

ARGUMENT FROM ZENO

The Argument:

Zeno of Elea, the ancient Greek philosopher, argued that in a race the super-fit Achilles cannot beat the tortoise and that if we perceive that he does that is an illusion for it is impossible so Achilles is not moving at all. The reason is that for Achilles to catch up with the tortoise he moves an infinity of places and you cannot cross an infinity of places for infinite implies that something has no beginning and no end. If you could cross it, it would not be unlimited and would have an end. Since that time the world has answered that space can be infinitely divisible but is not infinitely divided.

More honest people say that Zeno was right but he was also wrong for even if movement is an illusion some kind of movement has to take place. Something has to move in the illusion. For example, if you imagine a man walking across the street in your mind's eye, movement of something has taken place in order for you to be able to imagine the movement. It's a real movement in your mind. So we are back where we started. The illusion view doesn't solve the problem.

Something has to make me think of a house one moment and of the colour blue the next. Movement and change are one and the same thing.

Is space infinitely divisible but not infinitely divided? For Achilles to catch up with the tortoise he does cause divisions in space. He moves half a millimetre after moving half of that after moving whatever is half of that and so on ad infinitum. The objection forgets that he is making divisions and dividing the space between himself and the tortoise. Space is indivisible in a sense – it is like one emptiness - but not in the sense that Achilles cannot break it up to move for he has to. The space that physics studies is not a void but energy bound up with time. But space in the sense of emptiness as we understand it must still exist so physics has no relevance to this discussion for we are not thinking of the space it studies. When something so impossible is still true it shows that all motion is supernatural and when we have that power and are made of it, it follows we can use it to survive death for we can thwart nature. Change is the only kind of miracle we can accept for it is undeniable unlike the miracles reported by religion. It proves that if miracles happen they just happen and we should pay no attention to any alleged religious message they have for the miracle of motion does not always have a message for us – like the miracle of a grain of sand falling to the bottom of the sea.

Zeno proved that there is something permanent about us. Death cannot put us out of existence. Change cannot destroy us.

The mind is the most supernatural entity of all because movement is useless if nothing is aware of it. We have seen that consciousness is a form of motion. It moves from one perception to another. The supreme and best form of motion then cannot pass away because when the cosmos had to do what seems impossible to cause motion it will not let the masterpiece suffer decay.

Heaven and earth will pass away but the mind will never pass away.

REPLY: The argument recognises that movement certainly exists. The error is that Achilles has to move across infinite space to catch up with the tortoise. All infinities have their finite elements. For example, you can have 5 apples though 5 is a part of a series of numbers that has no beginning and no end. Mathematically, space is infinitely divisible but not infinitely divided. Achilles moves through one space to catch up not an infinity of carved up pieces of space.

An objection is possible: "It is said that space and anything is infinitely divisible but is not infinitely divided. But that is an assumption. Cheese that is full of divisions that you cannot see will be as much cheese that is a unit without divisions." The answer is that we experience change and cannot deny it so that is how we know we are not assuming that space is infinitely divisible but not infinitely divided. We are experiencing not assuming.

Even if it were logically undeniable that movement though real was incoherent it would still be the case that our experience of motion contradicts what our reason says. This would not mean that reason was always wrong but that we all have a programming error in our heads in this issue. It would mean we would have to let experience supersede the authority of reason in this case. You can't build a case for the afterlife based on contradictions. Reason would be saying that if all is one unchangeable entity like Zeno said the experience disproves that for experience changes so the existence of change would be undeniable. If reason also claims that change never happens then the reason that accepts my experience supersedes it for reason saying change never happens is a mathematical examination while the other is stronger for it has the backing of thinking logically and the undeniable fact that the experience of change is real. In other words, a deduction from logic on its own is inferior to a deduction from logic supported by experience. So it is still rational to dispute what Zeno said even if there is irrefutable logic in it for something is not true just because it cannot be disproven.

