

Re: provenance of truth tables

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From: Mitch Harris (harrisq_at_tcs.inf.tu-dresden.de)

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Robin Chapman wrote:

> *Mitch Harris wrote:*

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>

>>*Robin Chapman <rjc@ivorynosspamtower.freemove.co.uk> wrote:*

>>

>>>*Did Ludo contribute anything of value to mathematics?*

>>

>>*Supposedly he was the originator of the truth table (in Tractatus*

>>*Logico-Philosophicus). (I believe that Post had published on truth*

>>*functions and truth tables previously but Wittgenstein is more commonly*

>>*mentioned as the originator).*

>

> *So you are saying that he is often wrongly attributed as originator*

> *of the truth-table ?*

Yes, and I think mostly by the philosophy community (at least that is where I got the impression).

I think it is undeniable that the Tractatus is the primary source (section 5.101) for its popularization in that community. And Wittgenstein, in the introduction, explicitly disavows any claim to originality (though he disavows it in what I would consider to be a very crankish manner):

"...what I have written here makes no claim to novelty in detail, and the reason why I give no sources is that it is a matter of indifference to me whether the thoughts that I have had have been anticipated by someone else.

I will only mention that I am indebted to Frege's great works and of the writings of my friend Mr Bertrand Russell for much of the stimulation of my thoughts."

The fact that he mentions Frege, more likely to be thought of as (at least one of) an originator, could be considered as much of a reference as one could expect.

comp.theory: Re: provenance of truth tables

More tangible authority for these opinions can be read here (at the Historia Mathematica mailing list archives):

http://sunsite.utk.edu/math_archives/.http/hypermail/historia/apr00/0117.html

Executive summary:

- Frege, Peirce, and Schroeder are considered to be the originators of truth functions
- the graphic method of a table of these values come from Lucasiewicz, Post, and Wittgenstein independently