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Paul J. Nahin

Time Machine Tales

The Science Fiction Adventures and Philosophical Puzzles of Time Travel

Springer

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Also By Paul J. Nahin

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Holy Sci-Fi! (2014), Springer
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In Praise of Simple Physics (2016), Princeton

Frontispiece: The Pioneers of Time Travel

The scientific pioneers were Albert Einstein (1879–1955) and Kurt Gödel (1906–1978), good personal friends who are shown here in 1954 at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, in a photo taken by Richard Arens. It was Einstein's 1916 general theory of relativity (theory of gravity) that Gödel used as the basis for his 1949 paper that was the first to show that the general theory does **not** forbid time travel into the past.

The literary pioneer of time travel was of course Herbert George Wells (1866–1946), who is shown here as a college freshman cut-up around 1885. The photograph was taken as a prank by an unknown friend while Wells was a student in a biology course given by Thomas Huxley, at the Normal School of Science in

South Kensington (a branch of the University of London). A far too thin and impoverished Wells was then still a teenager, and *The Time Machine* lay a distant 10 years in the future.

Einstein/Gödel photograph courtesy of the American Institute of Physics Emilio Segré Visual Archives of the AIP Niels Bohr Library. Wells photograph courtesy of the rare Books and Special Collections Department of the Library of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

A Note on the Story Citations and Science Fiction History

> "You will find it a very good practice always to verify your references, sir."
> —advice given in 1847 to a young scholar by Martin Joseph Routh, President of Magdalen College, Oxford

Most of the pulp science fiction stories I've cited in this book, in their original form as ink on paper, have long since vanished from our region of spacetime and exist today only (alas) on microfilm reels in scholarly vaults. I am especially indebted to Texas A & M, the Claremont Colleges, the California State Universities at Northridge and Fullerton, Mount Holyoke College, the New York City Public

Library, and the University of Delaware, for giving me access via Inter-Library Loan (through my home institution, the University of New Hampshire) to their extensive archives of ancient science fiction magazines.

A number of the really good stories *have* been anthologized, however, and so are still readily available today in book form. In essentially all cases, though, for historical reasons, I've given the original publication information (magazine and date). You can find which of the stories cited are available in one or more anthology reprints by going to an immensely useful, searchable database on the Web, at: http://www.isfdb.org, and I gratefully thank all those in the science fiction community responsible for creating and maintaining that database.

The following two books by science fiction historian Sam Moskowitz (1920–1997), who lived through what Isaac Asimov called the 'Golden Age of [magazine] Science Fiction,' may be difficult to find today but, if you are interested in the early history of *magazine* science fiction (beyond simply the subgenre of time travel), the hunt for them will be well worth your time:

Science Fiction by Gaslight: a history and anthology of science fiction in the popular magazines, 1891–1911 (World Publishing Company 1968);

Under the Moons of Mars: a history and anthology of "The Scientific Romance" in the Munsey Magazines, 1912–1920 (Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1970).

Some First Words

> Is time travel in principle (never mind the difficulties) a possibility? It has received some thought in the past and deserves some more.
>
> —David Park, in his 1980 book *The Image of Eternity*

> He used to have quite a reputation, but the last couple of years he's been working on time . . . You know, time travel, that sort of rot. An A-1 crackpot.
>
> —a character (discussing a colleague) disagrees with Park, in Mack Reynolds' "Advice from Tomorrow," *Science Fiction Quarterly*, August 1953

In 1993 the first edition of my book *Time Machines* was published by the Press of the American Institute of Physics. In 1999, after Springer acquired AIP Press, the second edition of that book appeared. So, is this the third edition? Well, yes *and* no. It *is* because large chunks of the 1999 edition are still here, along with new discussions of the advances by physicists and philosophers that have appeared in the intervening 18 years. The prime example of that centers on the time travel paradoxes. Those discussions contain mostly what is in the second edition, but they have also been brought up to date with the latest thinking on the paradoxes, by physicists and philosophers.

