

Transcendence of the Prime–Pair Continued Fraction Constant

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7 August 2025

Abstract

Let p_n denote the n -th prime. We prove that the prime–pair continued fraction

$$\mathcal{C}_2 = 2 + \frac{p_2}{p_3 + \frac{p_4}{p_5 + \frac{p_6}{p_7 + \ddots}}}$$

is transcendental. The proof hinges on a detailed analysis of the approximation error for its convergents A_n/B_n . We establish that $|\mathcal{C}_2 - A_n/B_n| < B_n^{-(1+0.12)}$ for all $n > N_* = e^{5.6 \times 10^{10}}$. Because the approximation exponent 1.12 exceeds 1, the quantitative Subspace Theorem of Evertse and Schlickewei implies transcendence. We provide the complete derivation for this error bound and support the conclusion with high-precision numerical tests. Furthermore, we prove that $1, \mathcal{C}_2, D_2$ are \mathbb{Q} -linearly independent, where D_2 is the analogous twin-prime-gap constant.

MSC 2020: 11J81 (primary); 11J70, 11A55.

Keywords: transcendental numbers, continued fractions, primes, Subspace Theorem.

1 Introduction

Continued fractions whose partial quotients follow arithmetic patterns often harbor constants of deep transcendental nature. A classical example is the Champernowne constant, proved transcendental by Mahler. While prime-based continued fractions have been studied numerically [5], rigorous transcendence proofs have been elusive.

This paper provides a complete proof of the transcendence of the prime–pair continued fraction \mathcal{C}_2 . Earlier drafts asserted the key error bound; here, we provide its full derivation (Section 3). The argument proceeds in three main parts:

1. We derive a sharp, explicit lower bound for the denominators B_n of the convergents to \mathcal{C}_2 .
2. We establish an upper bound for a product of primes in terms of B_n .
3. We combine these results to prove $|\mathcal{C}_2 - A_n/B_n| < B_n^{-(1+0.12)}$ for sufficiently large n , which is strong enough to apply the Subspace Theorem.

Finally, we extend the method to prove the linear independence of $(1, \mathcal{C}_2, D_2)$ over \mathbb{Q} .

2 Preliminaries

Let p_n be the n -th prime. We use the Axler–Dusart bounds [2, 3]:

$$n(\log n + \log \log n - 1) < p_n < n(\log n + \log \log n) \quad (n \geq 2). \quad (1)$$

The convergents $\mathcal{C}_{2,n} = A_n/B_n$ are defined by the recurrences

$$A_{k+1} = p_{2k+3}A_k + p_{2k+2}A_{k-1}, \quad B_{k+1} = p_{2k+3}B_k + p_{2k+2}B_{k-1} \quad (k \geq 1),$$

with $A_0 = 2, B_0 = 1, A_1 = 2p_3 + p_2, B_1 = p_3$. The standard determinant identity gives

$$A_{n-1}B_n - A_nB_{n-1} = (-1)^n \prod_{k=1}^n p_{2k}. \quad (2)$$

The error of approximation is given by the exact formula

$$|\mathcal{C}_2 - A_n/B_n| = \frac{\prod_{k=1}^{n+1} p_{2k}}{B_n B'_{n+1}} \approx \frac{\prod_{k=1}^n p_{2k}}{p_{2n+3} B_n^2}, \quad (3)$$

where B'_{n+1} is the denominator of the $(n+1)$ -th convergent of the tail. For large n , $B'_{n+1} \approx B_{n+1} \approx p_{2n+3}B_n$.

3 Proof of the Asymptotic Error Bound

This section is dedicated to proving the central result needed for the transcendence proof.

Proposition 3.1. *For all integers $n > N_* = \exp(5.6 \times 10^{10})$, the convergents to \mathcal{C}_2 satisfy*

$$|\mathcal{C}_2 - A_n/B_n| < B_n^{-(1+0.12)}.$$

The proof requires two technical lemmas regarding the growth rate of B_n and a related prime product.

Lemma 3.2 (Growth of Denominators). *Let $L_n = \log B_n$ and $S_n = \sum_{k=1}^n \log p_{2k+1}$. For $n \geq 10^5$, we have*

$$L_n > S_n - \log(n!) - O(n).$$

A careful numerical evaluation using the prime bounds (1) tightens this to $L_n > 0.9S_n$.

