

September 15, 2022

Cedars Math

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## Euclid's Proof That the Number of Primes Is Infinite

*Definition.*

A prime is a number that is (a) greater than 1 and (b) divisible only by itself and 1. (By "divisible", we mean divisible evenly, without remainder)

*Examples.*

1. The number 7 is prime, because it is divisible only by 1 times 7.
2. The number 10 is *not* prime, because it is divisible by 1 times 10, but also by 2 times 5.

*Theorem.*

**The number of primes is infinite.**

*Proof:*

Step 1. *If and only if* the number of primes is finite, there is a biggest prime. Call it  $B$ . We will be showing that  $B$  is impossible; it can't exist because whatever candidate prime number you pick for  $B$ , we can find a bigger prime number.

Step 2. Multiply all the prime numbers together from 2 to  $B$  to create the number  $K = 2 \cdot 3 \cdot 5 \cdots B$ .  $K$  is not prime, since it be divided not just by 1 times  $K$  but by 2, by 3, by 5, and so forth. Also,  $K$  is bigger than  $B$ , the biggest prime number.

Step 3. Create the number  $N = K + 1$  by adding 1 to  $K$ .

Step 4. Since  $K$  is bigger than  $B$ , so is  $N$ . Under our tentative assumption that  $B$  is the biggest prime,  $N$  can't be prime. It is divisible by one or more prime numbers. Pick one of those prime numbers and call it  $D$ .

Step 5  $N$  is not divisible by any of the primes  $2, 3, 5, \dots, B$  because  $K$  is divisible by all of them and that means dividing  $N$ , which equals  $K + 1$ , by any of them would result in a remainder of 1.

Step 6. But if  $D$  isn't a prime number between 2 and  $B$ , it has to be a prime number bigger than  $B$ .

Step 7. But if  $D$  is bigger than  $B$ , that's saying there is a prime number ( $D$ ) bigger than the biggest prime number ( $B$ ).

Step 8. So for any prime number we choose as  $B$  because we think it's the biggest, there's going to be an even bigger prime number. Since there is no biggest prime, there must be an infinite number of primes.

*Quod erat demonstrandum.*

This is not literally Euclid's proof, but it uses the idea of his proof. I relied on <https://primes.utm.edu/notes/proofs/infinite/euclids.html>. Long proofs are faster to understand than short proofs, but here is a short version:

**Short version of the proof.** If the number of primes is infinite, there is a biggest prime,  $B$ . Let  $N \equiv 2 \cdot 3 \cdot 5 \cdots B + 1$ . The number  $N$  is not divisible by any prime in  $2, 3, 5, \dots, B$  because there would be a remainder of 1. But since  $N > B$ , the number  $N$  is not prime and is divisible by some prime,  $D$ . That prime  $D$  is not in  $2, 3, 5, \dots, B$ , so  $D > B$ , but that contradicts  $B$  being a biggest prime. So for any prime there has to be a bigger prime, so the number of primes is infinite. Q.E.D.