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Jaroslav Peregrin: *Inferentialism: Why Rules Matter*
Palgrave Macmillan 2014, 272 pages

Peregrin begins his *Inferentialism* by making clear that its topic will be first and foremost the enigma of meaning, i.e. probably the most central one of analytical philosophy. With possibly different emphases, he is going to approach it from the point of view of Brandomian inferentialism. The author offers a look at inferentialism which is fresh and strikes particularly by its clarity. Peregrin profits from the debates about inferentialism which have taken place during the last years, especially as he chooses some of the most common and natural objections to it and attempts to show, by and large with success, that they are not fatal for the doctrine.

The book is divided into eleven chapters, each terminated by a short summary of the main points. The chapters are divided into two main groups. In the first one some more general philosophical issues related to inferentialism are discussed, the second one is dedicated to philosophy of logic.

1. General tenets of Peregrin's inferentialism

In the first chapter Peregrin points to the fact that other doctrines regarding meaning which come to mind more naturally, most prominently various forms of representationalism, face serious difficulties. We get a brief rehearsal of the problems. Typically, some important vocabularies, such as the logical one, are hard to accommodate into representationalism, as it is not clear what their referents are supposed to be. Even in the case of empirical vocabularies, the issue linked to the Quinean inscrutability of inference arise. Yet the main focus of this book is not so much to criticize the rival views. Peregrin points at the problems with other approaches mainly to convince us that it is legitimate to give a try to inferentialism, counterintuitive as it might be. The comparison with different approaches to the problem of meaning appears mostly implicitly, when some misconceptions regarding inferentialism are clarified. The doctrine thus presented then speaks rather for itself.

Inferentialism in general is based on the contention that meaning of a given sentence is given by its inferential relationships with the other sentences. The meanings of words consist in their contribution to the meanings of the sentences

they can occur in. A simple example would be the conjunction sign, the meaning of which is given by the obvious introduction and elimination rules. The inferentialism advocated here is fundamentally normative, as opposed to descriptive varieties. It is the inferential rules, that is what is correct and what is incorrect to infer from a given (set of) statement(s) which determines meaning, not the actual inferential moves we make. Thus an objection that inferentialism is mistaken, as we have to understand the meanings of linguistic units (that is primarily sentences) before we can make inferential moves between them, "loses its bite" when aimed at normative inferentialism. There still might be a story about the relation between the actual moves and their normative statuses to be told, yet Peregrin in fact adresses that later in the book, discussing the necessity of implicit rules.

To contrast inferentialism with the more intuitive representationalist accounts of meaning, an interesting example from law due to Alf Ross (see Ross 1957) is adduced, which exemplifies the typical anti-inferentialist convictions. This author shows that some words from his discipline, such as "ownership" are in a way no real words, as they do not refer to anything, but merely express the link between the conditions of their application and the consequences thereof (e.g. between buying something and having the right to bestow it on one's children).

There is simply nothing more to this word. Yet according to inferentialism the situation is the same with all words. How can such an account get off the ground in case of empirical vocabulary? We have to specify some important features of the inferentialism presented here.

2. Pragmatism, holism and the empirical vocabulary

First of all, the inferences countenanced cannot be only the ones sanctioned by (some) logic. They have to include also the rules which are called, in the Sellarsian tradition, material (and these are then not seen as enthymemes). And furthermore there is no principled distinction of analytical and synthetic inferences. Sometimes quite empirically looking inferences have to be accepted as, in fact, indispensable for meaning of certain words. The conceptual framework and the contents we fill it with cannot be clearly demarcated. As every statement can be made immune to revision, so every statement can be sacrificed.

And even the most general features of our conceptual schemes are not completely free from the influence of empirical world, though such influences can be described only indirectly.

To accommodate the empirical vocabulary, though, we have to countenance also the rules which somehow connect the language with the non-linguistic real-

ity. The worry is that the two realms are just too heterogeneous to make something like that possible. The realm of causality and the realm of reasons are radically different. Yet this dilemma, which is shown with particular vivacity by McDowell (in his famous 1994), can be relieved by abandoning the supposition that the difference between the linguistic and the non-linguistic is a difference between what is inside and outside. Language is essentially public and moreover it is a system of embodied rules. This feature makes it more analogous to, e.g., football than to chess. It is not only the proper inferential transitions we make between sentences in a language but also the Sellarsian language-entry and language-exit transitions which are constitutive of meanings. As such the system of inferential rules is not blind to the causal realm.

