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## **Between Doing and Saying ‘We’ – On Analytic Pragmatism and the Progressive Development of Plural Self-Expression**

### **Abstract**

What do we do when we say ‘We’? This paper pursues a response from analytic pragmatism. The guiding idea of analytic pragmatism is to look to what one must implicitly know how to do to be able to use expressions to say something, including how to make that implicit know-how explicit. Accordingly, the question we are tasked to answer is what one must know how to do to say ‘We’ – that is, what practical know-how saying ‘We’ requires and can be employed to make explicit. The concept *normative ascent* is introduced in developing an answer. On this approach, the know-how in question turns out to be a distinctively normative capacity. Both being and saying ‘We’ turns out to involve being able to do and say something normative.

### **Keywords**

analytic pragmatism – expressivism – inferentialism – normative pragmatics – plural selves – plural self-progression

This paper explores the path of analytic pragmatism towards an account of saying and being ‘We.’ To consult analytic pragmatism is an exception in this context. That it is an exception is somewhat surprising. Brandom’s *Making it Explicit* (1994) is *the* systematic exposition of analytic pragmatism, and it opens and closes precisely with the question what we mean and do when we say ‘We.’ One would be excused for having thought that some of it had gained more traction than it has by now. The task of the present contribution is to remedy the neglect. Instead of arguing for an analytic pragmatist approach to being and saying ‘We,’ consequences for how to think about collectives according to it are traced.

Before embarking on that path, here is a short diagnosis of the identified neglect. First, perhaps analytic pragmatism contains *too much*. Between the opening and closing of *Making it Explicit*, and in many books published between then and now,<sup>1</sup> Brandom wears out many a pair of shoes along paths of no *obvious* relevance to general social ontology. He treats, e.g., the logic of sub-sentential substitution inferences, the history and metaphysics of intentionality, anaphoric reference-inheritance, and gives us a seven hundred and sixty nine pages long Hegel-interpretation. Those paths seem not to be of *immediate* interest to social ontology or philosophy of the social sciences more generally. Second, much recent literature on collectivity – on, e.g., what-it-is-like-for-us to act jointly,<sup>2</sup> the primacy of the first-person singular or first-person plural<sup>3</sup> – is often concerned with small-scale, e.g., dyadic, social encounters. In contrast, when Brandom asks what goes into being and saying ‘We’ his concern is primarily with *sapient*s – thinking, conceptually aware beings – as distinct from *sentient*s – feeling, sensuously aware but not concept using beings. Understanding what it is to be and say ‘We,’ from *that* point of view, amounts to understanding ‘We’ in a *very wide* sense, in contrast to the ‘We’ of, say, a group of friends or a family going for a picknick or enjoying a movie, and the what-it-is-like-for-us to do so.

Perhaps, then, there’s simply too much going on in analytic pragmatism for it to be worthwhile to visit. That might be right. We won’t go into all the detail here. Nevertheless, the three core elements – inferential role semantics, normative pragmatics, and expressivism – will be rehearsed. For those three has much to teach us about being and saying ‘We,’ also in a narrower sense than all concept using beings, or so I will argue.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 1 introduces and explains the three core elements of analytic pragmatism. The purpose here is only to unpack analytic pragmatism to the end of finding what it can teach us about plural selves *were* we to take it as point of departure. To that end, the exposition in the first section is required to get the conceptual apparatus in place for the reasoning in the rest of the paper. Section 2 introduces the concept *normative ascent*. Preliminarily, normative ascent is a capacity to take propriety-assessing attitudes as contents of propriety-assessing attitudes. This concept isn’t found in the annals of analytic pragmatism but is my contribution to it in order to articulate how participants to plural selves can progress from a stage of pre- reflective plural self-awareness to a stage of reflective plural self-awareness, in Sections 3 and 4. Section 3 also raises and responds to a *scope-problem*: that the proposed account leaves the scope of reference of ‘We’ too (or indeterminately) wide. The worry is responded to in terms of resources already

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<sup>1</sup> For example, *Articulating Reasons* (2000), *Between Saying and Doing* (2008), and *A Spirit of Trust* (2019).

<sup>2</sup> For example, Salmela and Nagatsu (2017), and Salice (2022).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Schmid (2008; 2014a/b; 2018), Brinck et al. (2017), Zahavi (2018; 2019; 2021).

present in analytic pragmatism. Section 4 discusses to what extent plural selves are *explicitly* declared or imposed in contrast to *implicitly made* or *enacted*. That discussion culminates in a proposal to think of plural selves as requiring a core set of practices or abilities, while different plural selves differ with respect to the *degrees* of plural self-awareness of their participants. The idea, tentatively, is that expressive capacities exhibited by those *saying* 'We' signal particularly sophisticated plural self-awareness (the one, it turns out, focused by most analytic social ontology). Those who are 'We' but who *don't* fulfil the condition of normative ascent, in contrast, are plural selves and may be pre-reflectively plurally self-aware and self-determining, where plural selfhood remains a pre-reflective *mode* or *manner* of acting, thinking, and experiencing. It is first and only in the fourth and final section that we look to how the approach extracted in the first three relates to other contemporary approaches to plural selves (and social ontology more generally), represented there primarily by Gilbert and Searle. It is concluded that analytic pragmatism, were we to depart from it, helps us see that, and in detail how, plural selves come in degrees of self-awareness and self-expressiveness. The conceptual tools of analytic pragmatism, then, can function as corrective lenses to traditional approaches, which turn out to be narrowly focused on collectives and a social reality whose participants already must have progressed through several stages of being 'We,' such that they can speak and argue about it. In the end, we find that it is fruitful to think of collectives and plural selves on a gradient from less to more self-awareness and self-expressiveness, as opposed to their coming into existence by declaration as if by the flipping of a switch.

## 1 Elements of Analytic Pragmatism

We start with a closer look at what analytic pragmatism is centrally about. It is primarily a way to think of the relation between meaning and use, or, rather, between doings that count as sayings and what is said. The three core elements here are normative pragmatics, semantic inferentialism, and expressivism.

To approach, first, normative pragmatics and semantic inferentialism, consider, to begin with, the ability to use ordinary empirical descriptive vocabulary containing colour words and demonstratives. Imagine someone saying "That's red." Analytic pragmatism asks us what a speaker must be able to *do* for that utterance to count as *saying* of something that it's red – for the utterance to have that content. The normative pragmatics and inferentialist semantics of analytic pragmatism says that for a speaker to do so she must be able implicitly to reliably differentiate among *other claims* (upstream to it, as it were) those that would from those that would not *commit* or *entitle* to the claim, and what other claims (downstream from it, as it were) the claim would and would not entitle or commit to. The content-constitutive practices or abilities are thus *normative* practices or abilities. Saying something is making oneself *responsible* for reasons for and

consequences of what is said. More precisely – and to further elaborate semantic inferentialism – sayings require capacities implicitly to differentiate among *inferences from* judgable contents (as premises) those that entitle or commit to, or preclude entitlement to, the claim, and among *inferences to* judgable contents (as conclusions) those that the claim commit, entitle or preclude entitlement to. Someone who utters “That’s red” but isn’t reliably able to treat inferences to, e.g., “It’s coloured” as commitment-entailed (for nothing can be both red and not coloured), or “It’s green” as entitlement-precluded (for nothing can be both red and green simultaneously), doesn’t have the capacities, the *know-how*, required for *saying that* something is red. Again, someone who utters “The cat is on the mat” but isn’t capable of differentiating among other claims, as premises for it, those that would and those that would not entitle, commit, or preclude entitlement to it and other claims, as conclusions from it, it would and those it would not entitle, commit, or preclude entitlement to, doesn’t strictly speaking count as *saying that* the cat is on the mat. For instance, one remains entitled to the claim even if it is Tuesday, half a degree warmer in the neighbour’s living room, and an aardvark is just about to eat twenty ants at the zoo, but not if it suddenly sprouts wings and flies away or a black hole swallows the planet. The point is that to count as a *saying* the speaker must be able practically to implicitly (i.e., without necessarily being able to *say* or being *aware that* this is what she is doing) differentiate *some* such inferences.<sup>4</sup> Thus, an utterance counts as a *saying* if and only if it plays an *inferential role* for what the speaker is undertaking *responsibility for*. Its content is determined by that role in a field of inferences to and from judgable contents (the “Frege field”; Cf., Brandom 2000, Ch. 1). Thus, content-constitutive normative practices or abilities are *normative inferential* practices or abilities.

So much for the first two core elements of analytic pragmatism; namely, its normative pragmatics and inferential role semantics. The third core element is its *expressivism*. To approach it, consider how different vocabularies play different expressive roles. Thus, consider the different practices or abilities required for saying “It’s red,” on the one hand, and for saying “If it’s red then it’s coloured,” on the other. The first requires, first, a practical capacity to differentiate red from non-red things; apiece to classificatory capacities. To have semantic content, it secondly requires normative inferential capacities described in the previous paragraph. To understand the expressivism of analytic pragmatism it is important to note that when a speaker says that something is red, she *has not thereby*, even if she in principle could, said what she implicitly knows how to do such that she said what she said. She has only *exercised* the relevant implicit inferential know-how in *expressing* that claim. This is one level of expressiveness: to make claims, to say something. Her being able *also* to *say that* in expressing that something is red she is implicitly exercising that

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<sup>4</sup> Not all or even very many, for we mustn’t assume that to say something the speaker must be perfectly and infallibly able to track all inferences to and from judgable contents.

inferential know-how – for example, by deploying a conditional “If it’s red, then it’s coloured” – is a higher order of expressiveness. By employing such claims speakers can fallibly make explicit the know-how implicit in the former; the latter is, and requires the ability to, explicitly provide *reasons* for the claim; to prove one’s entitlement for committing to something being red, or for saying that the cat is on the mat.

