



EULER BOOK PRIZE

THE Euler Book Prize is awarded annually to the author of an outstanding book about mathematics. The Prize is intended to recognize authors of exceptionally well-written books with a positive impact on the public's view of mathematics and to encourage the writing of such books. The Euler Prize, established in 2005, is given every year at a national meeting of the Association beginning in 2007, the 300th anniversary of the birth of Leonhard Euler. This award also honors Virginia and Paul Halmos, whose generosity made the award possible.

CITATION

Francis Su and Christopher Jackson

Harvey Mudd College

Mathematics for Human Flourishing, with reflections by Christopher Jackson, Yale University Press (2020)

While many authors have presented compelling cases for the beauty and utility of mathematics, *Mathematics for Human Flourishing* takes a different tack, presenting mathematics as a discipline that has the power to transform lives and speak to the very core of what it means to be human.

Su's writing artfully blends personal narrative with scholarly perspectives and mathematical problems that challenge the reader to engage in their own mathematical journey as the book unfolds. As powerful as Su's narrative is, his thesis is driven home in dramatic fashion through the included writings of Christopher Jackson, whose own journey led him to discover the transformative power of mathematics from behind prison walls.

In the conclusion of the book, Su encourages his readers, writing: "I hope you now never feel like saying, 'I'm not a math person,' because you are a human person, and you can see how doing math is tightly bound to being human." He hopes that his readers will "speak about mathematics with others as a vitally human endeavor, grounded in basic desires that we all share, and elevated by virtues to which we can all aspire."

Su and Jackson's book is well-positioned to accomplish these lofty goals. Indeed, if taken to heart, *Mathematics for Human Flourishing* will transform the reader's conception of what it means to do mathematics, to apply mathematics, and to find mathematics beautiful.

Biographical Note

Francis Su writes about the dignity of human beings and the wonder of mathematical teaching. He is the Benediktsson-Karwa Professor of Mathematics at Harvey Mudd College, a former MAA president, and currently serves as an AMS vice-president. His research is in geometric combinatorics and he has co-authored numerous papers with undergraduates. In 2013, he received the MAA Haimo Award for distinguished teaching of mathematics. He authors the popular Math Fun Facts website and is the creator of @mathfeed, a math news aggregator on Twitter. Besides the *'Flourishing'* book, his recent projects include a linear algebra course for the Teaching Company and an IBL topology text with Michael Starbird.

Biographical Note

Christopher Jackson is an avid reader and thinker. Although mistakes as a teen landed him in federal prison 14 years ago, the study of mathematics, politics, and philosophy, among other subjects, helped him turn his life around. Within math, he has worked his way from algebra texts to calculus. Lately, he has been learning linear algebra and topology and is currently reading *Elements of Pure and Applied Mathematics*. His favorite area of math is analysis. He works in the education department at the Coleman federal prison in Florida and has helped over 50 inmates so far learn math to get their GEDs. His hobbies include studying, reading, working out, and keeping current with world events. He has a goal of using his experiences to get people excited about math education in particular and also education in general.

Response from Francis Su

The *'Flourishing'* book had its roots in my own journey of discouragement and wrestling with the fact that what I loved most about math was often absent from the way it is practiced and taught. As math educators, we would love for the public to see math differently, and yet we do little to change an educational system that rewards elitism and discourages those who don't fit a certain mold. We've stripped away the human aspects of math from our evaluation of mathematical potential. Many have helped me see this, most especially my friend Christopher Jackson. Discussing ideas with him has been a real joy, and I have learned so much by seeing math and life through his eyes. I am also more convinced than ever that if we could truly see the dignity and potential in each human being, we would not be locking away teenagers with long sentences over small crimes. I wish to thank the many people who read drafts of the book, my wife Natalie for her steadfast support, and the MAA for valuing mathematical exposition. I feel grateful to have had this opportunity to shape public dialogue about what math is, who it's for, and why everyone should learn it.

Response from Christopher Jackson

Mathematics has always been present in my life (I was told that I was “good” at mathematics from an early age through my early teens until my life took a change in course). After being put into a situation where I could stop and reflect, I found my love for mathematics when I realized that mathematics was a science about ideas and the application of ideas. I would like to thank the MAA for recognizing the ideas of my friend Francis Su and myself with this award. Ideas, when deeply digested, can change perspectives and the actions that come with them. I would like to thank Francis for listening to me and talking to me amongst other things, but especially for encouraging me to stick with and follow my ideas. In a lot of our correspondence and in some used for the book, I usually considered myself “rambling” or saying something half insightful and half off the wall, but he always seemed to convince me otherwise. I have been blessed to have so many people come through my life who have given me insight, pushed me to better myself, or have given me opportunities even if I didn’t take advantage of the opportunities at the time. Reflecting on those events allowed me to become better down the line. I’m also appreciative of those who’ve allowed me to help them, because in attempting to help others, I was ultimately able to help myself, and I am appreciative of all support from every source from which it comes. Thank you.