

15 A THE PARABLE OF PI

(by Bill)

Earlier in this century, the Indiana legislature considered the possibility of ruling that π be changed, from an irrational, endless number, to three and one-seventh. The law was not passed; but it gives inspiration for a parable:

Once upon a time, a government decided to pass a law that π be changed to two; after all, three, although an easier-to-manage integer, is odd. Therefore two was chosen, since it is also even. Furthermore, the state mandated that all technical calculations should henceforth use two for the value of π .

Some time passed, and technical problems in the kingdom increased. Workmanship seemed to be sloppier, pistons no longer fit well in cylinders, and the country's industries were not competing well with foreign industry. This problem eventually came to the attention of the astute government, which decided to issue an edict in order to rectify the problem. The government therefore proclaimed that committees be formed to study the teaching of technical expertise in all universities, and to allot money to ensure that new courses be taught on accuracy and technical expertise. No effort should be made, however, to rescind the former law, that π be equal to two.

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