

The Athenian Culture War

Argument Schema

Zeno against Plurality

Due: Tues., Nov. 1st

A good way to prepare for writing a philosophy paper is to schematize the argument you will be treating—that is to say, to set it out in premise and conclusion form. This exercise makes the task of writing much easier because it forces you to know beforehand exactly how the argument works, or, as the case may be, does not work.

Since you will soon be writing a paper that begins with Zeno’s best argument against plurality, prepare a schema of this argument, which McKirahan has conveniently labeled “Argument 2B” (fragments 12.3 and 12.4), pp. 183–84. As he observes, this argument has two major stages (Arguments 2B1 and 2B2). But beware that each major stage may have sub-stages, and that these sub-stages their own sub-sub-stages, and so on:

12.3. For if it should be added to something else that exists, it would not make it any bigger. For if it were of no size and was added, it [the thing it is added to] cannot increase in size. And so it follows immediately that what is added is nothing. But if when it is subtracted, the other thing is no smaller, nor is it increased when it is added, clearly the thing being added or subtracted is nothing.

12.4. But if it exists, each thing must have some size and thickness, and part of it must be apart from the rest. And the same reasoning holds concerning the part that is in front. For that too will have size and part of it will be in front. Now it is the same thing to say this once and to keep saying it forever. For no such part of it will be last, nor will there be one part <of any such part> not related to another. Therefore, if there are many things, they must be both small and large; so small as not to have size, but so large as to be unlimited.

Since this is likely to be your first time schematizing an argument, use the Melissus schema we discussed in class as your guide. In other words, represent each of Zeno’s claims as either a premise or a conclusion, or, in some cases, both. For each premise, name the fragment from which it comes (e.g., “12.3”). For each conclusion, name the premises from which it is supposed to be derived (e.g., “P1 + P2”), and, whenever possible, name the argument-form according to which it is derived (e.g., “modus ponens”). This is not always possible, you will find, since there are many more argument-forms than we have learned from Weston; but do your best.

The result should be 1–2 pages, but no more.