

(07) BILL HOWARD - PAUL HALMOS

Subject: Halmos
From: Howard, William A.
To: robtully;
Cc: fthulin
Date: Wednesday, 27 July 2016, 8:41

Dear Rob,

Re your mention of the tension between Stan and Paul Halmos (Winter 1966 section of your memoir): it goes back to (at least) the fall of 1953, when Halmos was giving a course on a method of subsuming Gödel's Completeness Theorem into a variant of Tarski's cylindrical algebras. Stan's reaction to this was: "Paul is trying to destroy logic by subsuming it into ordinary mathematics. In this, he is being egged on by Saunders Mac Lane."

Also, in the fall of 1953, Jim Dekker was giving a seminar on recursion theory. I was not interested in Paul's course or Dekker's seminar but I often came around when the seminar let out. One day, I heard Halmos down the hall say: "There go the logic cadets." Maybe he was annoyed that most of the seminar participants were ignoring his course. Also, he told me that he thought that logic attracted some pretty weird people; e.g., Stan, Smullyan, Myhill.

Re your remark in Winter 1966 section, "Logic students included Bill Howard, Ray Smullyan, and Anil Nerode": Michael Morley should be included. When I mentioned to him, in 2004, "We had an exciting logic group at U. of C. in the 1950s," his reply was, "We had logic students but no logic professors."

As for Halmos' book (1960), 'Naïve Set Theory', I did not understand why Stan's reaction against the book was so negative. I seem to remember him saying: "It's fraudulent. He does not know what he is talking about." My explanation now would be twofold: (1) Stan did not like Halmos very much, and (2) he thought that the book was unphilosophical. In reply to #2, I would say that it was not meant to be philosophical; it was just an exposition, meant for a certain audience. Apparently, even today, this audience has found it helpful:

http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/558194.Naive_Set_Theory

Halmos was Errett Bishop's thesis adviser. Stan talked to Bishop a lot about his plans for a new university. I got to know Bishop pretty well. Jonathan got his Ph.D. under Bishop in 1973. Small world!

I am sending a cc. to my colleague Fred Thulin, who is interested in these matters. Reminder to Fred: The memoir, on Google, is "Stanley Tennenbaum: American Original."

Best,

Bill