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Hermann Heineken (1936 – 2026)

Bernhard Amberg



Professor Dr. Hermann Heineken, from the Julius–Maximilians–Universität of Würzburg passed away on April 4, 2026, at the age of 90. With his passing, the international mathematical community and the field of group theory in particular loses a distinguished scholar and an inspiring academic teacher.

Born in Hamburg on March 5, 1936, Hermann Heineken studied Mathematics and Physics at the universities in Hamburg, Marburg and Frankfurt from 1954 to 1959. He completed his studies with the state examination of higher education in Frankfurt and subsequently became an assistant to Reinhold Baer at the University of Frankfurt.

Already in the early stages of his career, he impressed by finding elegant and in some instances unexpectedly simple solutions to problems considered highly challenging by his mentor, Professor Reinhold Baer. Heineken's thesis addressed significant problems in group theory leading to his first scientific publications. Heineken became a true specialist in sophisticated commutator calculations and the study of Engel elements.

As an assistant in Frankfurt, Heineken was a vital member of the "Baer group", where he mentored and motivated many young students in their research.

Heineken earned his doctorate in 1961 with a thesis titled "Engel elements of length three"and completed his habilitation in 1966 with

a thesis on "Groups whose commutator structures satisfy certain closure properties". During this period he also served as a visiting professor at the University of Cambridge (England) and the University of Notre Dame (USA).

After working as a lecturer at the University of Erlangen, he accepted a professorship at the University of Würzburg in 1973, where he remained a central figure in the department for decades.

His academic work focused on algebra, specifically group theory. As a renowned expert in both finite and infinite groups, he published about 130 scientific papers on various problems especially for soluble and generalized soluble groups. A notable highlight of his career was the construction of the first infinite metabelian p-group with trivial center (a joint work with Ismael Mohamed in 1968). In recognition of their importance, these groups are now known as Heineken–Mohamed groups. Throughout his career, he supervised 26 Ph.D. theses.

Through extensive international collaborations spanning England, Italy, Spain, Russia, Ukraine, and the United States, he earned global respect. He regularly attended mathematical conferences and frequently invited distinguished colleagues to Würzburg to foster intellectual exchange. Known for his friendliness and genuine interest in the work of others, he collaborated with approximately 45 coauthors.

Beyond research Professor Heineken was deeply committed to academic life. He organized colloquia and encouraged regional collaboration through regular meetings between algebraists in Erlangen, Freiburg, München and Würzburg, most notably the biannual series "Groups and topological groups". He also took an active role in university governance, serving twice as dean of his faculty and as a member of the university senate.

Colleagues, students, and friends will always remember Hermann Heineken as a dedicated mathematician, a thoughtful mentor, and a bridge-builder within the international scientific community. His legacy will endure through his contributions to algebra and the many scholars he influenced.

Bernhard Amberg