Is $\sqrt{2}$ a fraction? This brings us to one of the most famous proofs in mathematics. It follows the lines of the type of proof which the Greeks loved: the method of *reductio ad absurdum*. Firstly it is assumed that $\sqrt{2}$ cannot be a fraction and 'not a fraction' at the same time. This is the law of logic called the 'excluded middle'. There is no middle way in this logic. So what the Greeks did was ingenious. They assumed that it was a fraction and, by strict logic at every step, derived a contradiction, an 'absurdity'. So let's do it. Suppose

$$\sqrt{2} = \frac{m}{n}$$

We can assume a bit more too. We can assume that m and n have no common factors. This is OK because if they did have common factors these could be cancelled before we began. (For example, the fraction $^{21}/_{35}$ is equivalent to the factorless $^{3}/_{5}$ on cancellation of the common factor 7.)

We can square both sides of $\sqrt{2} = {}^{m}/_{n}$ to get $2 = {}^{m^2}/_{n^2}$ and so $m^2 = 2n^2$. Here is where we make our first observation: since m^2 is 2 times something it must be an even number. Next m itself cannot be odd (because the square of an odd number is odd) and so m is also an even number.

So far the logic is impeccable. As m is even it must be twice something which we can write as $m = 2k$. Squaring both sides of this means that $m^2 = 4k^2$. Combining this with the fact that $m^2 = 2n^2$ means that $2n^2 = 4k^2$ and on cancellation of 2 we conclude that $n^2 = 2k^2$. But we have been here before! And as before we conclude that n^2 is even and n itself is even. We have thus deduced by strict logic that both m and n are both even and so they have a factor of 2 in common. This was contrary to our assumption that m and n have no common factors. The conclusion therefore is that $\sqrt{2}$ cannot be a fraction.

It can also be proved that the whole sequence of numbers $\sqrt{n}$ (except where n is a perfect square) cannot be fractions. Numbers which cannot be expressed as fractions are called 'irrational' numbers, so we have observed there are an infinite number of irrational numbers.

Ὅροι.

α΄. Σημεῖόν ἐστιν, οὗ μέρος οὐθέν.

β΄. Γραμμὴ δὲ μῆκος ἀπλατές.

γ΄. Γραμμῆς δὲ πέρατα σημεῖα.

δ΄. Εὐθεῖα γραμμή ἐστιν, ἥτις ἐξ ἴσου τοῖς ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς σημείοις κεῖται.

ε΄. Ἐπιφάνεια δέ ἐστιν, ὃ μῆκος καὶ πλάτος μόνον ἔχει.

ϛ΄. Ἐπιφανείας δὲ πέρατα γραμμαί.

ζ΄. Ἐπίπεδος ἐπιφάνειά ἐστιν, ἥτις ἐξ ἴσου ταῖς ἐφ' ἑαυτῆς εὐθείαις κεῖται.

η΄. Ἐπίπεδος δὲ γωνία ἐστὶν ἡ ἐν ἐπιπέδῳ δύο γραμμῶν ἁπτομένων ἀλλήλων καὶ μὴ ἐπ' εὐθείας κειμένων πρὸς ἀλλήλας τῶν γραμμῶν κλίσις.

θ΄. Ὅταν δὲ αἱ περιέχουσαι τὴν γωνίαν γραμμαὶ εὐθεῖαι ὦσιν, εὐθύγραμμος καλεῖται ἡ γωνία.

ι΄. Ὅταν δὲ εὐθεῖα ἐπ' εὐθεῖαν σταθεῖσα τὰς ἐφεξῆς γωνίας ἴσας ἀλλήλαις ποιῇ, ὀρθὴ ἑκατέρα τῶν ἴσων γωνιῶν ἐστι, καὶ ἡ ἐφεστηκυῖα εὐθεῖα κάθετος καλεῖται, ἐφ' ἣν ἐφέστηκεν.

ια΄. Ἀμβλεῖα γωνία ἐστὶν ἡ μείζων ὀρθῆς.

ιβ΄. Ὀξεῖα δὲ ἡ ἐλάσσων ὀρθῆς.

ιγ΄. Ὅρος ἐστίν, ὅ τινός ἐστι πέρας.

ιδ΄. Σχῆμά ἐστι τὸ ὑπό τινος ἤ τινων ὅρων περιεχόμενον.

