

"Facts don't care about your feelings."

Post by "Joshua" of November 12, 2020 at 9:26 PM

I'm listening to an audiobook called *The Rise and Fall of Alexandria* on my commute. I found something there worth adding here regarding the topic of 'reason'.

Pythagoras, as a philosopher and also a mathematician, seemed to believe that pure reason could be a bridge between mathematical fact and philosophical truth. It all had to do with the number 10.

If you plot one number in a given space, you have a point. If you plot 2 numbers, you have two points—therefore a line. Three points are needed to make a surface (or plane)—a triangle. Add a fourth point, and you have a pyramid—that is, a solid.

The Pythagoreans reasoned that these four attributes were the ground of mathematics, that by adding them up you have the perfect number— $1+2+3+4=10$. Since the facts of cosmology are the reflections of pure geometric truth, the number 10 is the key to cosmology. From Encyclopedia Britannica:

Quote

The Pythagoreans recognized the existence of nine heavenly bodies: Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the so-called Central Fire. So important was the number 10 in their view of cosmology that they believed there was a tenth body, Counter-Earth, perpetually hidden from us by the Sun.

These 10 bodies were arranged in concentric celestial spheres. How wonderfully reasoned!

And, of course, total bullshit. (Who is laughing at Epicurus' Sun now!?)

Neither reason nor logic can ever be canonical, because in both cases you have to start with premises. Those premises might be conjectural, in which case the conclusion cannot be called knowledge; or they might be *themselves* conclusions of prior reasoning, in which case they are only as good as the original inputs; or they might be knowledge in themselves, derived canonically.

But reason can never be the starting point. It requires *something* to operate on. The belief that we can reason our way from *nothing* to anything is one of the central flaws of so much ancient philosophy.

As for the original quote, here's a tiny thought experiment:

Pompeii: "How did you beat me? My army had more foot, more cavalry, more supplies, better ground..."

Caesar: "And my army had the morale. Feelings don't care about your facts."