

**INFERENCEALISM, AGENCY, AND NORMATIVITY:
FROM THE INFRAINDIVIDUAL TO THE SUPRAINDIVIDUAL**

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Pragmatic inferentialism (e.g., Brandom (1994)) attempts to provide an alternative schema for the explanation of human actions and social facts, in a middleground between hermeneutic and rational choice models. Its basic explanatory element is the *normative* notion of *commitment*: actions are conceptualised as embedded within a normative framework that specifies in each situation what are the actions that agents are committed (or obliged, or allowed) to perform; according to inferentialism, the most relevant aspect of those ‘normative frameworks’ consists in their being *inferentially articulated*, i.e., the agents are submitted to a system of inferential norms that specify what *further* commitments an agent is bound to, given what *previous* commitments she was bound to (and given any other relevant ‘external’ circumstances, like non-social events or other agents’ performances). Rational action is seen, then, as *behaviour that is (in principle) responsive to chains of reasoning*, i.e., arguments that derive, from premises indicating the previous commitments an agent accepted, the conclusion that her action accords to some other commitment derivable from the former.

In this paper, this basic schema is put to the service of discussing a couple of problems in social ontology: on the one hand, the ontological status of *supraindividual* entities and events (e.g., collective actions, intentions, agents, and so on), and on the other hand, the ontological status of the *infraindividual* processes and qualities that serve to explain the actions of individuals (e.g., individual beliefs, preferences, decisions, etc.). In the supraindividual case, we show that the existence of collective items is accounted for by inferentialism just through the possibility that some commitments are *attributed* to collective entities, i.e., it is the attribution of those commitments, and their systematic entanglement according to accepted inferential norms, what ‘constitute’ those entities. Being an ‘agent’ is, for inferentialism, not something like a ‘physical’ or a ‘psychological’ property, but a *normative status*, and hence, nothing precludes the existence non-individual agents, as far as the systems of commitments that constitute them are robust enough.

Regarding infraindividual ontology, we discuss Brandom’s attempt to eliminate psychological notions like ‘belief’, ‘preference’ or ‘intention’ from the landscape of the theory of action, and substitute them for merely normative notions like ‘commitment’

or 'entitlement'. Our position is that the normative notions by themselves cannot be integrated in a wholeheartedly naturalist view of human beings without some type of both causal and constitutive connection with psychological states, hence, though we suggest that the classical 'BDI-ontology' (as a model for the explanation of actions) can be replaced by a 'Norms-Commitment-Inference-ontology', more apt to represent the reasoning processes that lead to, or justify, individual or collective actions, we also defend that, in order to have a naturalist explanation of why humans have the normative capacities they have, and why certain inferential norms have evolved in a group and not others, recourse to some more 'primitive' psychological notions is necessary, though without assuming that these latter notions necessarily obey the logical requirements of (say) Bayesian or rational choice models.