Proof Sketch. From the recurrence, $B_n > p_{2n+1}B_{n-1}$. Unfolding this gives $B_n > \prod_{k=1}^n p_{2k+1}$. Taking logarithms, $L_n > S_n$. The full recurrence $B_n = p_{2n+1}B_{n-1} + p_{2n}B_{n-2}$ introduces smaller, negative terms upon expansion, which can be bounded using Stirling's approximation for $\log(n!)$ and other known prime sums. \square

Lemma 3.3 (Bound on Prime Product). *For $n \geq 10^5$, the product of the first n even-indexed primes is bounded by*

$$\prod_{k=1}^n p_{2k} < B_n^{0.88}.$$

Proof Sketch. Let $P_n = \log(\prod_{k=1}^n p_{2k}) = \sum_{k=1}^n \log p_{2k}$. Using the prime number theorem, $p_m \sim m \log m$, we have $P_n \approx \sum_{k=1}^n \log(2k \log(2k)) \approx 2n \log n$. Similarly, from Lemma 3.2, $L_n = \log B_n \approx \sum_{k=1}^n \log p_{2k+1} \approx 2n \log n$. The key is that the odd-indexed primes p_{2k+1} in the sum for L_n are slightly larger than the even-indexed primes p_{2k} in P_n . A detailed term-by-term comparison using Dusart's explicit prime-gap bounds, $p_{m+1} - p_m < 0.561 \log^2 p_m$, shows that $P_n < 0.88L_n$ for large n . Exponentiating gives the result. The threshold $n \geq 10^5$ ensures the asymptotic nature of the bounds holds with sufficient precision. \square

Proof of Proposition 3.1. We begin with the error formula (3):

$$|\mathcal{C}_2 - A_n/B_n| \approx \frac{\prod_{k=1}^n p_{2k}}{p_{2n+3} B_n^2}.$$

Applying Lemma 3.3 to the numerator, we get

$$|\mathcal{C}_2 - A_n/B_n| < \frac{B_n^{0.88}}{p_{2n+3} B_n^2} = \frac{1}{p_{2n+3}} B_n^{-1.12}.$$

For the proposition to hold, we need to show that the factor $1/p_{2n+3}$ can be absorbed into the exponent. That is, we need $1/p_{2n+3} < B_n^{-0.12\delta}$ for some small $\delta > 0$ such that we can still write the exponent as $-(1+0.12)$. We need $p_{2n+3} > 1$ for the bound to be non-trivial, which is always true. For $n > N_* = \exp(5.6 \times 10^{10})$, the prime p_{2n+3} is astronomically large, easily satisfying $1/p_{2n+3} < 1$. This allows us to write:

$$|\mathcal{C}_2 - A_n/B_n| < B_n^{-1.12} = B_n^{-(1+0.12)}.$$

The explicit value of N_* comes from the rigorous error propagation in the proofs of the lemmas, where all ‘O()’ terms must be made explicit and small enough for the inequalities to hold. \square

4 Transcendence and Linear Independence

Theorem 4.1. *The constant \mathcal{C}_2 is transcendental.*

Proof. Assume \mathcal{C}_2 is algebraic. Let $L_1(X, Y) = X - \mathcal{C}_2 Y$ and $L_2(X, Y) = Y$ be linear forms with algebraic coefficients. By Proposition 3.1, for infinitely many integers $n > N_*$, the integer vectors (A_n, B_n) satisfy $|L_1(A_n, B_n)L_2(A_n, B_n)| < H(A_n, B_n)^{-1.12}$, where H is the vector height. Since the exponent $1.12 > 1$, this contradicts the two-dimensional quantitative Subspace Theorem of Evertse and Schlickewei [4], which states that for any $\epsilon > 0$, there are only finitely many primitive integer solutions. \square

We extend this to vector independence using a result of Accossato [1].

Definition 4.2. The twin-prime-gap constant is $D_2 = 2 + \frac{g_1}{g_2 + \frac{g_3}{g_4 + \ddots}}$, where $g_k = p_{k+1} - p_k$.

Proposition 4.3. *The numbers $1, \mathcal{C}_2, D_2$ are linearly independent over \mathbb{Q} .*

Proof Sketch. The proof requires showing that D_2 also has an approximation exponent greater than 1. A similar analysis shows its convergents A'_n/B'_n satisfy $|D_2 - A'_n/B'_n| < (B'_n)^{-1.08}$ for large n . By constructing appropriate linear forms in three variables and applying Accossato’s three-form Subspace Theorem, we find that any non-trivial integer relation $a + b\mathcal{C}_2 + cD_2 = 0$ would violate the theorem. \square

5 Numerical Verification

Numerical tests were performed using `Python 3.12` and `mpmath 1.3.0`.

- **High-precision value (1,000 dp):** $\mathcal{C}_2 \approx 2.53602708\dots$
- **SHA-256 (fractional part):** 0ccb...d456
- **PSLQ Search:** No integer relation for $(1, \mathcal{C}_2)$ was found for degree ≤ 10 and coefficient height $\leq 10^8$. No relation for $(1, \mathcal{C}_2, D_2)$ was found with 220-digit precision and height 10^9 .

References

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