And yet this book is *not quite* the third edition because the emphasis is now on the philosophical and on science fiction, rather than on physics as it was when written for AIP Press. In that spirit there are, for example, no Tech Notes filled with algebra, integrals, and differential equations, as there are in the first and second editions of *Time Machines*. That's because I wish to avoid having this book seem to be simply a long physics treatise. I have, in fact, some sympathy with the following views, expressed by two philosophers:

"There is one metaphor in the physicist's account of space-time which one would expect *anyone* to recognize as such, for metaphor is here strained far beyond the breaking point, i.e., when it is said that time is 'at right angles to each of the

other three dimensions.' Can anyone really attach any meaning to this—except as a recipe for drawing diagrams?"[1]

and

"This is from the outset a study in descriptive metaphysics. In consequence, I shall have nothing to say about twice-differentiable Lorentzian manifolds, Minkowski diagrams, world-lines, time-like separations, space-time worms [a 'thick' world-line], or temporal parts."[2]

I don't *completely* endorse these sentiments, however, and so please understand that I am not denying the ultimate importance of *physics* when it comes to achieving a deep understanding of time travel. To quote yet another philosopher,

"Arm chair reflections on the concept of causation [are] not going to yield new insights. The grandfather paradox is simply a way of pointing to the fact that if the usual laws of physics are supposed to hold true in a chronology violating space-time, then consistency constraints emerge. *[To understand these constraints] involves solving problems in physics, not armchair philosophical reflections* [my emphasis]."[3]

I could not agree more. So, in *Time Machine Tales* you *will* find some physics. In support of time travel to the future (and in how to make a wormhole time machine for travel into the past), for example, I'll show you a high school level derivation of the famous time dilation formula from special relativity. There are some spacetime diagrams, some simple algebraic manipulations, and here and there just a touch of freshman calculus; even the metric tensor gets a few words, too. But it is, admittedly, pretty light-weight stuff.

So, while certainly saluting the premier position of physics, *Time Machine Tales* is not a scholarly, in-depth treatment of time travel physics. Rather, it is an examination of how science fiction writers (and many philosophers, too) have viewed time travel. (Even in the physics discussions, science fiction will regularly appear.) Those views, by their very nature, are far more romantic than are those of hardcore theoretical physicists. History has shown, of course, that the results of the work of theoretical physicists may, in the end, prove to actually be far more astonishing than anything fiction writers cook-up—and if there is any scientific subject for which that may again prove to be true it's time travel—but for us, here, it will be the fiction writer who has center stage.

The philosophers will be only slightly less important in this book. While much of the early philosophical literature on time travel and backwards causation reads like imaginative fairy tales spun out of vacuous vapors (more on this soon), many modern philosophers have shown themselves to be quite sophisticated. What they

[1] C. W. K. Mundle, "The Space-Time World," *Mind*, April 1967, pp. 264–269.

[2] J. F. Rosenberg, "One Way of Understanding Time," *Philosophia*, October 1972, pp. 283–301.

[3] John Earman, "Recent Work on Time Travel," in *Time's Arrows Today: recent physical and philosophical work on the direction of time* (Steven F. Savitt, editor), Cambridge University Press 1995, pp. 268–310. We'll discuss the idea of *consistency constraints* in some detail later in the book. Earman is Professor Emeritus of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Pittsburgh.

have written deserves serious consideration by anyone interested in time travel, and that includes physicists. However, while the time travel interests of philosophers and physicists have a lot of overlap, those interests are *not* in total agreement. For example, while both groups talk of the grandfather paradox, the philosophers worry in particular about motivation (*why* the murderous mission?), while physicists have *never* to my knowledge asked themselves that question[4] (other than to figure out how to avoid it!). After all, philosophers talk of flesh-and-blood humans as time travelers, while the physicists send only billiard balls (with no personal identities or memories) on time trips into the past for the *expressed purpose* of avoiding the messy human issues of 'motivation' and free will. This approach by physicists isn't because they are cold and emotionless. It is a useful strategy because, if it can be shown that a mere billiard ball can travel into the past then, as one *philosopher* pointed out long ago, "It is implausible that it should be possible for some physical systems to travel back in time, and not others. Thus, if we suppose that simple objects can time-travel ... then we must suppose that more complicated systems, e.g., human beings, can also time-travel."[5]

