Marin Mersenne Encyclopedia Article

Marin Mersenne

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Marin Mersenne

1588-1648

French mathematician, philosopher, and theologian whose Mersenne numbers pioneered the effort to discover a formula representing all prime numbers. Mersenne spent five years at the Jesuit College at La Fleche and two years studying theology at the Sorbonne in Paris. He joined the Roman Catholic order of the Minims in 1611, and taught philosophy at its convent in Nevers from 1614-1618. The following year, he returned to Paris and became a member of the city's academic circle. Mersenne performed significant research in mathematics, arriving at the formula $2^{p}-1$, in which *p* represents a prime number. While this formula, called the Mersenne numbers, was not applicable to all prime numbers, it did stimulate interest in their study. Mersenne also investigated cycloids (types of geometric curves), and proposed the use of a pendulum as a sort of clock.