Jaroslav Peregrin: *Inferentialism. Why Rules Matter*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Reviewed by Thomas Dabay

Inferentialism is the view that meaning is constituted, at least in part, by the inferential relations that exist between sentences in a language. In his book, aptly titled *Inferentialism*, Jaroslav Peregrin attempts to clearly and concisely restate a version of the strong, normative form of inferentialism most convincingly argued for in Robert Brandom's *Making It Explicit*. At the start, it is important to note the clear overlap between Peregrin's project and Brandom's in his own *Articulating Reasons*. What separates these projects are, first, Peregrin's extended focus on logical languages, and second, Peregrin's efforts at bringing new metaphors to bear on well-established problems. These new metaphors are *Inferentialism's* greatest strength, insofar as they promise a deeper understanding of rule-following and inferentialism, but also its greatest weakness, insofar as they too often allow Peregrin to overlook pressing issues.

Here, I will outline the major theses of *Inferentialism* before focusing in more detail on Peregrin's metaphors. Ultimately, *Inferentialism* is worth reading for those already engaged with the inferentialist literature, and can serve as a helpful supplement to Brandom's *Articulating Reasons* for those coming to inferentialism for the first time.

Structurally, *Inferentialism* consists of eleven chapters, the first of which serves as an introduction. The remaining ten chapters are split evenly into two parts, with Part I focusing on familiar Brandomian issues concerning representation and the semantics of empirical languages, and Part II focusing on less familiar issues concerning logical constants in formal languages.

Chapters 1 through 3 function together to develop the overall framework of inferentialism. Importantly, Peregrin defends *strong inferentialism* – the claim that meaning is constituted *solely*, and not just in part, by inferential relations – and *normative inferentialism* – the claim that meaning-constituting inferential relations are *proprieties of proper inference*, not (dispositions towards) *performances of actual inference*.

In Chapter 4, Peregrin focuses on the status of individual rules and their role in our linguistic practices, and it is here that he introduces the metaphors I will focus on below.

In Chapter 5, Peregrin's focus zooms out to consider systems of rules. In order to understand how it is that (as he claims) only jointly are rules able to

constitute linguistic spaces within which we can engage in language games, Peregrin provides a detailed analysis of the Wittgensteinian analogy between language and chess, as well as what it tells us about the constitution of Sellars's space of reasons.

Peregrin concludes Part I with Chapter 6, where he sketches an evolutionary account of how rule-following creatures could emerge naturally, and propagate themselves and the rules they follow.

Chapter 7 opens Part II with a discussion of inference and logical consequence. As an inferentialist, Peregrin wants to account for consequence in terms of inference, but he quickly runs into the objection that consequence (understood in terms of truth-preservation) cannot be reduced to inference (understood in terms of human proofing) because a proposition can be the consequence of an infinite set of premises even though finite humans cannot complete an inference with infinite premises. Peregrin argues that this highlights a difference merely in degree between consequence and inference, not one in kind, and so an inferentialist account can still be illuminating.

In Chapter 8, Peregrin poses another objection to inferentialism: given how Peregrin sets up his inferentialism, no inferential relations can give the sign '∨' the meaning of disjunction as conceived in classical logic.

Peregrin rebuts this objection in Chapter 9, arguing first that the most this proves is that intuitionist logic is more natural for the inferentialist, not that the inferentialist fails to give '∨' a meaning. If this is not taken as an adequate response, Peregrin next argues that, by introducing what he calls multiple-conclusion inferences, an inferentialist can construct the system of classical logic. Both arguments are developed in terms of and in service to Peregrin's expressivist conception of logic.

Finally, across Chapters 10 and 11 Peregrin argues that the rules of logic are constitutive of the space of reasons, and argues that this has two important consequences. First, the rules of logic cannot be rationally justified, because any rational justification presupposes the rules of logic. Therefore, their only justification is pragmatic insofar as they expand the possibilities of cognition and help us cope in life. Second, the rules of logic are not rules of reasoning in the sense of directing actual processes of reasoning, although they are in the more fundamental sense of making possible any reasonings whatsoever.

