

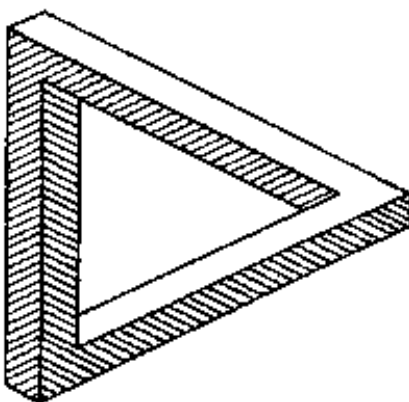
California State University, Fresno
Fall 2006 Mathematics Lecture Series

presents

JOHN STILLWELL

University of San Francisco

"Yearning for the Impossible"



Friday, November 3, 2006 from 4 to 5:00PM
Music 160

Many of the most important concepts in mathematics were once thought to be impossible; for example, irrational and imaginary numbers, infinitesimals, points at infinity, the fourth dimension, and curved space. Thus it seems that "yearning for the impossible" can be fruitful, but why? Kolmogorov once wrote (in his diary, 14 September, 1943):

At a given moment there is only a fine layer between the "trivial" and the impossible. Mathematical discoveries are made in this layer.

This talk will review some of the close encounters with the impossible on which mathematics thrives, with illustrations of the "impossible" in the art of Escher, Magritte, and others.

*John Stillwell was born in Melbourne, Australia, and educated at Melbourne University and MIT. From 1970 to 2001 he taught at Monash University in Australia, but since 2002 he has been Professor of Mathematics at the University of San Francisco. He has written several books on mathematics, the best known of which is *Mathematics and Its History* (2nd edition, Springer-Verlag, 2002).*