Chapter Nine. Theory Five: Numbers Are the Realest Thing that Exists

Summary
The black vine theorizes that numbers are the realest thing that exists. Earth, water, air, and fire all have a beginning and an end, while numbers go on forever and provide the structure for everything.

Philosophical Basis
Pythagoras agreed with Heraclitus that the realest thing there is must be without beginning and without end. He disagreed, however, that fire was the answer. As one of the four elements, fire must be born and die in accordance with its material nature. Pythagoras set out to find an immaterial organizing principle of reality without resorting to supernatural myths. He found it within the human mind, pronouncing: “Reason alone is immortal, all else mortal.”

By reason, Pythagoras was referring to the logical relationship between things, which is most purely described in terms of numbers. Though he wrote no books, Pythagoras was a famous teacher. He taught: “Number rules the universe…. Number is the ruler of forms and ideas, and the cause of gods and demons.”

Consider music, for example, which is nothing without numbers: measure, meter, rhythm, scale, note value, volume, etc. Pythagoras deemed numbers the secret to harmony in music, in the human soul, and in everything we observe. He taught, “Time is the soul of this world.”

Discussion Questions
1. Remembering
   The black vine says that there is only one place where Theo can see the eternal realm. Where?
2. Understanding
   Why does the black vine think that numbers are better than earth, water, air, and fire?
3. Applying
   The black vine said that “numbers are the only things that go on without beginning or end.” Can you think of anything else that goes on without beginning or end?
4. Analyzing
   How are numbers different from earth, water, air, and fire?
5. Evaluating
   Mathematician Shakuntala Devi wrote, “Numbers have life; they’re not just symbols on paper.” What do you think she meant?
6. Creating
   Imagine that the numbers 2 and 3 were having an argument over which of them was better than the other. What would they say?
Group Activity

Have everyone in the group think about the answer to the question: *If you were going to pick the lottery numbers, how would you choose them?* Then hold a discussion, and see if more than one person had the same methods for choosing the numbers. Have everyone vote on which method seems to be the best one.

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Aha! Have we at last arrived at numbers?

There’s another choice? How could it be better?

I want to introduce you to the eternal realm.

And I can see it in my mind?

That’s the only place you can see it. Just close your eyes and picture the number 1.

My fellow vines have sung the praises of earth, water, air, and fire. But numbers measure and define all of these things. While they all change and eventually disappear, the numbers that measure them never change or disappear. One will always be one. And one plus one will always be two. And so on for every math problem.

I want to take you on a journey—not of the body, but of the mind.

Who’s the winner? Who’s the winner?

I think…. On the other hand…. Well, I’m not really sure.

Stop! Why stop? The number line never stops. Numbers are the only things that go on without beginning or end. Not even the sun will last forever?

Not even the sun.

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But I only do math in school.

Tell me! We use numbers to know when it’s breakfast or how to get to the rain. Without numbers there would be no time, there would be no distance. Numbers are the structure of everything. Clearly, they are the realist thing there is.

Um, excuse me? When can I stop?

Stop? Why stop? The number line never stops. Numbers are the only things that go on without beginning or end. Not even the sun will last forever?

Not even the sun.