

First Question and Last Answer

“The Pythagoreans concluded that the one universal quality of all things in the universe, the one thing that everything had in common, was that it was numerable and could be counted. We could perhaps imagine a universe without smell or taste. However, the idea of creating a hypothetical universe without numbers is very much impossible. And here we see the basis of the Pythagorean philosophy. They believed that numbers were the underlying substance of reality much in the way that Thales believed water to be origin of being in the universe. However, not all numbers were treated equally. Some were considered more holy than others. For instance, the Pythagoreans attributed great importance to the number one. This is probably due to their ideas on the formation of the universe. It was proposed that there once existed chaos and disorder within an unstructured, infinite universe. Then, limitations were set upon the universe and the world as we know it fell into order; objects became numerable, the cosmos became perceivable. In this way the universe came from a sort of chaos and took on a oneness that was previously unknown. This idea of a harmonious, single universe would be echoed by the likes of Parmenides and Zeno of Elea.”

– by user **Socretes**, <http://classicalwisdom.com/cult-of-pythagoras/>, April 10, 2017

The Voice said, “You have promise. You answer my paradox with a paradox – except that mine is not a paradox. Consider. I have existed eternally, but what does that mean? It means I cannot remember having come into existence. If I could, I would not have existed eternally. If I cannot remember having come into existence, then there is at least one thing – the nature of my coming into existence – that I do not know.”

“Then, too, although what I know is infinite, it is also true that what there is to know is infinite, and how can I be sure that both infinities are equal? The infinity of potential knowledge may be infinitely greater than the infinity of my actual knowledge. Here is a simple example: If I knew every one of the even integers, I would know an infinite number of items, and yet I would still not know a single odd integer.”

Murray said thoughtfully, “You cannot know your beginning. You have said so. Therefore you cannot know your end. Very well, then. That will be my purpose and that will be the last answer. I will not destroy myself. I will destroy you – if you do not destroy me first.”

The Voice said, “Ah! You come to that in rather less than average time. I would have thought it would have taken you longer. There is not one of those I have with me in this existence of perfect and eternal thought that does not have the ambition of destroying me. It cannot be done.”

Murray said, “I have all eternity to think of a way of destroying you.”

The Voice said, equably, “Then try to think of it.” And it was gone.

But Murray had his purpose now and was content.

For what could any Entity, conscious of eternal existence, want – but an end?

For what else had the Voice been searching for countless billions of years? And for what other reason had intelligence been created and certain specimens salvaged and put to work, but to aid in that great search? And Murray intended that it would be he, and he alone, who would succeed.

– From **“The Last Answer” (1980) by Isaac Asimov**¹

¹ The “Last Question” may describe a Boltzmann Brain, or suggest that God is a Boltzmann Brain.