

Episode 244 - Cicero's OTNOTG 19 - Zeno's Paradoxes - Profundity Or Gaslighting?

Post by "Cassius" of September 1, 2024 at 8:37 AM

It seems to me that a point I would stress is that we are not "saving reality" by finding mathematical solutions to Zeno's paradoxes.

We're "saving mathematics" (or maybe more specifically, a form of propositional logic) by finding answers, but in the end, what we care about is living life happily, not saving mathematics or propositional logic.

People are harmed if they waste their lives in uncertainty and doubt, taken in by argument that motion is impossible and their senses cannot be trusted. Further, the good reputation of philosophy is harmed when people take these arguments seriously without immediately pointing out the ultimate validity of the senses.

The point to be emphasized is the one made by Seneca about mice and cheese and syllables. Word games can be fine if they are played for fun, or for sharpening our skills with words, but word games are not what life is about, and word games are not beneficial when they start interfering with life rather than enhancing it.

Norton says in the article that we can choose to take a "kinder" view of what Parmenides and Zeno were doing, but I see no reason to be so charitable from the information we have to go on. Much more likely is that they were not massively deluded OR in the grip of a mad fantasy, but testing out ways to gaslight people into doubting the validity of their senses, a path many others have followed.

Quote

It is hard to believe that Parmenides and Zeno really believed that motion is impossible. The evidence of our senses is powerful, unrelenting and, I believe, irrefutable. Someone who genuinely believes that all change is illusion would seem to be massively deluded and in the grip of a mad fantasy.

We can cast a kinder light on Parmenides and Zeno's project if we understand them not to be challenging change, but to be challenging the accounts we give of it. Can we really reason reliably about motion using the concepts we have? We think we can. Zeno says otherwise. Look at them more closely and you will find them to be an internal mess.