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The Thompson groups

In the 1960s, Richard Thompson (and, independently, Freyd and Heller) discovered three groups, F , T and V , with several remarkable properties. F , in particular, turns out to be one of those structures that appears unexpectedly in many diverse parts of mathematics. It also has a very natural and simple categorical description: it is the symmetry group of the 'generic idempotent object'. I will explain what this means, how it differs from Freyd and Heller's earlier description, and how it belongs to the large family of existing descriptions of free categories with structure.

Joint work with Marcelo Fiore.