

Proofs and Mathematics” (*Mathematics Magazine* 53 (1980), 131–138. He is perhaps best known for the anthology which he edited, *New Directions in the Philosophy of Mathematics* (Boston/Basel/ Stuttgart, Birkhäuser, 1985; Birkhäuser Boston, 1986). The latter includes a reprint of “The Four-Color Problem and Its Philosophical Significance”, which is undoubtedly his best-known and most important article on the philosophical significance of the use of computers in mathematical theorem proving.

PAUL ERDÖS (1913 – 1996)

Reprinted, with revisions, from
History of Logic Newsletter, no. 26 (November – December 1996), 3–4
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PAUL ERDÖS died in Warsaw, Poland on Friday afternoon, 20 September 1996 while attending a combinatorics seminar. The doctor at the hospital in Warsaw reported that in the early morning of that day, Erdős had suffered a heart attack in his hotel room and called for medical assistance. This was followed by a fatal second massive heart attack that same afternoon.

Erdős, who was born in Budapest, Hungary on 26 March 1913, received his Ph.D. from the University of Budapest in 1934. His posts included the Technion in Haifa, Israel, the University of Colorado, and the University of Budapest. He was also a member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

Erdős was best known as an international globe-trotting peripatetic mathematician who offered monetary awards for the solution of problems which he posed, and whose chief specialties were number theory and combinatorics. During his lifetime, he published over 1500 papers, and he worked at one time or another with some 460 collaborators or coauthors. Although Erdős did virtually no work specifically in logic, he did work on Ramsey theory in set-theoretic combinatorics. He also knew a number of interesting and important logicians, including in particular Kurt Gödel, and there are four anecdotes connected with or told by Erdős that are of especial interest to historians of logic.

The first anecdote concerns John von Neumann, who, Erdős opined in his interview with Gerald L. Alexanderson for *Mathematical People* [Alexanderson 1985, 84], ‘was very impressive to talk with. He was very quick.’ Erdős admitted that he did not know von Neumann’s work well, but knew that a number of younger mathematicians, with whom he had some contact, such as [Endre] Szemerédi and [Shaharon] Shelah, were following up on von

Neumann's work. In the interview, Erdős, regrettably, did not discuss what this work might be.

The second anecdote, now also well known, was likewise recounted by Erdős in his interview with Alexanderson for *Mathematical People* [Alexanderson 1985, 84]; Erdős said: 'You know that Brouwer, the Great Dutch mathematician, was also a businessman, as was an uncle of mine. Brouwer asked him, when he (my uncle) introduced himself, "Are you a relative of Paul Erdős, the young Hungarian mathematician?"'

The third anecdote concerns Gödel. Erdős and Gödel knew each other well. Erdős recounted [Alexanderson 1985, 89] that he used to talk with Gödel 'a great deal. He was certainly a remarkable intellect. He understood everything, even what he didn't work with. It is strange how little he published. He could have certainly done more things.' Erdős noted [Alexanderson 1985, 89] that Gödel 'had a proof that the axiom of choice is independent. And there was a rumor that he had a proof of the independence of the continuum hypothesis before Cohen. I asked him and he said, "No, it is not true." He had a proof for the independence of the axiom of choice, but he didn't like the proof.'

The fourth anecdote also concerns Gödel, but may not be very well known. As I recall, it was at the Third Southeastern Logic Symposium, held on 7 March 1987 at the College of Charleston, Charleston, South Carolina, that Erdős spoke of the following quick encounter that he had once had with Gödel at an airport while both were waiting for a flight. The discussion turned to Gödel's incompleteness theorem and its significance. As Erdős told it (as recorded by [Anellis, n.d.]), Gödel said, "half seriously, half jokingly: "In number theory everything will turn out to be decidable; in set theory, everything will turn out to be either trivial or decidable."

References

G. L. ALEXANDERSON. 1985. *Interview with Paul Erdős*, in D. J. Albers & G. L. Alexanderson (editors), *Mathematical people: Profiles and interviews* (Boston/Basel/Stuttgart, Birkhäuser), 85–91. (With photograph of Erdős, p. 82).

I. H. ANELLIS. n.d. *Erdős*, 1 p. ms. note.

RICHARD SYLVAN

RICHARD SYLVAN died on 26 June 1996. A philosopher who carried out his work in Australia and New Zealand and who held a post at the Australian National University, Sylvan's work included the historical and