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(continued)

LEADING OF PROOF — LEADING PRINCIPLE

Leading of Proof: no concise foreign equivalents. The operation bringing up to attention, among propositions admitted to be true, certain relations between them which logically compel the acceptance of a conclusion.

(C.S.P.)

Leading Principle: Ger. *leitendes Prinzip*; Fr. *principe directeur*; Ital. *principio fondamentale*. 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 premises 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 premises upon which it could operate, while the consequent should describe how the conclusion to which it would lead would be determinately related to those premises. Such a proposition is called the 'leading principle' of the reasoning.

Two different reasoners might infer the same conclusion from the same premises; 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 premises, the propriety of accepting the conclusion in such sense as it is accepted follows necessarily in every case. Suppose that the leading principle involves two propositions, L and L' , and suppose that there are three premises, P , P' , P'' ; and let C signify the acceptance of the conclusion, as it is accepted, either as true, or as a legitimate approximation to the truth, or as an assumption conducive to the ascertainment of the truth. Then, from the five premises L , L' , P , P' , P'' , the inference to C would be necessary; but it would not be so from L , L' , P' , P'' alone, for, if it were, P would not really act as a premise at all. From P' and P'' as the sole premises, C would follow, if the leading principle consisted of L , L' , and P . Or from the four premises L' , P , P' , P'' , the same conclusion would follow if L alone were the leading principle. What, then, could be the leading principle of the inference of C from all five propositions L , L' , P , P' , P'' , taken as premises? It would be something already implied in those premises; and it might be almost any general proposition so implied. Leading principles are, therefore, of two classes; and any leading principle whose truth is implied in the premises 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 premises