With that distinction of expressive levels in mind, the claim to be pursued and further explained in what follows is that saying ‘We,’ too, can be construed as coming in degrees of expressiveness. On the one hand, and to anticipate, one might simply implicitly *exercise* capacities required for saying ‘We’ without thereby being aware of what one is doing in saying it. On the other hand, one might also, what is different, *speak about* what one is doing in a saying ‘We.’ The latter, it will turn out, signals a rather sophisticated form of plural self- awareness; one, to anticipate, neglected by Gilbert in her account of plural selves (we return to that in the closing section).

Departing from analytic pragmatism, then, saying ‘We’ will turn out to play the expressive role of a normative plural self-reference, which implicitly presupposes practices and ways of behaving implicitly taken by the speaker to play a social and normative plural self-constitutive role. In the next section, normative ascent will be introduced as a conceptual lens through which details of practices or abilities (normative pragmatics) presupposed for saying ‘We’ to have content (inferential semantics) can be focused. After that, we proceed to the argument that saying ‘We,’ on a basic level of expressiveness, presupposes certain implicitly normative capacities, and that, at higher expressive levels, normative ascent is necessary.

## 2 Normative Ascent

Various notions of ‘ascent’ – semantic, intentional – have been introduced to philosophy during the 1900s. In this section, *normative ascent* is presented and proposed to be put alongside them, for the specific purpose of approaching the issue of being ‘We’ and the practices or abilities necessary to say ‘We.’ The first step down this path goes via comparing normative ascent with intentional ascent.

Intentional ascent is introduced by Pettit in *The Common Mind* (1996).<sup>5</sup> His general concern is to argue for the social holist claim that ‘the human capacity of thought [...] is dependent on enjoyment of social relations’ (180). Abstracting from details of his path, he takes himself to have to show that human thought is ‘commonable,’ by which is meant that it is possible intersubjectively to know rules followed in thinking.

But what, then, is it *to think*, such that what is thereby done is commonable? To

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<sup>5</sup> In introducing intentional ascent, Pettit latches on to Quine’s (e.g., 1960; 1970) notion of semantic ascent; roughly, the use of language to speak about the semantic properties of words, as distinct from the capacity “merely” to use words to describe things. In this section, then, we stand in dialogue from Quine to Pettit to today.

answer, Pettit distinguishes between intentional subjects simpliciter and *thinking* intentional subjects. He introduces two requirements on the latter: intentional ascent and rule-following. Putting the latter to the side, for intentional ascent

an intentional system should not only have intentional states with contents—states like the belief that *p*, the desire that *q*, and so on—it should also have intentional states that are about such contents. (Ibid., 60)

Intentionality *without* ascent, intentionality simpliciter, is basically a capacity to reliably respond differentially to stimuli by forming or entering states that are of or about objects and events. Thus, non-thinking intentional subjects reliably form intentional states accordingly as they encounter each other and the world. They may, after repeated encounters with aardvarks, become reliably disposed to believe that something is an aardvark (and not an armadillo), that aardvarks eat ants, and so on. In contrast, *thinking* intentional subjects – that is, those who satisfy intentional ascent<sup>6</sup> – can *intentionally regulate* intentional regularities. Intentional ascent makes possible, and here we depart from Pettit’s terminology, reflective awareness of intentional contents implicitly and regularly formed; regularities the subject can now intentionally regulate so as to live up to standards, for example standards of rationality (e.g., not only believe that *p*, but also to believe that *p* only if one has evidence that *p*).

Now, by comparison to intentional ascent, *normative* ascent has the same general, practical structure: consisting in capacities to have some target attitude or state be the possible content of an “ascended” one. But, rather than concerning intentional states as such, it concerns *normative assessments*. Thus, to anticipate, analogously to how intentional ascent concerns intentional states that take intentional contents as contents, enabling intentional regulation of intentional regularities, normative ascent consists in normative assessments of normative assessments, enabling normative regulation of normative regularities. That analogy, however, needs clarification. The following five considerations specify what makes normative ascent distinct. Each consideration plays an important role in the following sections, when we consider what it is to be and say ‘We,’ in the normative sense suggested by analytic pragmatism.

First, by an attitude being *normative* is meant that it is a particular kind of *assessing*: an assessing of (im)proprieties; paradigmatically of (verbal or non-verbal) behaviour. Thus, one might assess greeting others in a particular manner to be (im)proper. Such assessments can be *implicit*: one assesses without being aware of or able to say that one assesses. Saying *that* it is (im)proper – a rather more sophisticated expressive capacity – is making implicit assessments explicit. Importantly, in contrast

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<sup>6</sup> And, according to Pettit, the requirement of rule-following. But we abstract from that here.

to intentional states generally, which aren't, qua intentional, propriety-assessing, normative attitudes, as meant here, are, as such, propriety-assessing.

Secondly, concern with such assessments is concern with a specific *mode* rather than *content*.<sup>7</sup> Thus, that an attitude is, e.g., a belief that *p*, concerns how *p* is targeted: one takes it to be the case that *p*. That an attitude is, e.g., an intention to *p*, also concerns how *p* is targeted: one is to (try to) bring it about that *p*. They have, as it is sometimes put, different directions of fit, which cannot be read off from their contents. Similarly, that an attitude is propriety-assessing isn't read off from the content. It's a mode-specification. Thus, assessing greeting by spitting in the face improper cannot be read off from the content-specification "Greeting by spitting in the face." Propriety-assessings are modes in which contents are targeted. However, in contrast to *propositionally* contentful intentional states, propriety-assessings don't as such have directions of fit. Thus, taking greeting by spitting in the face to be improper can remain implicit, in which case the assessor tends not so to greet others and to react negatively to those who do. Such an assessing cannot be faulty or right, for it doesn't represent "Greeting by spitting in the face *as improper*" such that the assessment can fail or succeed to fit the fact that something is, or isn't, so assessed. (However, and this will be part of the whole point with introducing normative ascent: when the assessing is of an assessing – i.e., when it is "ascended" – it *can* fail or succeed, accordingly as the content of the assessing *is* or *isn't* assessed (im)proper.) So, propriety-assessings can, as I will put it, remain pre-reflective, because previous to normative ascent they are not accessible as objects for reflective judgment.

Third, propriety-assessings relate to normative regularities differently than intentional states in general relate to intentional regularities. Whereas the formation of intentional states tend to *adhere* to regularities – e.g., a belief that a pink ice-cube is present tends, at least ideally, to be formed only if a pink ice-cube is present – propriety-assessings instead, first, *institute* regularities – e.g., if greeting by shaking hands is assessed proper then greeting by shaking hands tends to *become* a normative regularity – and only secondly, as a result of that instituting, to *adhere* to regularities – e.g., if greeting by shaking hands has been instituted as a normative regularity then people will tend to assess it proper to greet by shaking hands (or not assess it improper). (For present purposes, we don't concern ourselves with the question exactly *how many* or if specifically *influential* individuals are necessary for (or more likely to institute) normative regularities.)

Fourth, (unintentional) *deviations from* and (intentional) *violations of* normative regularities may evoke *sanctions* (Cf., Bicchieri 2006, 11–13). For instance, if you greet others by spitting in their face and it is assessed improper to do so, others may, pre-reflectively or with awareness of what they do *that* it is a sanction, think unfavourably of you, avoid you, or otherwise socially sanction you. Thus, we may

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<sup>7</sup> I'd like to thank Søren Overgaard for having pressed me on this point. I'm far from sure that what I write in this paragraph is even close to satisfactory to him.



think of threats of, or expectations about, sanctions as serving a conservative or censoring function (Haugeland 1990). To the extent that people prefer not to risk incurring negative consequences, we may conjecture that they tend to (try to) avoid deviation and violation. However, that *that* is what they do need not be a description under which they would recognize what they do as intentional. Thus, normative regularities tend to be self-perpetuating: participants to social practices regulated by norms tend reflectively or pre-reflectively to “gravitate” towards conformity, thereby stabilizing a normative regularity.

Fifth, and in tension with the conformist function of sanctions, normative regularities are cross-contextually and intertemporally *dynamic* (Cf., Lo Presti 2016). Thus, it may be a normative regularity to greet others in some manner, *m*, in the context of a close group of friends, *C*, while it isn’t for non-participants to *C*, nor for participants to *C* when interacting with non-participants, nor when participants to *C* greet each other publicly (perhaps greeting *m*-ly is a secret code for members of *C* to identify in-group members). Moreover, from greeting *m*-ly in *C* being norm at time *t* we cannot simply linearly project that it *will* be so at some temporal horizon  $t_{1 < n}$ . Thus, suppose the friends grow older and, as they do, come to assess their youthful manners to have been silly; or they increasingly interact with non-participants to *C* and, as they do, come to re-assess the propriety of greeting *m*-ly in *C*, whereby normative attitudes operative in *C* change too, and change how properly to greet in *C*. In this regard, the inference from  $\varphi$ -ing *m*-ly being (im)proper in *C* at  $t_1$  to the conclusion that  $\varphi$ -ing *m*-ly will be (im)proper in *C* at  $t_{1 < n}$  is invalid. The problem isn’t that normative regularities *cannot* remain stable through time – they certainly *can*. The claim is that whether or not they *will* is indeterminate at any point in time.

