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Curry's Formalism as Structuralism

H. B. Curry is known for a philosophy of mathematics which he called "formalism". However, most people who know anything of his philosophy identify it with an early version which dates to 1939, relatively early in his career. In this early version, Curry proposed that mathematics be defined as the "science of formal systems", where he had in mind a definition of formal system somewhat different from the usual notion. Among the criticisms of this proposed definition are the suggestion that under this definition there could have been no mathematics before there were formal systems, a little more than a century ago.

In this paper, I will quote from Curry's later work to show that this criticism does not apply to his mature philosophy, and that his mature version of formalism is a form of structuralism.