Thus also the worry about spinning in the void is relinquished. The notion of the inferential rules connecting language with the world might not be for everyone's taste. Perhaps more discussion is needed regarding this specific point. Yet Peregrin shows that the notion of such rules is not particularly mysterious. Not much more than football, that is.

3. Wittgensteinian motifs

Saying that meaning is normative is not incompatible with our specifically human freedom. Rules of language are rather restrictive, not descriptive, they are something we can "bounce of" to do something we could not do without them, i.e. perform various speech acts. Furthermore, saying that such and such an expression has such and such a meaning is a specific speech act. Not only is it reporting some fact about the linguistic habits of the given community but it is also endorsing them. We can contribute to making the claims about meaning true by the very saying them.

Peregrin develops the Wittgensteinian turn to pragmatics in the philosophy of language. On the example of Lorenzen's game-theoretic accounts of semantics of logical constants (cf. Lorenzen – Lorenz 1978) he exhibits the general idea of meanings being instituted by sets of rules regulating a dialog. The rules regulating the use of non-logical vocabulary in our language games are overall more complex, though.

Unlike those of chess the rules of language cannot all be formulated fully explicitly, since this would already have to presuppose language. Before being able to say that thus and so is a correct or incorrect usage of given expression, we have to be able to treat some usages as correct or incorrect implicitly. Here I think we get more nuanced view on the distinction between the normative and descriptive inferentialism Peregrin describes at the outset of his book. Saying that it is the

rules of inferring rather than our actual acts of inferring which constitute meaning might sound as making the actual acts irrelevant. But they cannot be, as they contribute to the institution of the rules.

4. Relationship with natural sciences and evolution theory

Peregrin wants to make inferentialism plausible not only by confronting it with specifically philosophical discourse (and later with logic) but also with natural sciences and showing its relationship with them. It is true that we can describe a given community and its behaviour including normative stances towards inferences. Yet we also have to regard ourselves some inferences as valid or otherwise. Thus meaning cannot be captured exhaustively by natural sciences (even despite their possible great future achievements). Yet they are not banned from contributing to the study of it, either.

Peregrin discusses the possible ways language and rule-governed behaviour could have emerged in the course of evolution. He relates this to the question about the origins of cooperative behaviour (and altruism) in general. His solution is basically to turn to a more holistic perspective. Following, e.g., moral rules might seem a bad survival strategy from a perspective of individual situation, yet from a perspective of series of similar situations the picture changes because being a member of the community of rule-followers opens new ways of coping with hardships of life. The same holds in particular for the rules of language. And even if they might seem arbitrary seen individually, taken as a whole system they open new dimensions to us which it is already not arbitrary to enter. Peregrin is thus not a naturalist though he shows that inferentialism does not postulate anything supernatural.

5. Inferentialism and logic

Logic is for inferentialists most naturally presented in the proof-theoretical framework of the calculi of natural deduction or the sequent calculi. Though inferentialism seems to be a foe of model-theory, Peregrin does not shun set-theoretical constructions as explications of the inferential rules. The question for him is not whether model-theory or set-theory should be used in formal explication of our language, but rather how to interpret them. His interpretation is clearly not the one which would offer itself prima-facie. As an inferentialist he does not want to accept the relation of reference as explanatorily primary to the relation of inference. The notion of truth is not primary for him, as well. He understands it as something constituted by the notion of correct inference. The model-theoretical

constructions are thus ways, though rather indirect ones, of examining the inferential roles of expressions.

This is rather unproblematic when we have completeness theorems showing that the proof-theory and model-theory are basically doing the same thing.

Yet there are obvious problems with this. Take Gödel's incompleteness theorem which appears to show that we necessarily need model-theoretical devices which transcend the possibilities of the proof-theoretical ones. It would be too long a detour to go into details here (yet it has to be done elsewhere!) but Peregrin offers a very inspiring and illuminating account of logic, according to which the intuitionistic propositional logic can be seen as the very core logic because it most naturally arises from the inferentialist demands on logic to express the material inferential relations. The stronger logics, ultimately even the second-order logic or modal logics, are shown as a ways of relaxing demands put on the notion of inferential rules. The idea of different logics being truly logical in degrees with some logics as the core ones is in general a very appealing one. It depends how seriously one takes the attempt to demarcate what still is and what is not a logic anymore. But at least a very nice and neat overview and even systematization of some of the most important achievements of logic is reached.

Peregrin thus does a lot of great work in reconciling inferentialism with model theory and set theory, yet his account encourages further development.