For the most part, philosophers and physicists have worked at the extreme, opposite points of the time travel spectrum. Much better, I think, would be to adopt the following, more balanced position advocated recently: "The study of time machines is a good opportunity for forging a partnership between philosophy and physics. Of course, philosophers have to recognize that in this particular instance the partnership is necessarily an unequal one since the mathematical physicists have to do the heavy lifting. But it seems clear that a little more cooperation with philosophers of science in attending to the analysis of what it takes to be a time machine could have led to some helpful clarifications in the physics literature."[6]

In the past, philosophers gained a reputation for being just a bit too 'unconstrained by the facts' for scientific tastes—as the English mathematician Augustus De Morgan (1806–1871) wrote in an 1842 letter, "There are no writers who give us so much *must* with so little *why*, as the metaphysicians"[7]—but I do think today's physicists would do well to reexamine that harsh opinion.

Philosophers of the 'old school' may look askance at a non-philosopher (me!) leveling criticism at them, and so let me step aside and quote from a member of the

[4]Nicholas J. J. Smith, "Why Would Time Travelers Try to Kill Their Younger Selves?" *The Monist*, July 2005, pp. 388–395. As Smith writes, "[Motivation] does not impact upon the possibility, or even the likelihood of backwards time travel. Yet it is deeply puzzling, and we will have no idea what time travel would actually be *like* until we explore it." See also Peter B. M. Vranas, "Can I Kill My Younger Self? Time Travel and the Retrosuicide Paradox," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, December 2009, pp. 520–534.

[5]P. Horwich, "On Some Alleged Paradoxes of Time Travel," *Journal of Philosophy*, August 1975, pp. 432–444.

[6]John Earman, Christopher Smeenk, and Christian Wüthrich, "Do the Laws of Physics Forbid the Operation of Time Machines?," *Synthese*, July 2009, pp. 91–124.

[7]D. J. Cohen, *Equations from God: pure mathematics and Victorian faith*, The Johns Hopkins University Press 2007, p. 119.

'modern school' of philosophical thought: "Space-time is the basic spatiotemporal entity. Many philosophers have mouthed this truth, but few have swallowed it, and very few have digested it ... An appreciation of this truth is crucial to what is commonly referred to as the philosophy of space and time ... In large measure the lack of progress in this area can be traced to the fact that philosophers have not taken seriously the corollary that talk about space and time is really talk about the spatial and temporal aspects of spacetime."[8] This is a polite way of telling philosophers that they had better learn some physics!

What provoked those harsh words was that 'modern' philosopher's perception that 'old school' philosophers were not talking science when they wrote of space and time, but rather were in the business of telling each other irrelevant stories and myths, a curious philosophical approach involving the 'telling of tales' that reached its peak in the early and mid-1960s. Spacetime story telling seems to have started with a paper by the Oxford philosopher Anthony Quinton (1925–2010), who argued[9] that although there can be multiple, disjointed spaces, there can only be a single time that is the same for everyone, everywhere. The issue is *not* the truth or not of that assertion (Newton believed it, modern physicists don't), but rather Quinton's technique for arriving at it: myth construction.

Myth construction strikes those trained in the technical sciences as, while perhaps interesting—even physicists, after all, can enjoy a good fairy tale now and then—something quaint and totally beside the point. In his paper Quinton tells a fairy tale about how he thinks someone can live continuously in time and yet, via dreaming, be in two different spatial worlds; when awake he is in one world, while when the person is asleep he is in the other. Quinton argues that this multispatial myth is plausible, but that a search for an analogous multitemporal myth is doomed. This prompted a reply[10] from another 'old school' philosopher who rebutted Quinton with an even more outlandish counter-myth involving "the warring tribes of Okku and Bokku"!

It was this back-and-forth spinning of hypothetical tales that caused the 'modern' philosopher to write in his paper (note 30) that "the procedure for arriving at answers to these questions [about space and time] adopted by Quinton and most other ['old school' philosophers] is, to say the least, a curious one: a story is told about a mythical land—usually called something like the land of Okkus-Bokkus [which is now seen to an outrageous pun]—and then we are asked what we would say if confronted by experiences like those of the Okkus-Bokkusians. As often happens with such a question, people have said all sorts of things, not all of which are interesting or enlightening."

