Petr Vopěnka
Biography

Petr Vopěnka was born in Prague in 1935. He completed his grammar-school education at Ledeč na Sázavou in 1953 and was enrolled in the Mathematics and Physics Faculty of Charles University, where he was the last student of Professor Eduard Čech, who had a marked influence on his mathematical thinking. After graduating from the faculty he was engaged to teach there. He qualified as a lecturer in 1964 and was appointed senior lecturer in mathematics the following year; he was made Doctor of Science in 1967. Although his appointment as professor was ratified by the Academic Board of Charles University in 1968, he was prevented from taking it up until 1990. In the period 1966-1969 he was Vice Dean of the Mathematics and Physics Faculty of Charles University and head of the Department of Mathematical Logic (abolished in 1970). He educated two generations of mathematical logicians, some of whom went on to become distinguished scholars at home and abroad. Although the remained at the faculty during the 1970-1989 period (thanks to the intervention of the distinguished Russian mathematician, Academician P. S. Alexandrov), he was humiliated and prevented from attending conferences abroad (unable even to accept an invitation to Poland). During the 1980s, he organised a well-attended public philosophical seminar at the Mathematics and Physics Faculty, and invited philosophers who had no hope of working publicly during the normalisation period – e.g. Zdeněk Neubauer, Radim Palouš, Petr Rezek, Stanislav Sousedík and Jiří Polívka – to lecture at them. In January 1990, he was elected Vice-Rector of Charles University and was Minister of Education 1990-1992. In 1990, he revived the chair of mathematical logic and philosophy of mathematics at the Maths. and Physics Faculty (although it was abolished as soon as Prof. Vopěnka reached his 65th birthday). In 2000, Petr Vopěnka was appointed Professor Emeritus of Charles University. On 28th October 1998 President Václav Havel awarded him a state medal (for services rendered).

Petr Vopěnka is one of the world's leading mathematicians. Having initially devoted himself to topology he moved on to the theory of sets and mathematical logic. In the early seventies, he established the Alternative Set Theory (i.e. alternative to the classical Cantor theory), which he subsequently developed in a series of articles and monographs (e.g. Mathematics in the Alternative Set Theory, 1979, or the more extensive Introduction to Mathematics in the Alternative Set Theory 1989). In the sphere of world mathematics literature, Vopěnka's name is associated with many first-class mathematical achievements (mathematical theorems, techniques and structures). Since the mid-eighties he has concerned himself with philosophical questions of mathematics (particularly vis-à-vis Husserlian phenomenology). This has resulted in four books "Rozpravy s geometrií" (Discussions with geometry), which were subsequently published in 2000 as a compendium under the title of "Úhelný kámen evropské vzdělanosti a vědy" (Cornerstone of European scholarship and science). Their arguments are taken up in a further series of books, still incomplete, dealing with set theory, the fortunes of mathematics in the twentieth century and underlying foundations of science; so far, two books have been published:
Podivuhodný květ českého baroka (The remarkable flower of Czech Baroque), 1998, and Meditace o základech vědy (Meditations on the foundations of science), 2001.