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In Memoriam

Nicolaas Godfried (Nico) van Kampen (1921–2013)

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Nico van Kampen was a man of exceptional brilliance. He was born in Leiden on June 22nd, 1921 and belongs to the great physicists of the second half of the previous century. He graduated in Groningen with his uncle Frits Zernike, Nobel Prize laureate in 1952, and in 1952 he received from Leiden University, under the supervision of Hendrik Kramers, his Ph.D. with honors. As a student of Hendrik Kramers he studied the renormalization of the interaction between light and electrons. Later, during a stay at the Institute of Advanced Studies in Princeton, he analyzed the Landau damping in a plasma and discovered the so-called "van Kampen modes". Moving to Utrecht University, where he became a professor in theoretical nuclear physics in 1958, he continued in statistical physics. Subjects he discussed included the condensation of a classical gas with long-range interactions, the Ito versus Stratonovich approach in stochastic differential equations, the elimination of fast variables, and the (famous Ω) expansion of the master equation.

He wrote many important publications including the book *Theoretical Methods in Plasma Physics* published in 1967. His masterpiece is no doubt the book *Stochastic Processes in Physics and Chemistry* of 1981/1992, which people working in this area still consider as the bible of the field. It is dedicated to Frits Zernike, who was, besides Hendrik Kramers, one of Nico's great examples. The book in particular excels in clarity, after having been tested on generations of students in his excellent classes on "Mathematical Physics".

In his later years, especially after his early retirement, Nico spent much of his time and effort on the foundations of quantum mechanics. He was proud of his no-nonsense approach in his "ten theorems about quantum mechanical measurements", of which theorem I reads: "Quantum mechanics works" and theorem IV: "Whoever endows the wavefunction Ψ with more meaning than is needed for computing observable phenomena is responsible for the consequences".

Nico had a sharp mind and in many seminars he was the first to ask questions. In the canteen of the Utrecht University students would flock around him to grasp an insight from the grand old master. He was also a welcome guest at dinner parties and celebrations, where he would impress everyone present with his observations

and anecdotes, especially about other great physicists that he had encountered. He wrote a book in Dutch battling against pseudo-science. Even in his last days his mind remained sharp.

Nico had an equally sharp sense of humor. At the celebration of the 1999 Nobel prizes for his nephew Gerard 't Hooft and long-time colleague Martinus Veltman, he was confronted with the question: "And what about you, Nico", his immediate reply was, in English although the question was posed in Dutch: "Always a bridesmaid, never a bride".

One of the many duties Nico had was being an honorary editor of *Fluctuation and Noise Letters.* He also received a number of important prizes, such as an honorary doctorate from RWTH Aachen in 1981, the Royal Shell Prize in 1988, and the Physica Prize in 1996. He became a member of the Royal Academy of Sciences in 1973 and was a loyal attender of their meetings. Those visits he would finish in a manner known only to few: combine Nico the physicist with Nico the person and take a beer in a cafe along a canal in Amsterdam.

Nico will be fondly remembered by his many friends, colleagues and students.

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