To summarize, while normative attitudes are, intentional ones aren’t as such propriety-assessing. Nor are intentional attitudes in general, but normative ones are, associated with sanctioning, which tends to *institute- and stabilize* normative regularities. Moreover, assessments that institute normative regularities don’t as such, at least not before normative ascent, take propositional contents.

We can now substantially expound normative ascent (NA). It was said earlier that NA consists in propriety-assessings of propriety-assessings, enabling normative regulation of normative regularities implicit in practice. Having made clear that contents of propriety-assessments aren’t as such propositional, we find that NA consists in capacities to make assessments implicit in, as it were, “ground-level” assessments *explicit*; to bring to awareness *that* something is (im)proper. Thus, while before one might’ve assessed greeting by spitting in the face improper one now propriety-assesses that propriety-assessing. So, with NA, assessments of (im)proprieties for the first time become candidate contents for possible assessments. While assessments before NA are pre-reflective we can say that now they’re *objects for reflective awareness*. Put differently, NA allows for propositional *knowledge that* whose object is what one already implicitly *knows how* to do to institute, dynamically change, and abide by



normative regularities. In line with the analytic pragmatist's versions of expressivism, NA brings with it expressive resources for deploying normative vocabulary: one can now *say* what one must implicitly *know how to do* to say that something is, or ought or ought not be, norm.

Before moving on, it is of no small importance, for our understanding what it is to be and say 'We' in the next section, to consider what, more exactly, the normative regularities that NA lets one reflectively think about are. It isn't accidental that we've throughout considered participation in *social* propriety- assessing practices as instituting and modulating normative regularities. The rationale is familiar: for it to be possible to differentiate what *is* from what *seems to be* (im)proper, between *taking to be* and *being* (im)proper, it is to *social triangulation of assessments*<sup>8</sup> we must look for a friction between what *is* and what is *taken to be* (im)proper. The familiarity is Wittgensteinian,<sup>9</sup> at least in spirit. Thus, consider the case where individual *I* takes cat-beating to be proper (so assesses it). One might then want to say that cat-beating is *proper-for-I*. And that is sensible. But it is sensible only if the case involves at least two assessors and the assessed – namely, *I*, cat-beating, and someone, who isn't *I*, assessing cat-beating *proper for I*.<sup>10</sup> For suppose *I* were the *only* assessor populating the world of assessment (apart from the poor cats), so that there were no possibility that *I*'s assessments (dis-)agreed with others'. In this case, whatever *seems* proper-for-*I* thereby *is* proper. Or, rather, what remains to say in such a case is only that *I* tends to beat cats, not that doing so is (im)proper.

Granting that normative regularities thus require social triangulation, it follows that NA amounts to capacities for assessing propriety-assessments of a *group* or *collective* (minimally a dyad). All normative regularities are social regularities. Hence NA allows for normative regulation of normative regularities *collectively*, if *pre-reflectively*, made, modulated and abided by; normative regularities are properly said, for those with the relevant expressive resources (more on which shortly), to result from what 'We' take to be proper; they are for them 'Our,' whether they can also *say that* or make that judgment with reflective awareness. And since, as argued earlier, normative regularities are essentially dynamic, NA makes possible assessments whether normative regularities *ought to be* 'Our,' whether 'We' *want* them to be in force, and so on. In a later section we'll return to implications, for being 'We,' of being able to *express* and *reason about* such assessments. To anticipate, NA provides

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<sup>8</sup> Or rather, but stranger sounding, it's to their social *n*-angulation we must look insofar as we allow, as we should, for social practices to take any unrestricted number *n* of participants.

<sup>9</sup> In particular §§ 201–202 of *Philosophical Investigations* ([1953] 1958).

<sup>10</sup> Which gives content to the claim that normative regularities are necessarily not only relational (because requiring *at least* triangulation) but *socially* relational (because requiring that *at least two* of the triangulated socially relate to *each other as assessors*). I leave open for present purposes whether the assessor of  $\varphi$  being proper-for-*I* may be *I* at a different time assessing *I*'s assessments at an earlier time.

a conceptual lens through which progressive *stages* of *expressive plural self-awareness and self-transformation* comes to focus.

Closing this section, it has been proposed that alongside intentional and semantic ascent we put normative ascent; a capacity for propriety-assessings to reflectively be possible contents of propriety-assessings. Thus it is that collectively pre-reflectively instituted normative regularities can be objects of awareness, such that implicitly instituted normative regularities can in turn be *explicitly* regulated by those who previously implicitly lived according to them and participated in their institution, stabilization, and negotiation. The next section proposes how to understand what normative practical know-how saying ‘We’ requires. Then, the last section presents a progressive path from pre-reflective to reflectively expressive plural self-awareness, via normative ascent, and situates the present account in the wider context of recent social ontology.

### 3        **Saying ‘We’**

Recall that expressivism, as meant here, is the thesis that some vocabularies play the expressive role of enabling those who deploy them to make explicit what they implicitly do in saying something. In the normative sense at hand, what practitioners are pre-reflectively able to do is responding differentially to socially instituted (im)proprieties – by, e.g., avoiding what is improper or by sanctioning, and to what is proper by tending to do it (and perhaps encourage it, or at least not discourage it). In this section, normative ascent will be used as a conceptual lens to focus what one must be able to do to say ‘We.’ Recall also that the reasoning in this paper is, on the whole, to be read as an extraction of a new way to approach plural selves and collectives from analytic pragmatism. We are not arguing for analytic pragmatism, but attempting to say what it might teach us to think and say about being and saying ‘We.’

Three expressive levels or stages of saying ‘We’ will be distinguished in this section.<sup>11</sup> Already at the first, a *scope-problem* will arise: that the proposed account has no way of restricting the scope of reference of ‘We.’ Two separate answers will be given, drawing only on resources from within analytic pragmatism as so far presented.

To begin with, the grammatical plural subject ‘We’ can be the active subject in sentences, such as, e.g., “We went to the beach” or “We want ice-cream.” Let’s label this the “basic” expressive level. To anticipate, on higher expressive levels one can use ‘We,’ first, to say something *about the plural self*, and, secondly, as grammatical construct

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<sup>11</sup> Stages or levels, because, as will become clear, those saying ‘We’ may *develop* higher levels of expressive plural self-awareness, in which case what they previously could do is revealed as a stage of their expressive plural self-progression. We return to that in the next section. I will for the most part speak of “levels” in this section.

and say something *about its use* – something about *what one is doing in saying ‘We.’* Making this distinction between levels of use is to emphasize that ‘We’ can be used for different expressive purposes. That is to be expected. For just as clearly as one *can* use ‘red’ or ‘ought’ to make ordinary empirical descriptive claims (“The book is red”) or normative ones (“One ought not eat aardvarks”), as distinct from using them in their expressive roles of saying what one is doing in describing or, e.g., commanding, one can also use ‘We’ in a basic expressive role “We want ice-cream” (by which one says nothing about what one is doing in saying ‘We,’ but nevertheless expresses something). In a higher, second-level, expressive role, the argument will be that ‘We,’ if only implicitly, plays a social and normative plural self-referential role, which presupposes practices and ways of behaving taken, again if only implicitly, by the speaker to make uses of it in that social and normative plural self-referential role *proper*. Thus, someone who says ‘We’ must implicitly be able to engage in a set of practices – that is, *know how to do* something even if she cannot also *say that* or *what* she is doing – such that she *can* plurally self-refer. And what she’s thereby implicitly doing, again to anticipate, is taking normative regularities instituted in propriety-assessing practice to actually demarcate a plural self. Thus it is that saying ‘We,’ at this expressive level, plays the role of a social and normative *indirect* plural self-reference; indirect because at this level it is *via* implicit normative regularities that ‘We’ is self-referential. At a yet higher, third, expressive level, the one saying ‘We’ isn’t *implicitly* but *reflectively* doing that, which requires that she has expressive awareness that *that* is what she’s doing. In the latter case, her saying ‘We’ is a petition that it be recognized *as a proper* social and normative plural self-reference; what she is doing is taking it to be proper, according to her propriety-assessments, to use ‘We’ to refer to a collective by virtue of what she takes to be ‘Our’ norms. This latter claim will be returned to last in this section and further discussed in the next.

