

Review of The Golden Ratio

It is unfortunate that the editors of the *Notices* chose to allocate four full pages to a biased and self-serving “review” of a book intended for a lay audience. Rather than presenting an overview of Mario Livio’s 304-page book *The Golden Ratio* (*Notices*, March 2005), together with thoughtful commentary, George Markowsky seemed more intent on promoting his own 1992 College Mathematics Journal article “Misconceptions about the Golden Ratio”. Much of the review focuses on repeated claims that Livio did not sufficiently acknowledge that article: [Livio] “closely parallels my paper but does not cite the paper either in the text or in the notes to the text”, “does not reference my paper”, “does not quote my conclusion”, “follows my paper closely without giving any attribution”, “no citations are given to my work”, etc. Markowsky finally admits, in the penultimate paragraph, that “Livio is aware of my paper and quotes it in

various places, [but] it is not even mentioned in the notes for” Chapter 3. Apparently, one of Markowsky’s main complaints is that his CMJ paper was simply not cited often enough—of course, his review compensated for that with more than a dozen references to his own paper.

The fault is not with Dr. Markowsky, who is certainly entitled to his opinion. Rather, the blame for publishing such an unfair review lies squarely with the editors. They should have questioned the objectivity of such an obviously malicious review that accuses the book’s author of doing “a disservice to mathematics” and of “sloppy scholarship”, and says that the author “seems interested in spawning some new myths”, makes “dubious claims”, cites a “ridiculous formula”, and “repeats a lot of nonsense”. *The Golden Ratio* won Livio the 2003 Italian “Peano Prize” (<http://www.dm.unito.it/mathesis/ppeano2003.html>), and the 2004 “International Pythagoras Prize” (<http://143.225.237.3/News/Premio%20internazionale%20Pitagora.htm>) for the best book on mathematics (the same year Andrew Wiles won the IPP for mathematical achievement), and the *Notices*’ readers should know that Livio’s book has been extremely successful in bringing some of the beauty of mathematics to the masses. Even the 2003 paperback edition carried praise of “wonderful” by Roger Penrose, “eloquent” by *Newsweek*, and “Mysterious, beautiful...a truly splendid text” by the *Los Angeles Times*. Markowsky’s biased analysis is certainly not up to the standards expected by readers of the *Notices*. The editors should publish an apology to Livio, and to AMS members, for presenting such an unbalanced review.

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