

A beautiful proof of a probably useless theorem.

by

Edsger W.Dijkstra and W.H.J.Feijen

Let a <sup>positive</sup>~~non-negative~~ continuous function be defined on the Euclidean plane, such that its integral taken over the whole plane is finite, say = 1. Then there exists a set of rectangular axes such that the four integrals of the function, taken over the four quadrants respectively, are all equal to each other.

For a fixed orientation of the cross we can first move it in a direction perpendicular to one axis, such that eventually the surface integrals taken over the half planes at both sides of that one axis are equal to each other, a state of affairs that is not destroyed by moving thereafter the cross in a direction perpendicular to the other axis until also for that other axis the surface integrals at both sides are equal to each other. Such a so-called "balanced position" always exists and is uniquely determined by the orientation of the cross because the function integrated is <sup>positive</sup>~~non-negative~~. In a balanced position the surface integrals taken over opposite quadrants are equal: if they are both  $\frac{1}{4} + \alpha$ , then the other two must each be  $\frac{1}{4} - \alpha$ .

While keeping the relation "the cross is in a balanced position" invariant, the cross is now slowly rotated. The continuously changing value of the surface integral, taken over the quadrant encompassed by two chosen half-axes, that was originally  $= \frac{1}{4} + \alpha$ , must have been at least once  $= \frac{1}{4}$  before we have rotated the cross over more than a right angle, for after a rotation over a right angle the cross has returned to its original balanced position, in which the continuously observed surface integral has the value  $\frac{1}{4} - \alpha$ .

dr.Edsger W.Dijkstra  
BURROUGHS  
Plataanstraat 5  
NUENEN - 4565  
The Netherlands

ir.W.H.J.Feijen  
Department of Mathematics  
Technological University  
P.O.Box 513  
EINDHOVEN  
The Netherlands