### 3.1 **First-Order Plural Self-Expression and the Scope-Problem**

At the first expressive level, where uses of ‘We’ play an implicitly social and normative indirect plural self-referential role, a speaker must be able in practice to pre-reflectively reliably differentiate what is from what isn’t proper, not only, as we’ve seen, *according to her* but *according to participants* to the social practice, such that normative regularities she’s thereby reliably disposed to adhere to are *their* – instituted by *them* (including her, which, from her pre-reflective first-person plural self-perspective, *makes* them *their*). At this level, we needn’t attribute capacities to her to explicate that *that* is what she’s doing. That we don’t need to do so is what is meant by saying that, on this first expressive level, what one is *implicitly doing in saying ‘We’* is using it to make a social and normative indirect plural self-reference. Hence, to say ‘We,’ on this first expressive level, it is sufficient that speakers are able reliably to differentiate among manners of behaving in pursuit of some practice those that are from those that aren’t proper accordingly as normative regularities have been instituted by the propriety-assessings of

participants to those practices. Saying ‘We’ in this rather basic sense – as one does when one says, e.g., “We don’t like you” or “We should go to Greece” – is putting in claimable form what one is capable to implicitly do without necessarily knowing that one does that; namely, as the case might be, differentiating between who is and who isn’t likable, or between where to and where not to go, according to collectively instituted proprieties. Thus, the practices or abilities implicit in saying “We should go to Greece” on the first expressive level is just to reliably differentiate where to go from where not to, accordingly as proprieties are instituted by those participating in social practices (e.g., planning a vacation) one oneself also participates in. The know-how implicit in saying ‘We’ at the first expressive level is thus a *participatory know-how* (more on which shortly).

It is at this junction that a scope-problem for approaching saying ‘We’ from analytic pragmatism arises. The problem is obvious if one asks: If Greece is the place to go for people with otherwise nothing or very little in common, wouldn’t the verdict nevertheless be that *all of them* fall within the scope of ‘We,’ the plural self-reference, whenever *anyone* of them says “We should go to Greece”? Wouldn’t that be the verdict, if we’re to understand saying ‘We’ as referring to those sharing propriety-assessings? That would be highly implausible. The plural self-reference “We want ice-cream” ought not on any account to come out as taking as its scope, even if implicit, *everyone* who wants ice-cream. When I say “Let’s go to the cinema” I’m not, not even implicitly and indirectly, referring indeterminately either to all cinema-goers on the surface of the planet, or in the universe, or only all in the country or city where I live, even if, as a matter of fact, we all want to go to the cinema.

Two responses from analytic pragmatism to the scope-problem are to be pursued.<sup>12</sup> Each is meant to separately silence the worry. Yet we consider both. The first goes via considering what, in more detail, it is to be a *participant* to propriety-assessing practices and the second via considering the *inferential fine-structure* of plural self-constitutive normative regularities.

First, it was claimed above that normative regularities require social triangulation; at least two assessors and the assessed. Moreover, it was claimed that normative regularities assessed through normative ascent are regularities for those who *make* the assessings in pursuit of their social practices, so that those assessing those assessings may, if they can, properly *say* of the regularities in question that they’re *theirs*, as something that, from their perspective, ‘We’ make and live by. This

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<sup>12</sup> There are other possible responses, but I prefer here to keep with the theoretical framework of analytic pragmatism already presented rather than introduce new claims. One obvious alternative to the two responses pursued here, and one that for all I’ll say might be entirely right, is that ‘We’ is restricted by fellow-feelings; to those with whom one in some sense or other have a *sense of community*. I’ll have something to say about this in the last section, concerning pre-reflective plural self-awareness. The responses given to the scope-problem in this section aren’t incompatible with such a response.

reasoning sets a lower scope-limit: 'We' cannot refer to *less* than two assessors. But an upper limit on scope is also set. For *only those* with whom one is engaged in normative regularity-instituting assessing practices are included (which, of course, is nothing a speaker need be able to *say* in saying 'We,' even if including only those is what she is implicitly *doing*).

But *who*, the worry continues, *are* "only those"? We cannot give and ought not expect as exact a scope for the upper limit as for the lower, since *any*  $n \geq 2$  is possible. Still, "only those" can be restricted to those who, the speaker included, are, as it was put above, *participants* to instituting normative regularities. By that is here meant only those whose assessments are consequential for a token normative regularity being the regularity it is for a restricted number of individuals. It requires that individuals at least implicitly and reciprocally take each other's assessments to be consequential for each other's assessments, such that what each takes to be (im)proper is a function of their own propriety- assessments and those of others, thereby establishing a common way of life broadly construed (ordering of preferences, ways of behaving, thinking, speaking). Only *those* participate in instituting determinately *different* plural self-constitutive normative regularities, which is why only those form the plural self referred to. And if only those are all those, and none other, who thus *participate* in instituting the normative regularity, it follows that the implicit know-how required for saying 'We' at the basic expressive level is, as put earlier, a *participatory* know-how.

As Brandom puts it, for different purposes, 'We' presupposes that individuals stand in 'I-thou' relations (e.g., 1994, 38–9, 61–2) of reciprocal recognition. Thus, 'I-thou relations [are] the fundamental social structure' (1994, 39; Cf., Gilbert 2003) for being and saying 'We.' The second-person perspectival structure of intersubjectivity, necessary for propriety-assessing perspective-taking on each other's assessments, is presupposed by there being any 'We' to speak, and talk about, at any expressive level. Importantly, the scope of any tokening of 'We' can be restricted to those, including the speaker, whose propriety-assessments, reciprocally taking each other's assessments into account, matter for what normative regularities are instituted and lived by. They're perspectives *from within* propriety-assessing practice. It minimally takes two taking each other's assessments to matter for each other for them to *be* 'We.' That way, in "We should  $\varphi$ " not all or anyone for whom  $\varphi$  is proper are included, but only those reciprocally, possibly implicitly, taking each other's takings into account in their assessments. This ends the first response to the scope-worry.

The second response is to look again to the analytic pragmatist's combination of normative pragmatics and inferential role semantics, introduced in the first section. It reveals a fine grain of plural self-constitutive normative regularities, which makes it rather unlikely that different plural self-constitutive normative regularities *ever* match one-to-one between different plural selves.

Recall, to begin with, that making a claim presupposes practices or abilities implicitly to differentiate among judgable contents those that commit, entitle, or preclude entitlement to it (as conclusion), and those it (as premise) commits,

entitles, or precludes entitlement to. This might seem far removed from an answer to the scope-problem. But it is closer than it seems. For we may respond to that problem by pointing out that the scope of 'We' can be determinately restricted by considering what *other* propriety-assessings the one at issue (as conclusion) follows from or precludes entitlement to and which follow from or are precluded by it (as premise). This reveals an inferential fine structure of normative regularities, practically eradicating any risk of indeterminacy of scope of 'We.' To see how, consider again the expression "We should  $\varphi$ ." This expression, it was claimed, implicitly differentiates whether  $\varphi$  is what to do accordingly as it is assessed by participants to normative regularity-instituting social practices. The problem then was that there may be people with no or little common concern other than whether to  $\varphi$ , but that all of them can hardly be the (indeterminate) plural self referred to. (When I say "We should go to Greece" I ought not be taken to refer to everyone on the planet, or even in the city where I live, for whom Greece is the place to go.) Now, the second answer to the scope-problem is that there are *other* propriety-assessings to which  $\varphi$ -ing is inferentially related, and *those* inferential relations – the fine grains (or inferential fibres) constitutive of normative regularities – are highly unlikely to match one-to-one the way that isolated assessings often do. These inferential relations determinately restrict the scope of 'We' accordingly. For instance, together with contributing to greenhouse gas-omissions being assessed improper, sailing proper (together with access to a sloop), the propriety of renting *that* house or else to bring a tent, and so on, the propriety of going to Greece, considered as normative atom, stands in indefinitely different inferential relations to other proprieties in indefinitely different normative regularities, which, as plural self-constitutive, make any plural self-reference determinably unique. Being able implicitly to reliably differentiate which, within the web of proprieties, those the one at issue does and those it doesn't entitle or commit to and those that do and don't entitle or commit to it safeguards against 'We' taking implausibly (indeed, indeterminately) wide scope. The claim isn't that a speaker must be able to track *all* or even most inferentially interlinked propriety-assessings within a normative regularity to definitely indirectly plurally self-refer to a determinate plural self by saying 'We.' But she needs to be able to track *some*. Put otherwise, that  $\varphi$ -ing in C is "What we do" still admits of an indeterminate number of manners *m* of properly  $\varphi$ -ing *m*-ly in C, where what particular *m* is proper is inferentially determinable only within a whole network of normative regularity-constitutive proprieties (which, recall, are dynamic: constantly potentially changeable). And, so, the risk that 'We' takes indeterminately wide scope significantly diminishes, if not completely vanishes.

Two responses to the scope-problem have been presented. While each individually silences the worry, their combination provides a yet stronger defence. Before proceeding to consider saying 'We' at higher expressive levels, let's consider a second way of formulating the second response to the scope-problem.

Consider it being assessed proper for two persons to go to Greece and that that



propriety-assessment is inferentially related to their assessing it proper to do so *only with each other* (perhaps it's their honey moon). It seems that this is sufficient for restricting the scope of 'We' as per the second response to the scope-problem. We needn't involve a whole set of other proprieties. Thus, Sam and Jill assess Greece being the place to go, and that assessment is inferentially related to it being proper, as assessed by Sam, for Jill to go only if she does so with him and for himself to go only if he does so with her, and vice versa for Jill, and their (possibly implicit, non-ascended) assessments reciprocally *matter* for the other's assessments. That seems to be all that is required for them being the only two participants to the plural self referred to in "We should go to Greece." Thus they may restrict who they refer to by 'We' without, at least at this first level of plural self-expression, knowing or saying that that is what they do in saying what they say. In other words, in many cases we may not need to scout very far out into the normative inferential periphery of plural selves to find their borders; i.e., who the 'We' is. When fewer participants, or participants with a special affective connection to each other, are involved, we might hit the wall already a few assessments away.<sup>13</sup> I assess it worthwhile to  $\varphi$  only if I  $\varphi$  with you and you assess it worthwhile to  $\varphi$  only if you  $\varphi$  with me. So, from the propriety expressed by "We should  $\varphi$ " 'We' is determinately narrowed in scope already at the next assessing. This, incidentally, shows how plural selves may be rather transient and variable with respect to persistence through time, with respect to the identity of plural self-constitutive normative regularities, and with respect to their expansion and contraction in space.