ιε΄. Κύκλος ἐστὶ σχῆμα ἐπίπεδον ὑπὸ μιᾶς γραμμῆς περιεχόμενον [ἣ καλεῖται περιφέρεια], πρὸς ἣν ἀφ' ἑνὸς σημείου τῶν ἐντὸς τοῦ σχήματος κειμένων πᾶσαι αἱ προσπίπτουσαι εὐθεῖαι [πρὸς τὴν τοῦ κύκλου περιφέρειαν] ἴσαι ἀλλήλαις εἰσίν.

ιϛ΄. Κέντρον δὲ τοῦ κύκλου τὸ σημεῖον καλεῖται.

ιζ΄. Διάμετρος δὲ τοῦ κύκλου ἐστὶν εὐθεῖά τις διὰ τοῦ κέντρου ἠγμένη καὶ περατουμένη ἐφ' ἑκάτερα τὰ μέρη ὑπὸ τῆς τοῦ κύκλου περιφερείας, ἥτις καὶ δίχα τέμνει τὸν κύκλον.

ιη΄. Ἡμικύκλιον δέ ἐστι τὸ περιεχόμενον σχῆμα ὑπό τε τῆς διαμέτρου καὶ τῆς ἀπολαμβανομένης ὑπ' αὐτῆς περιφερείας. κέντρον δὲ τοῦ ἡμικυκλίου τὸ αὐτό, ὃ καὶ τοῦ κύκλου ἐστίν.

ιθ΄. Σχήματα εὐθύγραμμά ἐστι τὰ ὑπὸ εὐθειῶν περιεχόμενα, τρίπλευρα μὲν τὰ ὑπὸ τριῶν, τετράπλευρα δὲ τὰ ὑπὸ τεσσάρων, πολύπλευρα δὲ τὰ ὑπὸ πλειόνων ἢ τεσσάρων εὐθειῶν περιεχόμενα.

κ΄. Τῶν δὲ τριπλεύρων σχημάτων ἰσόπλευρον μὲν τρίγωνόν ἐστι τὸ τὰς τρεῖς ἴσας ἔχον πλευράς, ἰσοσκελὲς δὲ τὸ τὰς δύο μόνας ἴσας ἔχον πλευράς, σκαληνὸν δὲ τὸ τὰς τρεῖς ἀνίσους ἔχον πλευράς.

κα΄ Ἔτι δὲ τῶν τριπλεύρων σχημάτων ὀρθογώνιον μὲν τρίγωνόν ἐστι τὸ ἔχον ὀρθὴν γωνίαν, ἀμβλυγώνιον δὲ τὸ ἔχον ἀμβλεῖαν γωνίαν, ὀξυγώνιον δὲ τὸ τὰς τρεῖς ὀξείας ἔχον γωνίας.

Definitions

1. A point is that of which there is no part.

2. And a line is a length without breadth.

3. And the extremities of a line are points.

4. A straight-line is (any) one which lies evenly with points on itself.

5. And a surface is that which has length and breadth only.

6. And the extremities of a surface are lines.

7. A plane surface is (any) one which lies evenly with the straight-lines on itself.

8. And a plane angle is the inclination of the lines to one another, when two lines in a plane meet one another, and are not lying in a straight-line.

9. And when the lines containing the angle are straight then the angle is called rectilinear.

10. And when a straight-line stood upon (another) straight-line makes adjacent angles (which are) equal to one another, each of the equal angles is a right-angle, and the former straight-line is called a perpendicular to that upon which it stands.

11. An obtuse angle is one greater than a right-angle.

12. And an acute angle (is) one less than a right-angle.

13. A boundary is that which is the extremity of something.

14. A figure is that which is contained by some boundary or boundaries.

15. A circle is a plane figure contained by a single line [which is called a circumference], (such that) all of the straight-lines radiating towards [the circumference] from one point amongst those lying inside the figure are equal to one another.

16. And the point is called the center of the circle.

17. And a diameter of the circle is any straight-line, being drawn through the center, and terminated in each direction by the circumference of the circle. (And) any such (straight-line) also cuts the circle in half.[†]

18. And a semi-circle is the figure contained by the diameter and the circumference cuts off by it. And the center of the semi-circle is the same (point) as (the center of) the circle.

19. Rectilinear figures are those (figures) contained by straight-lines: trilateral figures being those contained by three straight-lines, quadrilateral by four, and multilateral by more than four.

20. And of the trilateral figures: an equilateral triangle is that having three equal sides, an isosceles (triangle) that having only two equal sides, and a scalene (triangle) that having three unequal sides.

