

WHAT PEIRCE MEANS BY LEADING PRINCIPLES

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C. S. Peirce contributed an article on what he called 'Leading Principle' to Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* of 1901 (reprinted in 2. 588-589)*. He had earlier, in 1880, developed the notion in an article on the algebra of logic for the *American Journal of Mathematics* (reprinted in 3. 154-251). The *Collected Papers* contain several other places in which he treats the same subject. In this note I propose to analyze what he means by a 'leading principle' and to indicate the mediaeval antecedents for the major division that he makes of it.

Peirce introduces the notion of a leading principle to make clear the nature of inference. Representing the general type of inference from premiss to conclusion by the form, ' $P \therefore C$ ', he claims that this passage "takes place according to a habit or rule" (3. 162-163). It is this habit or rule that he calls a 'leading principle'. It is logically good, he goes on to say, "provided it would never (or in case of a probable inference, seldom) lead from a true premiss to a false conclusion". From this it would appear that by a 'leading principle' Peirce means no more than what would now usually be referred to as a 'rule of inference'.

Yet that he does mean something more than this would seem to be indicated by his going on to speak of using the leading principle as a premiss for a new inference (3. 164). Strictly speaking, a rule of inference cannot be a premiss for an inference. Although both have a function as logical statements, they belong, as it were, to different orders. A premiss is a statement *from which* conclusions are drawn and is expressed within a logical system in the object-language of that system. A rule of inference, on the other hand, is a rule-statement *in accord with which* conclusions are drawn and has to be expressed in the meta-language of the system; it is incapable of expression in the object-language of the system because it is a directive stating how the operation of inferring is to be performed within the system; it is a matter of choice.

*Here and henceforth I shall quote Peirce by volume number and paragraph of the *Collected Papers*, full bibliographical data for which is given in the references at the end of this paper.