INTERVIEW WITH HANS KAMP*  

Alice ter Meulen and Klaus von Heusinger

AtM: First on your background: you grew up in the Netherlands, where you got your bachelor's degree in physics in Leiden and studied logic with Evert Beth in Amsterdam.

HK: When I went to Leiden University in 1958, I wanted to study theoretical physics. As the completion of my undergraduate studies got nearer, I felt an urge to do something different for a year before disappearing behind the doors of the Institute for Theoretical Physics. Dick de Jongh, who was also studying mathematics and physics in Leiden, had told me about Professor Evert Beth who had founded his Institute for Formal Logic and the Foundations of Science at the University of Amsterdam just a couple of years before. Dick himself had decided to go there to do a Masters degree and then, eventually, a Ph.D. Dick whetted my appetite so much that we ended up going to Amsterdam together. As far as I was concerned, this was just a kind of timeout to explore a world of science I might never belong to in earnest. But, as the year at Beth's Institute progressed, I was offered a student assistantship and became increasingly integrated into the research group Beth had established. So the temptation to stay and make formal logic and its applications the subject of my further academic work became harder and harder to resist. In the end I gave in and decided to stay.

During those years in Amsterdam I developed a strong interest in the relation between logic and language, one of Beth's many interests. Open as he was to new developments, he organized, during my second year, a seminar on Noam Chomsky's book Syntactic Structures, which had just appeared, but was already widely hailed as heralding a completely different way of looking at grammatical structure.¹ Young linguists also participated, among them Albert Kraak, Wim Klooster, Pieter Seuren, Hugo Brand Corstius, some

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of whom had been told by their more established colleagues not even to consider Chomsky's new work (or else ...), so we were all sworn to some kind of secrecy as to their presence. For me this was an early opportunity, rare in Europe in those days, to become familiar with the basic ideas of generative grammar. Beth did not only have an abiding interest in the relation between formal logic and natural language, but also in its relation to computation and thought. These interests came together in the project for which Beth had been able to find a sponsor in Euratom, the European joint project for the development of peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The project's aim was to explore the possibilities of using Beth's Semantic Tableau Method—then still quite new—as the basis for the development of automated systems capable of effective and psychologically plausible logical reasoning. The computer was to find proofs for deductively valid inferences using the tableau-based deduction algorithms that the group was to design and make available in machine-readable format. Being part of that group was an important factor that kept me in Amsterdam, although I don't think I ever contributed anything to this project. But I didn't work any less hard than the others. The project provided a wonderful opportunity to be part of a larger unit with a clear scientific purpose and a strongly felt, joint commitment. Besides, it provided a certain material comfort.

During my second year in Amsterdam I met Richard Montague, who had chosen to spend part of his sabbatical year there. (The other part was spent with Andrzej Mostowski in Warsaw.) The reason why I got to know Montague better than I otherwise would have had little to do with logic. Besides a superb logician, Montague was also a very accomplished organist. Someone at my father’s office happened to be a relative of the verger of the St. Laurens church in Alkmaar, the site of one of Holland's most famous organs, at that time already used for widely hailed recordings by highly regarded organists. Since it was within the verger's discretion to decide who would be admitted to the organ outside regular services, it was possible to arrange for Montague to come along to Alkmaar and try it out. The event was a very big thing for me and I think it also meant something to him. In any case, he did remember me when I wrote to him a couple of years later, which led to my being accepted eventually as a Ph.D. student in the Philosophy Department of UCLA, where Montague was a professor.

I got my Masters in Philosophy and Logic from Beth's Institute about a year and a half after Beth had died—he died during my third year in Amsterdam. The topic of my master's thesis was a paper by Alfred Tarski on the calculus of formal, deductively closed systems, *The Calculus of Deductive Systems*, in which he develops a type of algebra whose points are deductive