Midnight

Night Shift in Math • 12 Apr 2024

Something I had been struggling for a while is coming to terms with my mediocrity, how my abilities falls short when compared to my ambitions, even when I keep moving the goalposts down. I was never destined to be a great mathematician or any kind of serious academic and on some level, I understood this even from the very start. I did not need to be the very best, but I had personal standards. I thought if I were to pursue academia, I should do it in an area where I have decent chances of becoming a professor. The academic world is very competitive and unforgiving. Knowing this, I compromised and opted for a more realistic route into statistics instead of mathematics and physics for graduate school, which was largely a mistake. I was struggling to maintain my interest in statistics, ended up falling behind in my degree, and dropped out. Of course, one would assume that I would think that I should have pursued a PhD in mathematics instead, but I honestly wonder if things would have turned out that differently. I'm not a very creative person, I am honestly terrible at research, and I am not confident that I could have finished my PhD had I chosen mathematics instead. Even if I had finished my PhD, there was basically no chance of me becoming a professor after that ordeal.

I'm currently working as an actuary and while it is not very exciting, it does pay the bills and allows for serious career progression. One way the actuarial societies try to promote themselves is by trying to present themselves as "business mathematicians". However, the mathematical content that actuaries deal with is often at a lower level than what engineers at the bachelors level go through and they often get ridiculed for not knowing enough mathematics. However, it did make me think about how little mathematics people know in general. Mathematics is such a deep and rich field of knowledge that is so useful and often crucial to legitimizing knowledge in other fields that it shocks me how little people are asked to know about it outside of mathematicians. The way our systems are run does not help. We are told it is largely a waste of time and career prospects within mathematics proper is dismal. It seems that the only choices in mathematics are to abandon it entirely or sacrifice your livelihood for it. Only the very best mathematicians are allowed to survive. Why should it be this way? I think that the world needs more mathematicians, even if they aren't the best of the best.

I’ve decided for myself that I did not like either option. I want to pursue mathematics but I don’t want to destroy myself for it. The reckless move is to give up my job and pursue mathematics seriously again but I am not ready to quit my day job. Hence the name of the blog. I am choosing to self study mathematics for my personal satisfaction and I will record my progress here.

I’m starting my journey with algebra. It is a huge weakness of mine especially since statistics does not emphasize the algebraic aspects nearly as much as the analytical aspects. My main reference will be Algebra by Hungerford, I will also be supplementing with Algebra by Lang and Algebra: Chapter 0 by Aluffi.