### 3.2 *Second-Order Plural Self-Expression*

We turn now to the next level of expressiveness. Where, before, saying 'We' played the expressive role to implicitly normatively demarcate a plural self, at this expressive level 'We' takes the grammatical subject-role and is used to *explicitly say* something about normative regularities previously implicitly taken to demarcate the 'We.' The latter requires *awareness of* what one is doing in saying 'We' at the previous level – doings described in the previous sub- section. This, it will be argued, requires normative ascent (NA).

Instances of this second expressive level are, e.g., "This ought not to be what defines us" or "We should change our ways of doing this." To properly deploy such sentences requires mastery not only of the first-person plural but its use as *directly plurally self-referential*. Thus, whereas, on the one hand, "We want ice- cream," which plurally self-refers indirectly via an assessment of what to have, can be deployed by anyone with only an implicit know-how to differentiate proprieties in practice – e.g., a three-year old taking ice-cream to be what to get for him and his siblings but not thereby knowing that that is what he is doing in saying what he says – "We should change who we are," on the other, which contains the first-person plural and

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<sup>13</sup> Here recent phenomenological approaches to being 'We,' in terms of fellow-feelings and a "sense of community" or "for-us-ness" immediately suggest themselves.



explicitly self-referentially says something about the plural self, requires capacities to differentiate *for whom* whatever “doing this” *self-refers*, such that participants to *that self* should change who *they* are, as assessed by the speaker from the first-person plural perspective as a participant to the relevant propriety-assessing practices. And so, to say “We should change who we are” or “This ought not define us” doesn’t merely differentiate what is from what isn’t proper, but whether what is (or isn’t) proper for the ‘We’ to which one is a participant *ought (not) to be* so. To do so requires NA because NA consists precisely in capacities to be aware of and propriety-assess propriety-assessings. Only with NA can one *think and speak about* normatively demarcated plural selves, and only thereby can one directly plurally self-refer, as in “This is how *we* do it.” Here one *directly* self-refers because one says something about the plural self, not indirectly, as when ‘We’ is used as active subject where it refers via propriety-assessings.

To summarize the first two expressive levels, to say ‘We’ at the first is to socially and normatively pre-reflectively indirectly plurally self-refer. This requires being able in practice implicitly to differentiate what is from what isn’t proper accordingly as it is assessed by participants to normative regularity- instituting plural self-constitutive practices. At the second expressive level, to say ‘We’ is to explicitly, reflectively and directly plurally self-refer. This involves using the first-person plural to talk about the plural self, and petitioning to have what one says to be taken to *properly*, with authority, identify what is and isn’t proper for the ‘We’ and to say about the ‘We.’ For that, normative ascent is necessary: one has to be able to assess normative regularity-instituting propriety-assessings that constitute (or are taken by the speaker to constitute) the ‘We.’

### 3.3 *Third-Order Plural Self-Expression*

Now, finally, at the third expressive level one becomes able to *talk about inferences* embedded in plural self-constitutive normative regularities, paradigmatically by deploying conditionals containing the plural self as subject term. This is the expressive level where participants start to speak about what is involved in their being and saying ‘We.’ As per the second response to the scope-problem, this is the level of expressiveness at which participants can respond to that worry by asking themselves, “Indeed, who *is* this ‘We’?” (or, depending on their collectivist contra individualist proclivities: “Who *are* we?”)

To recap, according to analytic pragmatism, the conditional is the paradigm locution explicitly codifying among inferential moves one (fallibly) implicitly knows how to differentiate those one takes from those one doesn’t take to be proper (or those one takes to be improper). In the context of saying ‘We,’ conditionals can be taken to explicitly codify among inferential moves embedded in plural self-constitutive normative regularities those that, according to the speaker, differentiate those proprieties that are from those that aren’t plural self-constitutive. Thus, in “If we do this we’ll never be forgiven” the speaker is *making*

*explicit* that whatever ‘doing this’ is is improper (or unforgivable) according to what she takes participants to the ‘We’ to thereby consequently become committed to (responsible for having done). Consider also “Let’s have a picnic tomorrow if it is sunny.” Here, the speaker is making explicit that going for a picnic tomorrow, conditional on it being sunny, should be the thing to do from the first-person plural self-perspective of participants to the ‘We’ – i.e., those who reciprocally minimally triangulate, even if implicitly, their assessments.

The speaker can in these cases be understood to implicitly petition for recognition as able to properly “read off” from propriety assessing-practices of participants to the ‘We’ what from their first-person plural perspectives is (im)proper – thereby *marking off* the ‘We’ as those for whom, the speaker included, such-and-such is but so-and-so isn’t proper. The speaker does so *implicitly* in that she needn’t and doesn’t say that *that* is what she is doing by saying what she says. But, and in contrast to the previous expressive level, at which she could already implicitly inferentially navigate plural self-constitutive normative regularities, she now *explicitly says* which among the inferential moves she previously implicitly knew how to make those that participants to the ‘We,’ according to her, are and aren’t committed, entitled, or precluded from entitlement to. This is the expressive level where what Brandom (2000, Ch. 1, Sect. vi) calls ‘elucidative rationality’ is brought to bear on being and saying ‘We.’ This is where saying ‘We’ can be taken up in the game of giving and asking for reasons; of justifying and being able to justify what one says (Cf., Sellars 1956, §36), so as to, by means of *articulating* the inferences that implicitly confer content to claims, *make* what is said – in this case by ‘We’ – *explicit*. Thus, to anticipate a critique of Gilbert’s plural subject-account in the next section, it is *first* and *only* at this third level of plural self-expression that participants can openly declare that they’re ready to jointly commit “as one” to  $\varnothing$ . Participants can now reason about who they are, want to, and ought or ought not to be.

It ought to be clear that since NA was necessary for saying ‘We’ at the previous, second, expressive level, it is necessary also for this third level, since assessments are now made explicit. What is more, at this level participants start to master the plural *self-concept*; the concept articulated by inferences implicit in plural self-constitutive normative regularities. In a sense, they start to *discover* who they are as a ‘We’ of which they are now becoming increasingly self-expressively aware. Conditionals can be used to make explicit the contents of concepts, including the plural self-concept, as seen above in the examples of speaking about ‘We’ in conditional form. Importantly, since one just cannot say that what one is doing in saying ‘We’ is proper unless one can make explicit assessments of assessments implicit in plural self-constitutive normative regularities, NA is necessary for this third stage of plural self-expression.

To summarize, we’ve discerned three expressive levels of use of the first-person plural. At the first, it functions in the active subject-role, as it does in, e.g., “We went to the beach” or “We want ice-cream.” In so using it, one needs to know

implicitly how to differentiate among what to do from what not to do accordingly as proprieties are instituted in social propriety-assessing practice. ‘We,’ at this level, functions socially and normatively as an indirect plural self- reference (indirect because it self-refers via plural self-constitutive normative regularities instituted in implicit propriety-assessings). At a second level, ‘We’ is used as a direct social and normative plural self-reference. At this level one speaks about the ‘We.’ Thus, in “This is our way of doing it” and “Why would we want to do that?” one is *speaking about* the plural self in addition to implicitly exercising capacities to use the first-person plural pronoun. One isn’t yet *making explicit* among proprieties those one takes from those one doesn’t take to commit or entitle, or preclude entitlement to others, but one is implicitly doing so by saying that or asking whether something is or isn’t proper. Since one is here assessing propriety-assessings, NA is necessary. Then, finally, there’s the third level, where one *does* make explicit what one previously took to be (im)proper from the participatory pre-reflective first-person plural self- perspective, by putting sentences containing ‘We’ in either of the previous two ways in conditional form. Thus, in “If that’s a sloop, let’s steal it” or “Let’s not stick to the plan unless Sam joins” one, as it were, *discloses* propriety- inferences one previously implicitly took to be plural self-constitutive. In doing so, one also opens for other participants to the plural self to critically assess those inferences (as well as whether the inferences one takes to be inferences implicit in the social practices of those participating in the ‘We’ *are* inferences implicit in the social practices of the ‘We’). One is entering the game of giving and asking for reasons with respect to saying ‘We.’ It is plural self-elucidative rationality.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Sam says “Since we’re in town anyway, let’s go visit Marcus” whereupon Jill responds “But do we really like to hang out with Marcus?” and Sam continues “Well, I thought we did; at least I do” and Jill retorts “In that case, I suppose we’re of different opinions about him” and Sam goes on “Okay, I go visit Marcus and you do something else.” In this case, it isn’t as if Sam and Jill are explicitly explicating their plural self-concept (we rarely do, other than, perhaps, in papers like this). Still, they’re implicitly explicating their plural self- concept by questioning what they, as ‘We,’ feel about visiting Marcus.

