

Carnap on meaning and the justification of inference rules

March 14, 2011

Up to now, in constructing a language, the procedure has usually been, first to assign a meaning to the fundamental mathematico-logical symbols, and then to consider what sentences and inferences are seen to be logically correct in accordance with this meaning. Since the assignment of the meaning is expressed in words, and is, in consequence, inexact, no conclusion arrived at in this way can very well be otherwise than inexact and ambiguous. The connection will only become clear when approached from the opposite direction: let any postulates and any rules of inference be chosen arbitrarily; then this choice, whatever it may be, will determine what meaning is to be assigned to the fundamental logical symbols. By this method, also, the conflict between the divergent points of view on the problem of the foundations of mathematics disappears. For language, in its mathematical form, can be constructed according to the preferences of any one of the points of view represented; so that no question of justification arises at all, but only the question of the syntactical consequences to which one or other of the choices leads, including the question of non-contradiction. (From *The Logical Syntax of Language*, trans. Amethe Smeaton, London: Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner and Co. Ltd., 1937, xv.)