

# Theories of Time - University of Oregon Webpage

Post by "Cassius" of December 26, 2024 at 5:06 AM

For what it is worth as to the origin of this thread, I think many of us are familiar with the philosophic dispute over whether motion is possible, or is an illusion.

The question of "time" came up in our discussion of 12/25/24 as to whether Epicurus was addressing time because it was controversial in the same way, and for much the same reason.

From Joshua's first link above:

## Quote

Parmenides = the past and future are illusions, the Universe is timeless and unchanging.

Heraclitus= endless process of creation, destruction and change.

Plato = time is a reflection of the rotation of the heavenly spheres.

Aristotle = time is rooted in motion and is meaningful only with respect to events embedded in its flow. Yet time is not motion, it is everywhere.

Hebrew/Christian theology = developed linear time versus Stoic time which is cyclical.

Also:

## Quote

There are basically three theories of time: 1) realist, 2) relational and 3) idealist.

The realist view of time believes that time is a physical characteristic of the Universe, independent of other physical properties. Time would exist even if the Universe were empty of matter and people (a de Sitter-Einstein Universe). The block Universe of relativity is an example of this view.

The relational view of time states that time depends on the succession of physical events in the Universe, such that time would *not* exist in an empty Universe. Where the realist states that the Universe *has* a clock, a relationalist states the Universe *is* a clock.

The idealist view is that time is a property of the human mind and therefore is an illusion. The passage of time depends on human observers. In some sense, the block Universe is both realist and idealist as time is embedded in the Universe and that reality is a timeless, unchanging thing (Parmenidean).

Frequently, the discussion of time focuses on the passage of time where our views are divided into the Parmenidean versus Heraclitean view. Parmenides believed that stasis is fundamental and change is an illusion. Heraclitus emphasizes flux such that only change is real, permanence is an illusion. By Plato's era, time is associated with cosmic regularity (motion of the Sun and Moon), although Aristotle objects to this framework since motion is measured in time and time cannot be measured by motion.

Anyone want to suggest whether Epicurus is in one of these three categories, or that his view is distinguishable from all three?