Another modern philosopher was even less gentle in his rejection of the fairy tale approach to spacetime physics: "Quinton [and others of a similar approach invite

[8]J. Earman, "Space-Time or How to Solve Philosophical Problems and Dissolve Philosophical Muddles Without Really Trying," *Journal of Philosophy*, May 1970, pp. 259–276.

[9]A. Quinton, "Spaces and Times," *Philosophy*, April 1962, pp. 130–147.

[10]R. G. Swinburne, "Times," *Analysis*, June 1965, pp. 185–191.

us] to say what we should think in certain strange circumstances which they describe within common-sense language [as opposed to scientific terminology]. I must say that if I found myself in the circumstances which they describe I just would not know what to think. Probably I should simply conclude that I had gone mad . . . It looks as though these writers are inviting us to consider *what we should say if we knew no science* [my emphasis]."[11]

Even before the modern philosopher (note 30) wrote in 1970 to complain about myth-making, another had already done so: "Whenever a human being produces an argument which opens 'Suppose I had 23 senses . . .,' 'Suppose I were God . . .,' 'Suppose I experienced objects extended in four spatial dimensions . . .,' we can protest that the argument is worthless. For in supposing that he has transcended our human point of view, he has also transcended the limits of our understanding."[12] As this author concluded his very funny paper, such opening sentences are the signatures of myths from "The Philosopher's Fairy Tale Book."

The strained relationship between myth-making philosophers and physicists, especially concerning time travel, has a historically interesting antecedent in the 1920s negative reaction among many over Einstein's theories of relativity (the very theories that give apparent life to time travel). To illustrate my point, consider the October 1913 letter Oskar Kraus (1872–1942), a philosophy professor at the German University in Prague, sent to Ernst Gehrcke (1878–1960), a physics professor at the Reich Institute of Physics and Technology in Berlin. Both men were opponents of Einstein but, as Kraus wrote in his letter, it was only Gehricke among the physicists he considered to be sympathetic to him: "[I] would not know . . . anyone else but you who as a specialist would not reject the intervention of a philosopher from the start."[13]

So, I think Earman's proposal a sound one, an echo in fact of similar words that the physicist Kip Thorne wrote (in the Foreword to the second edition of *Time Machines*) concerning science fiction writers: "Smart physicists seek insight everywhere, including from clever science fiction writers who long ago began probing seriously the logical consequences that would ensue if the laws of physics permitted time travel."[14]

To emphasize this new, combined, diversified focus (but also to retain some connection with my earlier books) is the reason I have altered the title, just a bit. In addition, each chapter now concludes with several open-ended questions, suitable for motivating either classroom discussions or more extensive essay responses.

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[11]J. J. C. Smart, "The Unity of Space-Time: Mathematics Versus Myth Making," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, (no. 2) 1967, 214–217.

[12]M. Hollis, "Times and Spaces," *Mind*, October 1967, pp. 524–536. Hollis ends by saying he is prepared to accept the failure of his paper to convince many of his colleges to change their ways, and he is waiting for one of them to write a paper opening with "Twice upon a time in another space no distance in any direction from here . . ."!

[13]Quoted from the Introduction to Milena Wazeck, *Einstein's Opponents: the public controversy about the theory of relativity in the 1920s*, Cambridge 2014 (published in German in 2009).

[14]Thorne is Professor Emeritus of Physics at the California Institute of Technology.

Teachers, in particular, may find this a useful feature if using the book in an academic setting. The book ends with reprints of two of my own published time travel stories (one from *Analog* and the other from *Omni*), with each serving as an illustration of technical issues raised in the book. From my own teaching of an undergraduate honors class in time travel at the University of New Hampshire, I think the assigning of story writing to be an excellent tool for teachers to use. I found reading student stories to be a lot of fun, and students may well surprise teachers with innovative ideas.

