] I suggest that this point captures what is right about Jeshion's (2009) proposal that we assign proper names only to things that are 'significant' to us. (One way to put the point I have made is as the claim that use of a proper name *bestows* a specific kind of significance.)

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