In the next and final section we engage the discussion of degrees of plural self-awareness and how to conceive of the progression from pre-reflective plural selves, on one end of the spectrum, to expressively plural self-transformative ones, on the

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<sup>14</sup> Why not introduce a yet higher, fourth, expressive level? Thus consider *logically* self-aware plural selves: plural selves whose participants are capable of formulating, arguing about and investigating the deontic logic of plural self-constitution, awareness, and expression (for the singular case, see Brandom 2000, 20–21, 41, 149; 2009, 12). Indeed, the present paper can be read as an attempt to *exercise*, together with you as my ‘We’ (in this paper expressed by all tokens of “we” rather than “‘We’”) such fourth-order expressive capacities, in order to find what analytic pragmatism might tell us about what it is to be and say ‘We.’ See also Figure 1 below.

other. This is where we finally find what difference analytic pragmatism – taken as point of departure in this paper – makes relative to other approaches to plural selves and collectives. One virtue, I'll suggest, is that it allows us to make sense of expressive progress and degrees of plural self-awareness; from participants having pre-reflective plural self-perspectives to participants thematizing and reflecting on their first person plural self- perspectives, becoming able to explicitly plurally self-transform (indeed, as we will find, to plurally self-terminate).

## **4 Plural Self-Progression**

The degrees of expressiveness discerned above yield a three-stage differentiation among plural selves accordingly as their participants are plurally self-aware and self-transformative to different degrees. This section considers in detail the progressive path through each stage. This will throw light on recent attempts to discern levels of awareness, both for singular and plural selves, precisely as *stages* of (plural) self-progression. The section closes by situating the results in the context of recent analytic social ontology. I also discuss what makes the present account attractive by comparison to Gilbert's account of plural selves and Searle's social ontology more generally.

### **4.1 Pre-Reflective Plural Selves**

Before normative ascent, there may already be normatively and socially self-determined plural selves. Taking plural selves to be socially and normatively demarcated allows for pre-reflective plural self-determination – participants *doing* all that is necessary for plural self-constitution despite their participants being neither reflectively plurally self-aware nor plurally self-expressive. They can mark themselves off as a 'We' by implicitly in practice instituting and negotiating plural self-constitutive normative regularities; ways of acting, thinking, speaking – "ways of life" in general. Now, at the first stage of plural self- awareness, those regularities are implicit in social propriety-assessing practices, participation in which may be pre-reflective; one is able to participate in the instituting of and to reliably differentiate what is from what isn't proper even if one isn't reflectively aware or can express that *that* is what one is doing, nor that *what* one is doing is participating in plural self-determination. Moreover, since normative regularities may dynamically change as participants proceed to engage and continuously re-engage propriety-assessing practices, they may pre-reflectively plurally self-transform. The doings implicit in practice are pre- reflective makings and changings of a 'We.' Also, participants may, with time, pre-reflectively plurally self-terminate as they disengage the relevant plural self-constitutive practices.

Here's a proposal how to think in more detail about plural selves at this first stage of pre-reflective plural self-awareness. We may take it that participants experience

non-thematized we-ness; a *sense* (in the sense of *felt* ‘sense,’ not of reflectively assigning senses to expressions) of *belonging* or *fellow-feeling* (e.g., Salice 2022).<sup>15</sup> Participants, for instance, experience tensions or affective dissonance when confronted with behaviour or responses to behaviour (e.g., sanctions) conflicting with pre-reflectively instituted proprieties they know how to navigate. Threats of sanctions, too, may evoke pre-reflective inhibitions; non-thematized disinclinations or hesitation to do one thing rather than another out of fear for negative consequences – a context-sensitive felt sense of *this*, but not *that*, being what to do with *you* but not *him*, in *this* situation of second-person engagement. We may even allow that participants *do* express themselves as per the first expressive stage discussed in the previous section (e.g., “Let’s not go there” or “That’s a good idea”) while nevertheless remaining incapable to say, or being ignorant of the fact, that they’re giving expression to proprieties implicit in plural self-constitutive normative regularity-instituting practices. For instance, one says “Cat-beating is wrong,” expressing how not to treat cats, being unaware that one’s assessment *expresses* assessments implicitly instituted by participants to pre-reflective plural self-constitutive practices.

It might be said that in pre-reflective plural self-awareness, expression, and transformation, the ‘We’ is “transparent” to participants. One acts, thinks and in general is, and has the world in view from a pre-reflective first-person plural self-perspective. *It* – the plural self-perspective – isn’t reflected on. Much like the hammer isn’t typically an object for reflective awareness while hammering, the pre-reflective first-person plural self-perspective isn’t an object for reflective awareness to participants as they pre-reflectively go about their daily dealings. To use a different example, like the blind man senses *through* his stick, individuals go about their daily lives through their pre-reflective first-person plural self-perspective; assessing and acting in light of normative regularities without *them* being assessed, thought about, or acted on. Thus, if it is part of a normative regularity to greet by handshakes, participants to greeting-practices in the context of the relevant collective are likely pre-reflectively to shake hands when greeting each other; if it is part of a normative regularity that one ought not to greet by spitting in the face, participants are likely pre-reflectively to *not* do so and to tend to some degree to sanction those who do. However, they may not, and at the first expressive stage do not, think about *that*. In a sense, they live and move and have their being as participants to a ‘We’ even if *that* isn’t something of which they are, at this stage, aware. And they may *transform* that life and being, again without being aware of *that*. Still, they’re doing something implicitly: making, transforming, and possibly giving expression to the propriety-assessings of participants to a pre-reflective plural self.

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<sup>15</sup> As we proceed along stages of plural selves, features characteristic of previous stages should be understood as remaining intact, though they may be altered as participants become aware, through NA, of characteristics implicit at previous stages and act to regulate plural self-progression.

## 4.2 *Reflective Plural Selves*

Suppose now that we could load a syringe with normative ascent (NA) and inject it into the practices of participants to a plural self who, so far, only implicitly make, transform, and possibly give expression to a pre-reflective plural self-perspective. With the injection of NA, we're bringing about a *reflective* plural self. Where the plural self before the injection was transparent to participants in that they could already do everything needed in principle for plural self-determination, they're now also capable to assess assessments that institute normative regularities constitutive of the pre-reflective plural self. They know that *that* is what they're doing and can assess previously implicit assessments. Thus, participants to reflective plural selves exhibit *reflective plural self-awareness*.

Let's connect this sense of reflective plural self-awareness to a wider discussion on how to understand stages of *individual* self-awareness. I'm thinking here of Lynne Baker, but similar views are found in Brandom (e.g., 2009; 2019) and Sellars (1962). In line with them, rather than think of members of a species that, as species, has developed capacities for NA over evolutionary timescales as *born* with NA, we may think of them as *having the potential to develop* those social and normative capacities during their lifetime. Echoing Baker (2013; 2015), we can say that while some species don't others do develop beyond a rudimentary first-person plural self-perspective to a robust one and, for those of the latter, there's a stage of their ontogenetic development during which they only have the rudimentary first-person plural self-perspective with a potential for developing a robust one, from which they typically but not necessarily develop the latter. Baker's concern is with the first-person *singular* perspective. Her distinction between a rudimentary and a robust one amounts roughly to, on the one hand, organisms with capacities for sensing, perception, and action from a pre-conceptual point of view that allows them to navigate the world – the *rudimentary* first-person perspective. On the other hand, some also have developed, over evolutionary timescales, second-order socially enabled capacities to during their lifetime develop capacities to *conceive* of themselves in the first-person, thereby also to ask what they are, want to, and ought to be and do, to make plans, and so on – this is the *robust* first-person perspective. It is *socially enabled* in that it requires conceptual abilities, where concepts are understood as socially negotiated in a linguistic community.

Similarly, we can say that NA makes possible a *robust* first-person *plural self*-perspective. This is another way to speak of the progressive path towards a *reflective* plural self-perspective, where participants to the plural self can not only pre-reflectively and contingently change their assessments in practice (even if they also continue to do that) but also assess their assessments and thereby choose to or not to regulate already pre-reflectively instituted plural self-constitutive normative regularities. Individuals with reflective first-person plural self-perspectives can reflectively conceive of and plan collective action. (So this is arguably the lowest level



of plural self-awareness at which Michael Bratman's (2014) *planning* theory of (collective) agency can possibly apply). For with NA comes the capacity for assessing assessments implicit in practical intentions, so as to reflectively regulate what goals to pursue and by what means. Indeed, we can think of reflective but not pre-reflective plural selves as capable of normative *descent*: a practice of reflectively remaking pre-reflective makings of plural self-constitutive normative regularities.<sup>16</sup> Thus, for instance, through NA participants assess the propriety of assessing cat-beating as improper and through normative *descent* come to reflectively reassess (or hopefully not, if you ask the cats) how to treat cats. Hence, plural self-transformation is, at this stage, far more sophisticated than at the stage of a pre-reflective first-person plural self-perspective. Thus it is that NA adds detail to the story of how both *individual and plural* selves may progress from stages of rudimentary, pre-reflective self-awareness, to reflective ones through NA, to expressively reflective stages through mastery of the plural self-concept (treated in subsection 4.3. below).

