



Leonhard Euler: Mathematical Genius in the Enlightenment

By Ronald S. Calinger

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This is the first full-scale biography of Leonhard Euler (1707-83), one of the greatest mathematicians and theoretical physicists of all time. In this comprehensive and authoritative account, Ronald Calinger connects the story of Euler's eventful life to the astonishing achievements that place him in the company of Archimedes, Newton, and Gauss. Drawing chiefly on Euler's massive published works and correspondence, which fill more than eighty volumes so far, this biography sets Euler's work in its multilayered context--personal, intellectual, institutional, political, cultural, religious, and social. It is a story of nearly incessant accomplishment, from Euler's fundamental contributions to almost every area of pure and applied mathematics--especially calculus, number theory, notation, optics, and celestial, rational, and fluid mechanics--to his advancements in shipbuilding, telescopes, ballistics, cartography, chronology, and music theory.

The narrative takes the reader from Euler's childhood and education in Basel through his first period in St. Petersburg, 1727-41, where he gained a European reputation by solving the Basel problem and systematically developing analytical mechanics. Invited to Berlin by Frederick II, Euler published his famous *Introductio in analysin infinitorum*, devised continuum mechanics, and proposed a pulse theory of light. Returning to St. Petersburg in 1766, he created the analytical calculus of variations, developed the most precise lunar theory of the time that supported Newton's dynamics, and published the best-selling *Letters to a German Princess*--all despite eye problems that ended in near-total blindness. In telling the remarkable story of Euler and how his achievements brought pan-European distinction to the Petersburg and Berlin academies of sciences, the book also demonstrates with new depth and detail the central role of mathematics in the Enlightenment.



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Leonhard Euler: Mathematical Genius in the Enlightenment By Ronald S. Calinger Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #173156 in Books
- Published on: 2015-11-24
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.40" h x 2.10" w x 6.40" l, .0 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 696 pages



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Review

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"[A]n impressive work of scientific biography. . . . A fascinating portrait of Euler, his work and the world around him."--**The Economist**

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"This work befits Leonhard Euler, one of the greatest mathematicians ever, and fills in details that raise his stature even further. Calinger is respected for his texts that explore the history of mathematics. This focused effort is his best! Calinger successfully embeds Euler's mathematical and physics results in a rich context--cultural, political, religious, and intellectual--while providing great insight into Euler as a person. . . . Read this book about Euler and be enlightened!"--**Choice**

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"This is the first real biography of Leonhard Euler, and I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that it is the most important book about Euler to appear in any western European language in the past century. The scholarship is absolutely first rate and is based largely on original sources, a monumental feat. Many of the details are new, but so is the grand synthesis that puts them together in one narrative. I learned something new from almost every page."--**Dominic Klyve, Central Washington University**

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"This will be the authoritative work on Euler's life. Embodying a great deal of research and information, the book provides a complete biography, connecting the year-by-year circumstances of Euler's life with his scientific work. One of the book's strengths is its account of the personal, institutional, and political milieu that formed the context of Euler's career."--**Craig Fraser, University of Toronto**

About the Author

Ronald S. Calinger is professor emeritus of history at the Catholic University of America and the founding chancellor of the Euler Society. His books include *A Contextual History of Mathematics*, *Vita Mathematica*, and *Classics of Mathematics*.

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