

# Theories of Time - University of Oregon Webpage

**Post by "Joshua" of December 25, 2024 at 8:50 PM**

<https://pages.uoregon.edu/jschombe/cosmo...venly%20spheres>.

I haven't read through this yet but it starts with a summary of different ancient views of time, and is relevant to our recent conversations about Parmenides and Zeno of Elea.

We also have [this](#) webpage from Kansas State University on Parmenides.

( [Cassius](#) and [Kalosyni](#), I posted this quickly and I didn't search very long for a proper subforum, so we may need to relocate it)

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**Post by "Joshua" of December 25, 2024 at 8:57 PM**

Another thread on time was started by [Don here](#).

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**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 is 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 is view is distinguishable from all three?

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**Post by “Cassius” of December 26, 2024 at 5:20 AM**

I also want to commend Joshua's second link for bring out the point I will underline in the quote here. This refers to Parmenides' argument that motion is impossible, but I point it out because this illustrates how these abstract logical assertions can have highly practical (in this case damaging) implications:

#### Quote

Nevertheless the above arguments seem rationally compelling. We are thus faced with a dilemma:

Either the arguments, despite their persuasiveness, conceal a fallacy.

Rationale: Since valid arguments can never yield a false conclusion, an argument that yields a false conclusion must be invalid. But change is real, because it is so strongly attested by the evidence of our senses so that the conclusion led to by these arguments is false. Hence the argument must be invalid.

*Project for the future suggested by this option: discover what this fallacy consists in, and display it to others. (This might mean making some progress in the philosophy of mathematics.)*

Or our senses are constantly deceiving us when they register change and motion.

Rationale: There is no fallacy to be discovered in the above arguments, and the conclusion of any valid argument must be true.

*Project for the future suggested by this option: **practice those disciplines that help us progressively to detach us from the senses -- from our body in general. (This might mean practicing some form of asceticism.)***

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With this conclusion:

#### Quote

Parmenides is reported to have chosen the latter option. It was his view that the testimony of reason was stronger than the testimony of the senses (reasons tell us what can and cannot be the case). Accordingly, he is associated with the view that motion, change, time (all embraced under the term "Becoming") are illusions, and that reality ("Being") is One and Eternal.

#### Quote

This position is congenial to those who are inclined to identify this Being with God, and to relegate all else (the many and the changing) -- hence, the material world testified to by the bodily senses, but also any individual personal identity, and hence the supposed experiences of all such entities -- to the category of unreal appearance. God, on this view, is the only reality.

Note that suffering of any sort, because it involves conflict, falls into the domain of the many and the changing. Hence the identification of God with the Parmenidean One can be made to serve the purposes of [theodicy](#). If we classify theodicies by the different kinds of strategies they adopt for solving the problem of evil, then the "Parmenidean" varieties form a group within the larger family of theodicies that **deny the reality of evil**.

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of December 26, 2024 at 9:07 AM

From post 3 quote above (and from Joshua's first link):

Quote

The idealist view is that time is a property of the human mind and therefore is an illusion. The passage of time is depends on human observers.

In last night's Zoom, I recall something from the material that said: "time is by necessity" ? ...Did I remember correctly and was it by Philodemus?

Imagine that we lived on a planet that rotated the sun, but did not itself rotate (but always stayed with the same side facing the sun) and did not have a moon. Life would evolve without circadian rhythms, and would that lead to a lack of the conception of time in evolved/sentient life forms?

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## Post by “Bryan” of December 26, 2024 at 10:15 AM

Quote

The relational view of time states that time depends on the succession of physical events in the Universe

Of the three, this is certainly the closest to Epikouros.

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### **Post by “Cassius” of December 26, 2024 at 10:53 AM**

You know when I combine in my mind the assertions that motion is an illusion, that time is an illusion, that everything our senses show us is nothing more than the illusions caused by shadows flickering on the wall of Plato's cave, it's hard to shake the feeling that this is the real heart of Epicurean philosophy.

Yes you end up with some conclusions about pleasure and pain after you apply your conclusions to those issues, but you'd never reach the same opinions if you didn't start with the confidence that the world your senses allow you to perceive is real, and not an illusion.

I'm not sure most people today who read Epicurus have any inkling of this.

They jump right to the pleasure analysis as if none of the rest makes any difference, when the truth is that the pleasure analysis makes no sense at all without the initial grounding that pleasure and pain and the rest of the canonical faculties are the true measure of what's real and what's not real.

Many people in the last 100 years are awake to the idea that the supernatural religions push this fraudulent idea (that what the senses reveal is not real) because the religions are pushing supernatural gods who are completely unverifiable by the senses in this world. That's easy enough to understand, though even that I don't think they take fully to heart.

But very few people who read Epicurus are awake to how the "secular" philosophers (other than Epicurus) are doing much the same thing. In my view, the motivation of the secular class in pushing "skepticism" is ultimately "power." "Power" is the motivation of the religious class too, even though I grant to many of the religious class that they are sincere. But I think a good argument can be made that the secular skeptical philosophers are more to be condemned as "liars" than are the religionists (the accusation included in David Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion that "...*the Sceptics are not a sect of philosophers: They are only a sect of liars.*") So I can see why Epicurus would have concluded that giving in to physics-based determinism is even worse than giving in to supernatural religion.

If you don't have confidence in the senses (the canonical faculties) you don't have anything at all. And that's the place to start in understanding pleasure and everything else.

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## Post by “Kalosyni” of December 26, 2024 at 12:31 PM

### [Quote from Cassius](#)

You know when I combine in my mind the assertions that motion is an illusion, that time is an illusion, that everything our senses show us is nothing more than the illusions caused by shadows flickering on the wall of Plato's cave, it's hard to shake the feeling that this is the real heart of Epicurean philosophy.

For myself, I thinking about time as being "by convention" rather than and illusion...

Definitions (from internet):

An **illusion** is a distortion of the senses, which can reveal how the mind normally organizes and interprets sensory stimulation. Although illusions distort the human perception of reality, they are generally shared by most people

**Conventionalism** is the philosophical attitude that fundamental principles of a certain kind are grounded on (explicit or implicit) agreements in society, rather than on external reality.

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## Post by “Cassius” of December 26, 2024 at 1:21 PM

I personally don't have as negative a view of "convention" as I have of "illusion."

By convention we drive on the right-hand side of the road, and it is no offense to me if the Brits drive on the other side.

But by "illusion" i am told that it is impossible to know a "truth" about anything.

It's at the deepest level of confrontation where the stakes are the highest in these arguments with other viewpoints.

And for the old-timers' music club here's a Brit talking about "illusion," rather than "convention," as to color:

<https://youtu.be/9TZJNs-fNqE>

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## **Post by “Bryan” of January 1, 2025 at 7:37 PM**

Here is the topic summarized in Aetius 1.21,22:

### 21. On Time

Pythagoras says that time is the sphere of that which encompasses.

Plato says that time is a moving image of eternity, or the dimension of the motion of the cosmos.

Aristotle maintained that time is the number of the motion of the (celestial) sphere.

Eratosthenes says that time is the course of the sun.

### 22. On The Substance of Time

Plato says that the substance of time is the motion of the heaven.

The Stoics say that it is motion itself.

Xenocrates says it is a measure of what is generated, and also everlasting motion.

Hestiaeus of Perinthus, the natural philosopher, says it is the motion of the heavenly bodies in relation to each other.

Strato says it is the quantitative in motion and rest.

Epicurus says it is a concomitant, that is an accompaniment of motions [or changes].