To approach the third stage of plural self-expressiveness, those with second-stage reflective first-person plural self-perspectives still lack what will be third-stage *plural self-explicating* capacities for making inferential relations among proprieties embedded in plural self-constitutive normative regularities explicit by the deployment, paradigmatically, of conditionals. By means of such capacities, participants *would* be able to propositionally differentiate among proprieties those that are from those that aren't constitutive of their plural self-perspective. This means that second-stage reflective plural selves don't transform themselves by way of *explicitly addressing* inferential relations among proprieties embedded in their plural self-constitutive normative regularities, so that those regularities can be explicitly questioned, defended and changed in the game of giving and asking for reasons. Nevertheless, reflective plural selves can *implicitly* do all of that. That is, by reflecting upon propriety-assessings, participants *implicitly* assess normative regularities constitutive of the plural self. What they might be expressing is something to the effect that "This is what we do" or "That's proper for us to believe." But saying and being aware of *that* isn't yet to be explicit about or aware of the inferential fine-structure of assessings that make what is said plurally self-referential. Still, reflective plural selves don't *merely* and as it were unwittingly constitute, express,

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<sup>16</sup> Normative descent was a term suggested to me by Thomas Szanto. I'm not sure that what I say here is what he intended, but I'm grateful for the suggestion. The term nicely fits alongside the analytic pragmatist's notion of *semantic* descent: the "mere" making explicit of inferences implicit in practices or abilities through which a vocabulary for making that practical know-how explicit is pragmatically mediated (e.g., Brandom 2019, 4–8). Normative descent adds a perspective to how normative regularity-instituting practices become expressively accessible for reflective modulation and conservation of the inferential fine-structure of those normative regularities.



and transform themselves, as they do on the first stage. They actively assess what they do and thereby who they make themselves be. When they through NA regulate plural self-constitutive normative regularities they can also engage in planned goal-directed self-transformation (or self-conservation). Their participants have a view as to what is and isn't proper for them. In contrast, participants to first-stage pre-reflective plural selves don't have such views; their self-constitutive and self-transformative activities are rather contingent, driven by felt tensions and urges (e.g., in response to sanctions or threats thereof).

So far, we've looked at the progression from pre-reflective to reflective plural selves through the lens of NA. Next and finally we turn to reflective plural self- *expressive* plural selves.

### 4.3 *Reflective Plural Self-Expressive Plural Selves*

Participants to reflective plural selves with the proper *conceptual* capacities are *self-expressively* plurally self-aware. Core among their capacities, mediated through NA, belong the mastery of a plural self-concept, with which inferential relations that bind proprieties embedded in plural self-constitutive normative regularities together can be made explicit as plural self-constitutive and self-defining. While participants to plural selves of previous stages might express themselves (e.g., "We're going to the beach," "That would be good for us to do"), participants to expressively reflective plural selves are plural self- explicating (as we will see: potentially plural self-(re)defining and plural self- suicidal). They can *explicitly* make and change themselves – their practices, plans, and indeed plural self-conception. This is where the magic, as it were, of plural self-creation ex nihilo, and transformation or extinction by declaration, that has so much occupied modern analytic social ontology, becomes possible (more on this shortly).

Plural self-explication is explication of inferential relations among proprieties embedded in plural self-constitutive normative regularities. Thus, paradigmatically, plural self-explication involves the use of conditionals; e.g., "If we're committed to this, we have to change" or "If we do it, we'll never be forgiven." This is to expressively lay bare the normative fine structure of "who 'We' are." Making those proprieties explicit is making them available for *reasoning*; for demands for justification. Participants to expressively reflective plural selves are producers and consumers of reasons for and against the plural self doing thus-and-so, for being and changing, and, indeed, for ending their plural self-existence. For purposes of illustration, consider participants to a plural self who, at this stage of plural self-expression, find themselves plurally self-committed to proprieties of which they weren't previously plurally self-aware – to a racial segregation, say.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The story might be that before participants to the plural self became explicitly plurally self-aware the propriety in question had implicitly shaped their plural self-conception long enough to be consequential for most or very many of their other implicit propriety-

It might be a commitment deeply ingrained in the inferential fine-structure making up a plural self-constitutive normative regularity, so that weeding it out risks, like in a game of jack-straws, to upset all or many inferential strings of the whole; participants would no longer be entitled to commitments conducive to their first-person plural self-identity. Now, becoming explicitly plurally self-aware of that ingrained commitment, participants face a stark choice: either to plurally self-terminate – to wholesale abandon plural self-constitutive normative regularities – or to radically plurally self-transform – to uproot the discordant strings of commitment and consequently update all those affected by it (downstream, as conclusions from it) and those from which commitment or entitlement to it can be inferred (upstream, as premises for it).<sup>18</sup> For, if they find the uncovered commitment to be one they cannot or don't want to remain entitled to, they've found the plural self to hold two commitments that entitlement-preclude each other, implying an inferentially disharmonious whole. Whatever the choice, what is done about it is nothing participants to plural selves at previous stages could do: an expressively plurally self-aware plural self-transformation (or plural self-termination) premised on plural self-explication. While participants to pre-reflective plural selves change and terminate plural selves without awareness that that is what they do – without assessing the prospect for doing so or intending *that* they change or terminate their plural self – and while participants to reflective plural selves may so assess and intend even if they cannot also make explicit what is implicit in what they're thereby doing, participants to expressively reflective ones can do all of that and in addition explicate, hence discover, the normative fine-structure of practices they thereby pursue. Participants to expressively reflective plural selves can, as it were, and in contrast to participants to previous stages of plural selves, be reflectively and expressively plurally self-suicidal.<sup>19</sup>

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assessings, thereby coming to play a core role for their plural self-identity (albeit, until now, implicitly).

<sup>18</sup> A third option might be: do nothing. One consequence could then be the “happy go lucky” one of ignoring the discordant commitment and go on as if all is well and good. Perhaps a notion of “plural self-deception” could capture such a situation. Another consequence could be the hypocritical “we dislike ourselves” one of living with the fact that one harbours a discordant commitment about which one does nothing. And here, perhaps, the notion “plural self-loathing” is apt (“plural self-hypocrisy” also comes to mind).

<sup>19</sup> Arguably and speculatively, this seems to mirror the case for singular selves, too. An individual with merely pre-reflective self-awareness, a rudimentary first person-perspective, cannot intend to commit suicide as a consequence of finding its existence indefensible (or some such), but a being with reflective self-awareness, a robust first-person perspective, can. Thus, Brandom (2007, 130) has us imagine a samurai who has dishonoured the code of conduct the honing of which is constitutive of *being* a samurai (of having that normative status). According to the samurai code of honour, this called for ceremonial suicide of the animal the samurai was thought to thereby have become, so

It was claimed above that it is with the achievement of expressively reflective first-person plural self-awareness that the “magic” happens whereby plural selves can be born ex nihilo and disband or transform by acts of declaration. This is what has concerned much if not most recent analytic social ontology. We now end by addressing parts of that literature so as to situate the present account in that context. It will turn out that the present approach promises illumination both of a far wider range of instances, kinds, and stages of plural selves, as well as a more detailed story about plural self-constitution, transformation, and disbandment. Thus, further developed, it would be both wider and more precise in focus. To argue for this, I will in what follows address mainly Searle and Gilbert.

Gilbert has (e.g., 1989; 2023) contributed significantly to our understanding how plural selves can come into existence through *open expressions* of individuals to *jointly commit* to form a plural subject, and Searle (1995; 2010) has significantly contributed to how *imposition by declaration* of status functions in the creation of social reality and institutions works. But, as we’ll see, both are from the point of view of the present investigation of analytic pragmatism revealed to be far too narrow in scope. A word of caution is in order about what the main contention of this discussion will be: it isn’t that philosophers like Searle and Gilbert are *wrong*; that their analyses should be abandoned or revised. On the contrary, they may have got what they’re looking at entirely right (what follows doesn’t suggest that they haven’t). But that they got it right is compatible with their having too little to say. And that is precisely the point. Analytic pragmatism, it is suggested, allows us to say so much more about being and saying ‘We’ than they do. They’ll be revealed to account – satisfyingly or not – only for special and narrow, yet important, aspects of being and saying ‘We.’

Beginning with Searle, it is notable that he recognizes that collective action presupposes a ‘Background sense of the other as a candidate in cooperative agency’ (1990, 415). The notorious thesis of the ‘Background’ concerns ‘a set of nonrepresentational mental capacities that enable all representing to take place’ (1983, 143). We can say that it is a set of pre-conceptual embodied capacities to act one way rather than another in a task- and context-sensitive manner. But Searle doesn’t say much, if anything, about how a collective *as ‘We’* can *plural self-expressively say*, or only think, “We accept [recognize] that X counts as Y in C” (a collective action – speech act – par excellence) such that as a matter of social fact, according to his account, X *does* come to count as Y in C. We have to turn to *Speech Acts* (1969) to find his account of what one is doing in making a declaration. But nothing is there said about *plural self-expressive* declaratives. Yet status function declarations in the plural ‘We’ is the centrepiece of Searle’s account of the creation of social reality; and

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as for the samurai status to survive. It would seem that no animal which *cannot conceive of itself* as having a status (or conceive of itself at all) could intentionally commit suicide. The same is true of plural selves.

those declarations are exactly plural self-expressive. So, apart from the details and whatever else is plausible about what Searle says in *Speech Acts*, it remains obscure what is involved in *being* a 'We' *saying* 'We' (declaratively or otherwise). Indeed, one might wonder how it is that, from *Speech Acts* to *Making the Social World* (2010), Searle's speaker turned from an 'I' into a 'We' and what exactly goes into that first-person perspective-transformation. This is no mere biographical curiosity about Searle's change of focus over the years, but importantly a concern with how what is involved in an 'I' declaring, e.g., a meeting adjourned is different (or not?) from what is involved in a 'We' doing so. The big picture is that participants individually have intentional states in the collective format "We [insert intentional state] that [insert content]." This is supposed to be a *sui generis* format or mode of intentionality, caused and realized in individual brains, left for the special sciences to investigate, not for philosophers to analytically excavate (this is where Searle's spade is turned, or handed over).