Turning now to Peregrin's metaphors, there are two I would like to highlight. Peregrin's first metaphor, that of *bouncing off* rules, is meant to shift the inferentialist's discussion away from rule-*following*. This is warranted because, according to Peregrin, linguistic rules are "not *prescriptive* in the narrow sense of

the word in which rules dictate what to do, but rather *restrictive*; rules tell us what *not* to do, what is *prohibited*."[1] The image this leaves us with has rules functioning as barriers that constrain our linguistic practices. Furthermore, when combined appropriately, rules may "*delimit* some new spaces for our actions" precisely "through *limiting* us in what we may do."[2] To supplement this metaphorical language, Peregrin describes how what he says latches onto Wilfrid Sellars's distinctions between rules of doing and rules of criticism, and between ought-to-dos and ought-to-bes.[3] By cashing out his first metaphor in this manner, Peregrin demonstrates the value his metaphors can have in making technical inferentialist points considerably more vivid and more intuitive.

Unfortunately, Peregrin does not always cash out his metaphors in this manner, and it is in these cases that his arguments become less enlightening. To see why, we need only consider Peregrin's second metaphor, that of *inhabiting* a linguistic space. Because rules delimit linguistic spaces, we can understand them from either an insider's perspective or an outsider's perspective. This difference in perspectives introduces an issue that strikes at the core of the normative inferentialist's position,[4] namely how he is to balance his naturalistic inclinations with his desire to acknowledge robust normativity. As Peregrin admits, when we describe linguistic spaces from the outside, their normativity seems to dissolve into mere dispositions of the sort antithetical to normative inferentialism. Peregrin's response is to prioritize the insider's perspective, from which the normativity of the linguistic space appears genuine. The reason we get to prioritize this perspective is, Peregrin claims, because we inhabit linguistic spaces such that we have our dwelling within them. Unfortunately, Peregrin never explains what this means in non-metaphorical language, and the best his reader is left to make of it is that we inhabit certain spaces in the sense that we have normative attitudes concerning what is proper within those spaces.

But if this is all that Peregrin's metaphor amounts to, it cannot do the work he wants it to. Barring some argument, the mere fact that we can inhabit a space from within or describe it from without gives us no reason to prioritize one perspective over the other. Additionally, the more obvious candidate for

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[1] Peregrin, *Inferentialism*, 72

[2] Peregrin, *Inferentialism*, 73.

[3] See, respectively, Wilfrid Sellars, *Science and Metaphysics* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), 76; and Wilfrid Sellars, "Language as Thought and Communication," in *In the Space of Reasons: Selected Essays of Wilfrid Sellars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 59-65.

[4] For Brandom's treatment of this issue, see his *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), Conclusion.

prioritizing is the outsider's perspective, if only because the insider's is more limited and parochial. Of course, someone sympathetic to Peregrin would argue that this response leads to a regress insofar as the outsider's perspective must still be situated within a linguistic space, and so we must take a meta-outsider's perspective on the outsider's linguistic space, and so on. But from here the most plausible responses are (1) to say that some perspective has proven most useful to us, in which case the best candidate would seem to be the sort of philosophically-informed scientific perspective that would dissolve normativity into dispositions, or (2) to accept the regress and argue that this proves the essential finitude of humans, in which case we might be unable but to take the insider's perspective, but this merely offers an exculpation of our normative attitudes and not a justification.

All of this is not to say that Peregrin's position cannot be defended, nor that Peregrin's second metaphor is idle. What it does say is that Peregrin's metaphor is merely the beginning of an account of a naturalistic normative inferentialism, and not the full account he takes it to be.

In conclusion, the merits of *Inferentialism* – which include Peregrin's new perspective on old problems and extended focus on inferentialism in logic – make it worthy of being read by those working in the problem areas surrounding inferentialism, and as an introduction to these areas Peregrin's book is second only to Brandom's *Articulating Reasons*.[5]

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[5] Robert Brandom, *Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).