

'Leading Principle' (pub. 20.10.15-18:05). 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-leading-principle>.

Term: Leading Principle

Quote: It is of the essence of reasoning that the reasoner should proceed, and should be conscious of proceeding, according to a general habit, or method, which he holds would either (according to the kind of reasoning) always lead to the truth, provided the premisses were true; or, consistently adhered to, would eventually approximate indefinitely to the truth; or would be generally conducive to the ascertainment of truth, supposing there be any ascertainable truth. The effect of this habit or method could be stated in a proposition of which the antecedent should describe all possible premisses upon which it could operate, while the consequent should describe how the conclusion to which it would lead would be determinately related to those premisses. Such a proposition is called the "leading principle" of the reasoning.

Two different reasoners might infer the same conclusion from the same premisses; and yet their proceeding might be governed by habits which would be formulated in different, or even conflicting, leading principles. Only that man's reasoning would be good whose leading principle was true for all possible cases. It is not essential that the reasoner should have a distinct apprehension of the leading principle of the habit which governs his reasoning; it is sufficient that he should be conscious of proceeding according to a general method, and that he should hold that that method is generally apt to lead to the truth. He may even conceive himself to be following one leading principle when, in reality, he is following another, and may consequently blunder in his conclusion. From the effective leading principle, together with the premisses, the propriety of accepting the conclusion in such sense as it is accepted follows necessarily in every case. [—] Leading principles are [...] of two classes; and any leading principle whose truth is implied in the premisses of every inference which it governs is called a "logical" (or, less appropriately, a *formal*) leading principle; while a leading principle whose truth is not implied in the premisses is called a "factual" (or *material*) leading principle.

Source: Peirce, C. S. (1902). Leading Principle. In J. M. Baldwin (Ed.), *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology, Vol. II* (pp. 1-2). London: Macmillan and Co.

References: DPP 2:1; CP 2.589

Date of 1902

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