So, though Searle seems to realize that there has to be a nonrepresentational level of we-ness his official account nevertheless comes into play first at what we've called the third stage of reflective plural self-expressive plural selves. If we conceive of plural selfhood as a gradient from pre-reflective plural selves to expressively self-reflective ones – along the lines of the detailed story about each stage provided above – Searle's focus is on a narrow range towards the latter end (see Figure 1 below).

The situation is similar with Gilbert. According to her, people form plural selves if and only if they individually *openly express readiness* to *jointly commit* with regard to, e.g., an intention, belief, or action (1989; 2023, 85). But how can there be jointness of commitment, not to mention plural self-expressiveness, such that individuals can, as it were, jointly expressively commit a plural self into existence? That that can happen if individuals openly commit individually to form a plural subject under conditions of common knowledge might seem to answer the question. But it doesn't. After all, *to whom* and *to do what* do individuals under that condition commit if not *to each other* and *to jointly commit*? It is precisely to jointly commit that Gilbert says that individuals must openly express readiness. But in that case, one would be excused for wondering what accounts for there being, first, *commitments to others* and, secondly, *joint* commitments and, third, practices of *expressing* them, *previous* to there being commitments of a (possibly pre-reflective) 'We.' How can we account for any of that without presupposing a community or collective in joint pursuit of communicative, normative, and social practices (Cf. Schmid 2023, Ch. 1.4)? Gilbert helps herself (and her plural selves) to the antecedent intelligibility of open expressions of readiness to commitment together under conditions of common knowledge, while, arguably, the intelligibility of each of these rather presupposes that people participate in rich communicative, normative, and social practices whose intelligibility isn't addressed by Gilbert.<sup>20</sup> The account explored in this

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<sup>20</sup> One might add similar criticisms and amendments from the perspective of the proposal

paper, in contrast, says, first, that *commitments* are socially instituted in implicitly propriety-assessing practices that, secondly, are pre-reflectively plural self-constitutive, which is why, third, capacities for *expression* to *jointly* commit is, as it were, already at the pinnacle of stages of plural self-progression. Already pre-reflective plural selves would, on the analytic pragmatist approach, be constituted by commitments (albeit implicit). Commitments are not (only) *consequences* of saying that one is committed or ready to commit with others; they are *constitutive* of sayings and communicative practice to begin with. Gilbert has nothing to say about it.

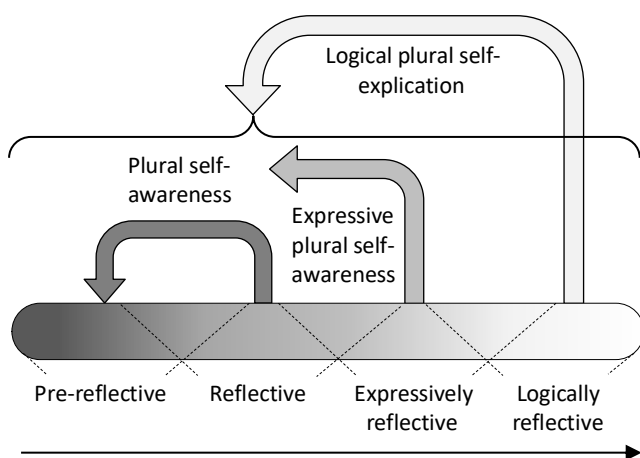


Figure 1. Stages of first-person plural self-progression

As for the *jointness* involved in Gilbertian open expressions to commit, which for her is necessary for plural subjecthood, the account we get from analytic pragmatism says that it is a matter of participants to implicit propriety-assessing social practices reciprocally (in the ‘I-thou’) taking each other’s assessments to matter for their propriety-assessings, which starts out pre-reflectively. Now, if interpersonal commitments can already be pre-reflectively plural self-constitutive, their *expression* is

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here presented to, e.g., Tuomela (2007; 2010). I’ve already parenthetically hinted at such a criticism of Bratman’s account. In fact, Petersson (2007) discusses a worry similar to the one raised here, but for Bratman’s (1992) analysis of shared cooperative agency. Schmid (2014b) also raises a worry about Gilbert’s, and Rovane’s (2004), approaches that they presuppose pre-reflective plural self-awareness. My worry about open expression to jointly commit in the context of Gilbert’s plural subject-account is, similarly, that *both* jointness and commitment presuppose plural subjects, hence cannot account for them. However, neither Petersson nor Schmid, nor anyone else as far as I’m aware, have explored an extensive *positive*, analytic pragmatist, account remotely similar to the present one.

certainly not necessary for plural self- constitution. And if doing anything *jointly* presupposes at least pre-reflective, if transient, plural selves, then to commit jointly, not to mention to *express* joint commitment, can hardly be necessary for the constitution of plural selves. What might be said on Gilbert's behalf is that expressions to jointly commit *makes explicit* to participants to an already pre-reflective plural self *that* they are jointly committed (generally, to be a plural self, or, particularly, to specific beliefs, intentions, and so on). Also, it can be said that if there *isn't* already a plural self, then open expressions to jointly commit as one is a possibility for individuals who already possess a reflectively expressive first-person plural self-perspective – none of which is *necessary* for being a 'We,' a plural self, to begin with.

So, I take it that analytic pragmatism gives us a gradient-metaphor to think of plural selves (Figure 1). According to it, Gilbert's focus, like Searle's, is on a narrow range at the self-expressive plural self-awareness end.<sup>21</sup> Analytic pragmatism, in contrast, suggests an account from which to explicate – or survey – the progressive development along the whole gradient. I say that Searle and Gilbert (and, e.g., Tuomela, and Bratman, though textual evidence hasn't been provided here) focus on a narrow range *close to one end* and not *at one end* of the gradient, because we may think of the gradient as stretching all the way to fourth-stage *logically* self-aware plural selves; plural selves, that is, whose participants can construe and criticize a deontic logic of degrees of plural self-awareness and expression (a stage of plural self-expressiveness implicitly exercised, or attempted, in this paper by uses of "we" accounting for being and saying "'We.'" See also footnote 14).

The present proposal, then, is that analytic pragmatism helps to specify a progressive development of stages of plural self-expression and awareness. Participants to advanced plural selves are engaged in what is now revealed to be bottom-up–top-down dialectical movements: the normative plural self-constitutive know-how implicit in practices of first-stage plural selves pre-reflectively makes and changes pre-reflective plural selves from the ground up, and can – by at least second-stage reflective plural selves – be brought to reflective plural self-awareness through normative ascent and be transformed through what was called normative descent. As implicitly plural self-constitutive normative regularities become accessible to the practice of giving and asking for reasons for being, or not being, changing or conserving, plural self-constitutive normative regularities – for

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<sup>21</sup> For all that has been argued here, to repeat, their accounts aren't wrong or incoherent. Rather, they address only a small (if indeed important) part of what it means to be and speak and live as a 'We.' What they're here reprimanded for, then, isn't that they make implausible claims but for making perhaps plausible claims about too little or, worse, for taking what has thereby been plausibly said to be all or most that needs to be said. Their bedrock is too elevated.

third-stage plural selves – participants to the plural self can, as participants to previous stages of plural selves cannot, top-down regulate who they are by speaking and arguing about it; they can impose and change norms and intentionally violate or enforce them to change them and *thereby* themselves. And so it is that participants to plural selves close to the summit of logically self-explicating plural self-awareness have the potential to themselves climb up and down the mountain (scan the gradient) to survey and sculpt the fine structure of who they are (their conceptions of themselves). They certainly are peculiar. No wonder that it is towards that end of what is now found to be a gradient of stages of plural selves and collectives more generally that so much attention has been spent by the likes of Gilbert and Searle. Our task has been to explicate a new way of conceptualizing how they (and, indeed, we) got there.

## 5 Conclusion

Analytic pragmatism is rarely, if ever, consulted in depth to account for what is involved in being and saying ‘We,’ and what happens between being and saying so. If nothing else, then, something new has here been said.

Admittedly, no argument has been given for the independent plausibility of analytic pragmatism. We’ve only looked at what it might lead us to think about being and saying ‘We.’ If only *that* analytic pragmatism can fruitfully play a role in accounting for plural selves has been shown, that is no small achievement. But, in addition, I’ve wanted to show *how*, in some detail, it can. Analytic pragmatism helps distinguish *and* focus stages of plural self-progression, all with the help of a few core tenets – inferential role semantics, normative pragmatics, and expressivism – in terms of plural self-awareness, expression and transformation (or termination). Not only can we zoom in and focus on each stage separately, but also zoom out and give an overview of the expressively progressive development in which they hang together. Finally, we can make sense of what others have already had to say in terms of what is now visible as such stages.

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