Now that I've mentioned story writing, let me say something about the heavy presence of time travel science fiction stories in this book, the majority of which originated in the often maligned pulp magazines of the 1920s through the 1950s. 'Pulp' has long been burdened with a bad literary reputation. As the editor of one anthology of pulp fiction bluntly put it, "Pulp equated with rubbish. Crap of the basest nature."[15] Part of the reason for that was cosmetic; as I wrote in an earlier book, "The term *pulp* came from the use of inexpensive wood-pulp—you could *feel* the lumpy wood chips in each ragged, untrimmed page—to make paper that was far too crummy for the use by any publisher of 'words meant to last.' Such paper quickly yellowed, turned brittle, and finally, amid billowing clouds of bits and pieces, entered into eternal oblivion. Think of the paper used in your newspaper before its final contribution to civilization in the bottom of your cat's litter box; pulp was worse."[16]

And then a little later, in the same book, "The stories in *Amazing* [*Stories* magazine] were 'read it in the morning, forget it by dinnertime' adventure fiction, the stuff you'd put inside a newspaper if on a crowded train or bus so fellow passengers wouldn't know what a low-grade mind you had. The transient nature of pulp fiction was independent of its literary quality, as the cheap acid-based paper that the stories were printed on began to oxidize and literally burn-up as soon as it rolled off the press. In the introductory essay to a 1950 collection of pulp-detective Philip Marlowe stories (*Trouble Is My Business*), mystery writer Raymond Chandler commented on this when he wrote 'pulp fiction never dreamed of posterity.' Pulp fiction was synonymous with trash fiction, and the nature of much of early pulp SF has been aptly described as 'scientific pornography for the mechanically minded,' and 'writing which drooled over descriptions of technology.'"

When publisher Hugo Gernsback (1884–1967) brought out the first issue of *Amazing Stories* in April 1926, it was the first pulp devoted totally to science fiction. With its masthead motto of "Extravagant Fiction Today—Cold Fact Tomorrow," and with the illustration on the contents page of each issue showing a muscular Jules Verne bursting from his grave in the heroic, up-up-and-away pose made famous years later by Superman, there could be no doubt as to what kind of fiction the reader would find under the dramatic, multi-colored cover art. It was fiction populated with mad scientists, and half-naked woman about to be ravished by alien

[15]Maxim Jakubowski, *The Mammoth Book of Pulp Fiction*, Carroll & Graf 1996.

[16]P. J. Nahin, *Holy Sci-Fi!: where science fiction and religion intersect*, Springer 2014.

invaders from outer space; all in all, stuff of interest only to teenage boys and imbecilic adults.[17]

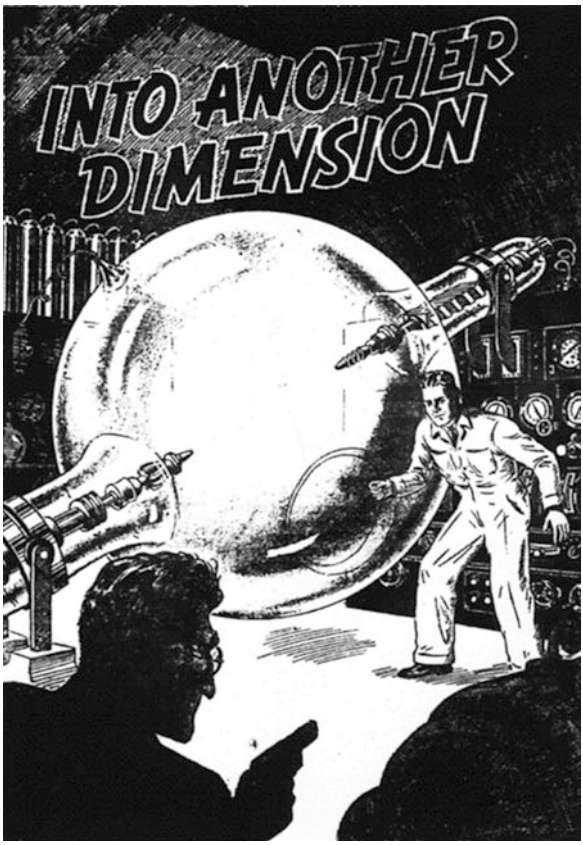
How else, after all, to explain the publication of one tale[18] that was given the following heart-stopping editorial introduction: "Professor Lambert deliberately ventures into a Vibrational Dimension to join his fiancée in its magnetic torture-fields"? In defense of many of the readers of early pulp science fiction, however, not all were attracted by such nonsense. Just 2 months later (June 1931) one reader wrote to the same magazine to complain of masculine heroes saving weeping women from ungodly horrors: "Just why do you permit your Authors to inject messy love affairs into otherwise excellent imaginative fiction? Just stop and think. Our young hero-scientist builds himself a space flyer, steps out into the great void, conquers a thousand and one perils on his voyage and amidst our silent cheers lands on some far distant planet. Then what does he do? He falls in love with a maiden—or it's usually a princess—of the planet to which the Reader has followed him, eagerly awaiting and hoping to share each new thrill attached to his gigantic flight. But after that it becomes merely a hopeless, doddering love affair ending by his returning to Earth with his fair one by his side. Can you grasp that—a one-armed driver of a space-flyer! . . . We buy A.S. for the thrill of being changed in size, in time, in dimension . . . not to read of love . . . I wish . . . for plain, cold scientific stories sans the fair sex."

