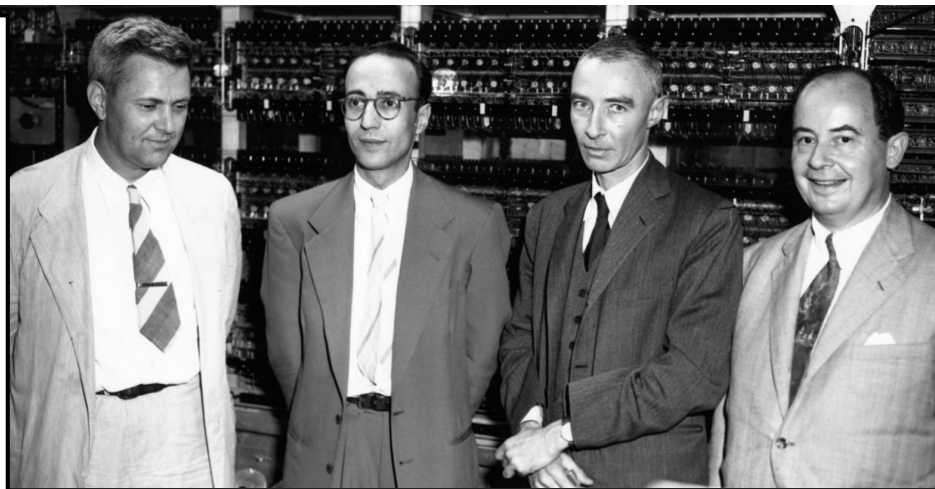


**I**t is indeed supremely difficult to effectively refute the claim that John von Neumann is likely the most intelligent person who has ever lived. By the time of his death in 1957 at the modest age of 53, the Hungarian polymath had not only revolutionized several subfields of mathematics and physics but also made foundational contributions to pure economics and statistics and taken key parts in the invention of the atomic bomb, nuclear energy and digital computing.

Known now as “*the last representative of the great mathematicians*”, von Neumann’s genius was legendary even in his own lifetime. The sheer breadth of stories and anecdotes about his brilliance, from Nobel Prize-winning physicists to world-class mathematicians abound:

Twice married and wealthy, he loved expensive clothes, hard liquor, fast cars and dirty jokes, according to his friend Stanisław Ulam. Almost involuntarily, his posthumous biographer Norman Macrae recounts, people took a liking to von Neumann, even those who disagreed with his conservative politics (Regis, 1992).



as one famously  
the enjoyments of life.



## Personality

Despite his many appointments, responsibilities and copious research output, von Neumann lived a rather unusual lifestyle for a mathematician. As described by Vonneuman and Halmos:

*“Parties and nightlife held a special appeal for von Neumann. While teaching in Germany, von Neumann had been a denizen of the Cabaret-era Berlin nightlife circuit.”* — Vonneuman (1987)

*The parties at the von Neumann’s house were frequent, and famous, and long.*  
— Halmos (1958)

Although influential in his own right, throughout his life, von Neumann made sure to acknowledge that the central concept of the modern computer was indeed Turing’s 1936 paper *On Computable Numbers, with an Application to the Entscheidungsproblem* (Fraenkel, 1972)

*”von Neumann firmly emphasised to me, and to others I am sure, that the fundamental conception is owing to Turing — insofar as not anticipated by Babbage, Lovelace and others.”* — Stanley Fraenkel (1972)