The Divine Proportion

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Using simple mathematical formulas, most as basic as Pythagoras's theorem and requiring only a very limited knowledge of mathematics, Professor Huntley explores the fascinating relationship between geometry and aesthetics. Poetry, patterns like Pascal's triangle, philosophy, psychology, music, and dozens of simple mathematical figures are enlisted to show that the "divine proportion" or "golden ratio" is a feature of geometry and analysis which awakes answering echoes in the human psyche. When we judge a work of art aesthetically satisfying, according to his formulation, we are making it conform to a pattern whose outline is laid down in simple geometrical figures; and it is the analysis of these figures which forms the core of Professor Huntley's book.
For the philosopher, scientist, poet, art historian, music listener, artist, as well as the general reader who wants to understand more about the fascinating properties of numbers, this is a beautifully written, exciting account of the search for a naturally manifested aesthetic that has occupied man since he first asked the question "why?"
"This is a delightful book to read. . . . It wanders here and there through some of the most attractive byways of simple mathematics, returning always to the oddities and pleasures of the golden section. This is a browser's book — a happy, untidy traveling or bedside book for those who know how to enjoy the charm of numbers and shapes." — Dr. J. Bronowski, The Salk Institute.

The Divine Proportion Details

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From Reader Review The Divine Proportion for online ebook

Sue Seibert says

Still reading, fascinating so far...

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david says

want to give it a three because there are a handful of not so not preposterous implications and assumptions the author makes. they are tiring. but the book is still good. insightful.

Michael says

I'm giving this book two stars even though I was unable to finish it (which would usually mean a one-star rating), because I genuinely enjoyed the part I was able to understand. Somewhere in the middle, the math got too complex for me to follow, and I had to give up. I suspect that, if I read this book in connection with a class and with a teacher that was going through the concepts, I would have been able to finish, but it would have been taxing.

In that sense, I'm sorry to say, the author failed to achieve what he intended. He claims that an attentive reader with minimal mathematical training should be able to follow all the way through, although not without effort. I made the effort and nonetheless was unable to.

The book is written as a celebration of "Phi," the irrational number that produces the "golden ratio" of the Greeks, and which is represented in the fibonacci sequence and myriad aesthetic constructs in art and nature. The introduction is a loving homage to mathematics and mathematical aesthetics. It is also crucial to the design of a properly-proportioned pentagram, which is at least partial explanation of how this book has found itself on occult reading lists. The author does have a bit of a spiritual agenda, as he acknowledges in the introduction, although it is doubtful whether he would agree with those of some of the groups which have adopted his work. I would say that, if you enjoy the intersection between philosophy, science, and nature, this book is worth a try, although you may find as I did that it gets to be a bit much.

A. J. McMahon says

This book is an investigation into beauty with special reference to the irrational number phi, which was called by Kepler the divine proportion, hence the title of the book. I should confess a personal bias at this point as H. E. Huntley was my maternal grandfather (he had two daughters, Rosemary and Alison; Rosemary was my mother). I only met him twice as a boy as we lived on different continents but I read his unpublished memoirs later on in which he spoke of one of his earliest memories: an uncle had placed a coiled wood-shaving next to his cot and he was transfixed by the beauty of this object. Beauty became a fixed interest for him later in life and this book represents the culmination of a lifetime's meditation on this topic. He was a devout Christian who decided that God had placed beauty in the world as a lure for humanity to seek the

divine but at the same time he was a Professor of Physics who had to reconcile faith and science. Some reviewers have commented that the mathematics of this book is too hard for the non-mathematical reader and I must admit that I can't follow all of the mathematical argumentation either. I take more after literature than mathematics myself (having just published my debut novel, The Last Suitor, by A. J. McMahon). However, you don't have to understand every detail of the maths in order to understand the significance which Prof Huntley attributes to the divine proportion. His central goal throughout is to try to understand something of the nature of beauty and why we respond to it. In this sense his book is as accessible to non-mathematicians as to mathematicians. This book is for everyone.

Esteban del Mal says

A rationalist's wet dream.

Alex Weinle says

Huntley's review of beauty in mathematics suffers a little from his tremendously stuffy tone and repetitious, near identical quotations. That being said this is a great investigation and what he fails to provide in literary inspiration he more than makes up for in examples of the recurrence of themes of phi.

You'll never look at a piece of A4 paper in the same light again.

Wendy says

Reminded me of why I love math so much. Beautiful, beautiful introduction.

J Campbell says

Interesting book, though the great pains used to develop phi in many of the examples feels a bit contrived. Reading this did reveal how weak my geometric education has been. I had to look up a lot of the geometric proofs used by the author.

Trickey says

While the majority of the "proofs" in this book are beyond my grasp of mathematical concepts, the dicussion between aesthetics and math is quite interesting.

Christine Cordula Dantas says

A book written with deep passion, alongside an equally profound, rational exposition on the theme of mathematical beauty. Enjoyable, clear— a fascinating book not only for interested readers, but also for those who just wish to gain a sense of aesthetic appreciation in mathematics. An amazing selection of detailed examples is presented, including examples found in Nature. Those who are able to follow the mathematical details will gain a sense of vertigo on the profound connections between the golden section and Fibonacci sequence. I highly recommend this book, whatever the reader's mathematical knowledge. It is particularly great for young students, and mathematical olympiad contestants at the adequate level. Even those who can't follow the mathematical details will enjoy the contents at some level. 5/5 stars.