

'Leading Principle' (pub. 20.10.15-17:59). Quote in M. Bergman & S. Paavola (Eds.), *The Commens Dictionary: Peirce's Terms in His Own Words. New Edition*. Retrieved from <http://www.commens.org/dictionary/entry/quote-algebra-logic-4>.

Term: Leading Principle

Quote: A cerebral habit of the highest kind, which will determine what we do in fancy as well as what we do in action, is called a *belief*. The representation to ourselves that we have a specified habit of this kind is called a *judgment*. A belief-habit in its development begins by being vague, special, and meagre; it becomes more precise, general, and full, without limit. The process of this development, so far as it takes place in the imagination, is called *thought*. A judgment is formed; and under the influence of a belief-habit this gives rise to a new judgment, indicating an addition to belief. Such a process is called an *inference*; the antecedent judgment is called the *premise*; the consequent judgment, the *conclusion*; the habit of thought, which determined the passage from the one to the other (when formulated as a proposition), *the leading principle*.

A habit of inference may be formulated in a proposition which shall state that every proposition c , related in a given general way to any true proposition p , is true. Such a proposition is called the *leading principle* of the class of inferences whose validity it implies. When the inference is first drawn, the leading principle is not present to the mind, but the habit it formulates is active in such a way that, upon contemplating the believed premise, by a sort of perception the conclusion is judged to be true.¹ Afterwards, when the inference is subjected to logical criticism, we make a new inference, of which one premise is that leading principle of the former inference, according to which propositions related to one another in a certain way are fit to be premise and conclusion of a valid inference, while another premise is a fact of observation, namely, that the given relation does subsist between the premise and conclusion of the inference under criticism; whence it is concluded that the inference was valid.

¹Though the leading principle itself is not present to the mind, we are generally conscious of inferring on some general principle.

Source: Peirce, C. S. (1880). On the Algebra of Logic. *American Journal of Mathematics*, 3, 15-57.

References: W 4:164-6; CP 3.160, 164

Date of 1880

Quote:

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