κβ΄. Τῶν δὲ τετραπλεύρων σχημάτων τετράγωνον μέν ἐστιν, ὃ ἰσόπλευρόν τέ ἐστι καὶ ὀρθογώνιον, ἑτερόμηκες δέ, ὃ ὀρθογώνιον μέν, οὐκ ἰσόπλευρον δέ, ῥόμβος δέ, ὃ ἰσόπλευρον μέν, οὐκ ὀρθογώνιον δέ, ῥομβοειδὲς δὲ τὸ τὰς ἀπεναντίον πλευράς τε καὶ γωνίας ἴσας ἀλλήλαις ἔχον, ὃ οὔτε ἰσόπλευρόν ἐστιν οὔτε ὀρθογώνιον· τὰ δὲ παρὰ ταῦτα τετράπλευρα τραπέζια καλείσθω.

κγ΄. Παράλληλοί εἰσιν εὐθεῖαι, αἵτινες ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ ἐπιπέδῳ οὖσαι καὶ ἐκβαλλόμεναι εἰς ἄπειρον ἐφ᾽ ἑκάτερα τὰ μέρη ἐπὶ μηδέτερα συμπίπτουσιν ἀλλήλαις.

21. And further of the trilateral figures: a right-angled triangle is that having a right-angle, an obtuse-angled (triangle) that having an obtuse angle, and an acute-angled (triangle) that having three acute angles.

22. And of the quadrilateral figures: a square is that which is right-angled and equilateral, a rectangle that which is right-angled but not equilateral, a rhombus that which is equilateral but not right-angled, and a rhomboid that having opposite sides and angles equal to one another which is neither right-angled nor equilateral. And let quadrilateral figures besides these be called trapezia.

23. Parallel lines are straight-lines which, being in the same plane, and being produced to infinity in each direction, meet with one another in neither (of these directions).

[†] This should really be counted as a postulate, rather than as part of a definition.

Αἰτήματα.

α΄. Ἠιτήσθω ἀπὸ παντὸς σημείου ἐπὶ πᾶν σημεῖον εὐθεῖαν γραμμὴν ἀγαγεῖν.

β΄. Καὶ πεπερασμένην εὐθεῖαν κατὰ τὸ συνεχὲς ἐπ᾽ εὐθείας ἐκβαλεῖν.

γ΄. Καὶ παντὶ κέντρῳ καὶ διαστήματι κύκλον γράφεσθαι.

δ΄. Καὶ πάσας τὰς ὀρθὰς γωνίας ἴσας ἀλλήλαις εἶναι.

ε΄. Καὶ ἐὰν εἰς δύο εὐθείας εὐθεῖα ἐμπίπτουσα τὰς ἐντὸς καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ αὐτὰ μέρη γωνίας δύο ὀρθῶν ἐλάσσονας ποιῇ, ἐκβαλλομένας τὰς δύο εὐθείας ἐπ᾽ ἄπειρον συμπίπτειν, ἐφ᾽ ἃ μέρη εἰσὶν αἱ τῶν δύο ὀρθῶν ἐλάσσονες.

Postulates

1. Let it have been postulated[†] to draw a straight-line from any point to any point.

2. And to produce a finite straight-line continuously in a straight-line.

3. And to draw a circle with any center and radius.

4. And that all right-angles are equal to one another.

5. And that if a straight-line falling across two (other) straight-lines makes internal angles on the same side (of itself whose sum is) less than two right-angles, then the two (other) straight-lines, being produced to infinity, meet on that side (of the original straight-line) that the (sum of the internal angles) is less than two right-angles (and do not meet on the other side).[‡]

[†] The Greek present perfect tense indicates a past action with present significance. Hence, the 3rd-person present perfect imperative Ἠιτήσθω could be translated as "let it be postulated", in the sense "let it stand as postulated", but not "let the postulate be now brought forward". The literal translation "let it have been postulated" sounds awkward in English, but more accurately captures the meaning of the Greek.

[‡] This postulate effectively specifies that we are dealing with the geometry of *flat*, rather than curved, space.

Κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι

α΄. Τὰ τῷ αὐτῷ ἴσα καὶ ἀλλήλοις ἐστὶν ἴσα.

β΄. Καὶ ἐὰν ἴσοις ἴσα προστεθῇ, τὰ ὅλα ἐστὶν ἴσα.

γ΄. Καὶ ἐὰν ἀπὸ ἴσων ἴσα ἀφαιρεθῇ, τὰ καταλειπόμενά ἐστιν ἴσα.

δ΄. Καὶ τὰ ἐφαρμόζοντα ἐπ᾽ ἀλλήλα ἴσα ἀλλήλοις ἐστίν.