And not just an inferentialist philosophy of logic but also one of mathematics is needed. Furthermore, some logics are left untouched regarding their status for inferentialism, e.g. the paraconsistent logics. But is this really an objection?

Obviously the book would have to be blown up considerably to deal with all these issues. Peregrin shows that inferentialism is suitable philosophical background for logic and for more concrete issues of philosophy of logic.

6. What is logic good for?

In the last two chapters Peregrin addresses two related questions. How can the logical rules be justified? And what is the overall purpose of logic?

Peregrin frames the topic of justifying logical rules into the mould of the dilemma of triviality and contingency. He chooses the first horn, saying that the logical rules are in fact trivial. At least, in the sense that they are not to be really discovered. Modus ponens, for example, simply belongs to the very concept of the conditional. Thus it actually does not make sense to doubt whether it is valid. This seems to be a rather obvious consequence of inferentialism about meaning. Without rules of the kind of modus ponens, we can hardly even identify an ex-

pression as a conditional. The issue of substantiating the rules thus cannot arise in the first place.

This is basically a Quinean move (cf. Quine 1986) and surely has got a lot to recommend it. Yet Quine uses a much more controversial example, which, though he himself does not really acknowledge it, also shows that this solution might not be fully satisfactory. Alternative logics give alternative answers to the questions regarding the validity of certain logical laws. The Quinean answer would be that they really speak of different concepts, when, e.g., the classical logician holds tertium non datur for valid, while the intuitionistic one does not. One speaks of the classical, the other of intuitionistic disjunction and negation. Yet this attempt at complete overthrowing the debates about logical laws is hardly acceptable. That the dispute between rivalling logics can be real is something which is difficult to doubt. Yet Peregrin probably does not want to tackle the specific issue of rivalry of logics in this chapter.

In the last chapter the normativity of logic is clarified. If logic is to be normative – and this is what Peregrin repeatedly made clear to be a part and parcel of his view – then it seems obvious that it has to guide our reasoning or argumentation practices in one way or another. MP thus seems to tell us what to do with the conditionals. But after reading the previous chapter it should be clear that this is not really Peregrin's view. At most it could be seen as a very misleading statement of his account.

Logical laws such as MP do not basically tell us what to do, e.g. what to say with the conditional, they rather tell us what the conditional is. In this sense they are rather like the constitutive rules of chess and unlike the tactical rules of the same game, which indeed hint us at doing smart steps during the game. They do not tell us how to maximize the number of true beliefs, they rather enable something like the concept of truth to emerge at all.

I have already mentioned that truth emerges out of the rules of inference which we create. This, at first, sounds like dangerous idealism. Yet we have to remind ourselves that not all the inferential rules can be explicit. Perhaps each one of them can be made explicit but we can never get rid of the rules which are only implicit to our practices. And such rules are followed, as Wittgenstein put it, blindly. Therefore they obviously are not consciously stipulated by us. All in all, it cannot be said that we simply decide what is and what is not true, as the immediate worry might be.

Someone might perhaps still protest that in order to understand the fact that thus and such an inferential move is correct, we already have to understand the notion of the truth, that is the truth exactly of the statement that the statement about the correctness of the move is true. Peregrin does not discuss this possible

objection (which can be linked to Frege's remarks about the irreducibility of the notion of truth in Frege 1918) but I think it does not have to be fatal for him. The notion of truth has to be understood, but it is enough that it be understood only implicitly. And the implicit understanding does not have to involve the treatment of the sentence and regarding it as true or otherwise.

The deceiving necessity of understanding logic as giving us directives about how to reason stems mostly from the need to somehow clarify the purpose of logic, i.e. why should it be better to have logic at all. In Peregrin's understanding, largely influenced by Brandom, logic is in a way both prior and subsequent to the rest of the meaningful discourse. That is, it is prior implicitly, as the sounds we emit cannot be regarded as truly meaningful without their standing in logical relationships, such as entailment or incompatibility. Yet logic as a tool of making these relationships explicit can come to the fore only after they exist (which of course does not mean that acquiring logic cannot lead us to changing the relations afterwards, exactly because we are then capable of judging them).

Asking what is the purpose of logic it thus very close to asking what is it good for to live as meaning-mongering creatures at all.

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Theodore Sider: *Writing the Book of the World*
Oxford University Press 2011, 318 pages

This book brings arguments for metaphysical realism, and its aspiration appears to be to make them knock-down. Sider tries to convince the reader that we can identify the structure of the world; he believes that we can reach the access to