

Modern Czech logic: Vopěnka and Hájek, history and background

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Two key figures of modern Czech logic are Petr Vopěnka and Petr Hájek. Petr Hájek is a worldwide known logician: he is an author or coauthor of numerous papers and several monographs, an active member of editorial boards and program committees, and a person who has thousands of citations in Web of Science. On the other hand, Petr Vopěnka is less well known, probably because he did not care much about traveling and attending conferences. Some of his papers were published only in Czech or in Russian. However, he is a deep thinker and an author of striking and influential ideas. Petr Hájek always named Vopěnka as his teacher, although his official thesis advisor was someone else. During the 1960s Vopěnka ran a seminar devoted to classical set theory, which remarkably contributed to the theory of independence results. Its participants were in competitive contact with the most prominent set theorists. Vopěnka by himself is a promising subject of historical research.

We will briefly list some of the ideas and results of Vopěnka and Hájek and of their school; we will discuss how the interaction between them and with others determined their work, and how philosophical ideas, personal and even political circumstances influenced their mathematical thinking. In some sense almost all Czech logicians were (are) formalists. However, none of them wanted to be an ideological leader, and they always let mathematically sound results influence and change their philosophical views and motivations.