ε΄. Καὶ τὸ ὅλον τοῦ μέρους μεῖζόν [ἐστιν].

Common Notions

1. Things equal to the same thing are also equal to one another.

2. And if equal things are added to equal things then the wholes are equal.

3. And if equal things are subtracted from equal things then the remainders are equal.[†]

4. And things coinciding with one another are equal to one another.

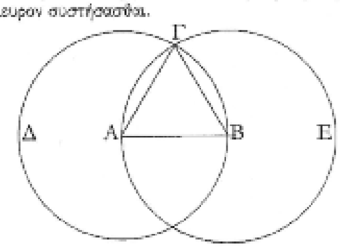
5. And the whole [is] greater than the part.

[†] As an obvious extension of C.N.s 2 & 3—if equal things are added or subtracted from the two sides of an inequality then the inequality remains

an inequality of the same type.

α΄.

Ἐπὶ τῆς δοθείσης εὐθείας πεπερασμένης τρίγωνον ἰσόπλευρον συστήσασθαι.



Ἔστω ἡ δοθεῖσα εὐθεῖα πεπερασμένη ἡ ΑΒ.

Δεῖ δὴ ἐπὶ τῆς ΑΒ εὐθείας τρίγωνον ἰσόπλευρον συστήσασθαι.

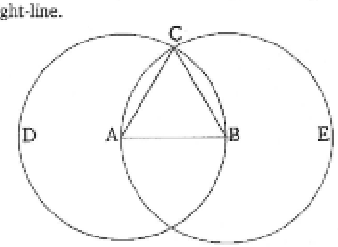
Κέντρῳ μὲν τῷ Α διαστήματι δὲ τῷ ΑΒ κύκλος γεγράφθω ὁ ΒΓΔ, καὶ πάλιν κέντρῳ μὲν τῷ Β διαστήματι δὲ τῷ ΒΑ κύκλος γεγράφθω ὁ ΑΓΕ, καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ Γ σημείου, καθ᾽ ὃ τέμνουσιν ἀλλήλους οἱ κύκλοι, ἐπὶ τὰ Α, Β σημεῖα ἐπεζεύχθωσαν εὐθεῖαι αἱ ΓΑ, ΓΒ.

Καὶ ἐπεὶ τὸ Α σημεῖον κέντρον ἐστὶ τοῦ ΓΔΒ κύκλου, ἴση ἐστὶν ἡ ΑΓ τῇ ΑΒ· πάλιν, ἐπεὶ τὸ Β σημεῖον κέντρον ἐστὶ τοῦ ΓΑΕ κύκλου, ἴση ἐστὶν ἡ ΒΓ τῇ ΒΑ. ἐδείχθη δὲ καὶ ἡ ΓΑ τῇ ΑΒ ἴση· ἑκατέρα ἄρα τῶν ΓΑ, ΓΒ τῇ ΑΒ ἐστιν ἴση. τὰ δὲ τῷ αὐτῷ ἴσα καὶ ἀλλήλοις ἐστὶν ἴσα· καὶ ἡ ΓΑ ἄρα τῇ ΓΒ ἐστιν ἴση· αἱ τρεῖς ἄρα αἱ ΓΑ, ΑΒ, ΒΓ ἴσαι ἀλλήλαις εἰσίν.

Ἰσόπλευρον ἄρα ἐστὶ τὸ ΑΒΓ τρίγωνον. καὶ συνέσταται ἐπὶ τῆς δοθείσης εὐθείας πεπερασμένης τῆς ΑΒ. ὅπερ ἔδει ποιῆσαι.

Proposition 1

To construct an equilateral triangle on a given finite straight-line.



Let AB be the given finite straight-line.

So it is required to construct an equilateral triangle on the straight-line AB.

Let the circle BCD with center A and radius AB have been drawn [Post. 3], and again let the circle ACE with center B and radius BA have been drawn [Post. 3]. And let the straight-lines CA and CB have been joined from the point C, where the circles cut one another,[†] to the points A and B (respectively) [Post. 1].

And since the point A is the center of the circle CDB, AC is equal to AB [Def. 1.15]. Again, since the point B is the center of the circle CAE, BC is equal to BA [Def. 1.15]. But CA was also shown (to be) equal to AB. Thus, CA and CB are each equal to AB. But things equal to the same thing are also equal to one another [C.N. 1]. Thus, CA is also equal to CB. Thus, the three (straight-lines) CA, AB, and BC are equal to one another.

Thus, the triangle ABC is equilateral, and has been constructed on the given finite straight-line AB. (Which is) the very thing it was required to do.

[†] The assumption that the circles do indeed cut one another should be counted as an additional postulate. There is also an implicit assumption that two straight-lines cannot share a common segment.

β΄.

Πρὸς τῷ δοθέντι σημείῳ τῇ δοθείσῃ εὐθείᾳ ἴσην εὐθεῖαν θέσθαι.

Ἔστω τὸ μὲν δοθὲν σημεῖον τὸ Α, ἡ δὲ δοθεῖσα εὐθεῖα ἡ ΒΓ· δεῖ δὴ πρὸς τῷ Α σημείῳ τῇ δοθείσῃ εὐθείᾳ τῇ ΒΓ ἴσην εὐθεῖαν θέσθαι.

Ἐπεζεύχθω γὰρ ἀπὸ τοῦ Α σημείου ἐπὶ τὸ Β σημεῖον εὐθεῖα ἡ ΑΒ, καὶ συνεστάτω ἐπ᾽ αὐτῆς τρίγωνον ἰσόπλευρον τὸ ΔΑΒ, καὶ ἐκβεβλήσθωσαν ἐπ᾽ εὐθείας ταῖς ΔΑ, ΔΒ

Proposition 2[‡]

To place a straight-line equal to a given straight-line at a given point (as an extremity).

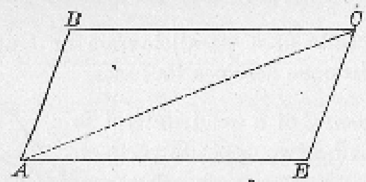
Let A be the given point, and BC the given straight-line. So it is required to place a straight-line at point A equal to the given straight-line BC.

For let the straight-line AB have been joined from point A to point B [Post. 1], and let the equilateral triangle DAB have been constructed upon it [Prop. 1.1].

Geometry

PROPOSITION XXXVIII. THEOREM.

179. ***In a parallelogram the opposite sides are equal, and the opposite angles are equal.***



Let the figure $ABCE$ **be a parallelogram.**

To prove $BC = AE$, and $AB = EC$,

also, $\angle B = \angle E$, and $\angle BAE = \angle BCE$.

Proof. Draw AC.

$\triangle ABC = \triangle AEC$, § 178

(the diagonal of a ▱ divides the figure into two equal △s).

$\therefore BC = AE$, and $AB = CE$,

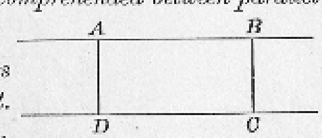
(being homologous sides of equal △s).

Also, $\angle B = \angle E$, and $\angle BAE = \angle BCE$, § 112

(having their sides ∥ and extending in opposite directions from their vertices).

Q. E. D.

180. COR. 1. *Parallel lines comprehended between parallel lines are equal.*

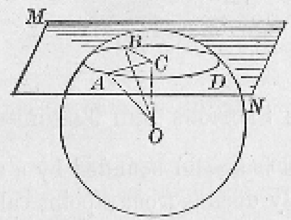


181. COR. 2. *Two parallel lines are everywhere equally distant.* For if AB and DC are parallel, ⊥s dropped from *any* points in AB to DC, measure the distances of these points from DC. But these ⊥s are equal, by § 180; hence, *all* points in AB are equidistant from DC.

Geometry

PROPOSITION I. THEOREM.

685. *Every section of a sphere made by a plane is a circle.*



Let O be the centre of a sphere, and ABD any section made by a plane.

To prove that the section ABD is a circle.

Proof. Draw the radii OA, OB, to any two points A, B, in the boundary of the section, and draw $OC \perp$ to the section.

In the rt. $\triangle$ OAC, OBC,

$$OC \text{ is common.}$$

Also $$OA = OB,$$

(being radii of the sphere).

$$\therefore \triangle OAC = \triangle OBC, \qquad \S\ 161$$

$$\therefore CA = CB.$$

In like manner any two points in the boundary of the section may be proved to be equally distant from C.

Hence the section ABD is a circle whose centre is C. Q. E. D.

686. COR. 1. *The line joining the centre of a sphere to the centre of a circle of the sphere is perpendicular to the plane of the circle.*

687. COR. 2. *Circles of a sphere made by planes equally distant from the centre are equal.* For $\overline{AC}^2 = \overline{AO}^2 - \overline{OC}^2$; and AO and OC are the same for all equally distant circles; therefore AC is the same.