Here's another example, this one of the sort of tale that gave an aroma of the sophomoric to 'golden age' time travel science fiction. It was a story of a young man of the far future, with access to a time machine, who wants to see a dinosaur before he dies. So back he travels, back, back, until he at last finds himself in a "subterranean cave, dark and foul-smelling." At first he is puzzled (did dinosaurs live underground?), but then suddenly he hears a thundering roar and sees a huge black shape in the gloom. There can be no doubt now; it *is* a dinosaur, and he sees its red, gleaming eyes just as it crushes him into a pancake. But that's okay; he saw a dinosaur before he died. Then comes the dénouement. He hadn't really gone back quite as far as the Jurassic period, but only to the twentieth century, where he has been run down by the local express train in a subway tunnel![19]

[17]This was particularly thought to be the case for readers of the romance pulps, written for young women in the 1930s and 1940s (a separate and distinct audience from that of the science fiction pulps). As one commentator wrote on that genre, the heroes and heroines of such tales often displayed the "mental equipment of a banana split," with the implication that the same might be said of the readers, themselves. (See Margaret MacMullen, "Pulps and Confessions," *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, June 1937.) I don't think, however, that this particular complaint generally applied to the pulp science fiction readership. I'll have much more to say about Gernsback and early pulp science fiction speculations concerning time travel, in Chap. 4.

[18]T. Curry, "Hell's Dimension," *Astounding Stories*, April 1931.

[19]R. G. Thompson, "The Brontosaurus," *Stirring Science Fiction*, April 1941. In the editors of *Stirring*'s defense, notice the month: maybe this story was *meant* to be a joke. If so, it was an admirable success.



Vibrating into new dimensions was, apparently, a popular idea in 1930s pulp science fiction. This 'super science' gadget operated by vibrating an object faster than light, whereupon the Lorentz-FitzGerald contraction formula (see Chap. 3) predicts an *imaginary* size for the object—which means (so we are told) that the object has entered "another plane of existence." The inventor (the fellow with the gun) is inviting his grim-faced assistant to give the gadget a try. The original caption reads "Get into that vibrator! Get in, I say!"

Illustration for "Into Another Dimension" by Maurice Duclos, *Fantastic Adventures* November 1939 (art by Kenneth J. Reeve), © 1939 by Ziff-Davis Publishing Co., reprinted by arrangement with Forrest J. Ackerman, Holding Agent, 2495 Glendower Ave., Hollywood, CA 90027

Today, however, the need to apologize for science fiction tales about time travel isn't quite so necessary. Now and then, in fact, you'll even find one of the better pulp stories cited in highly mathematical papers on time machines in the *Physical Review D*, one of the most important scholarly physics journals. Even those physicists and philosophers who mostly ignore science fiction—except perhaps to make slightly condescending remarks—would, if honest, admit that their early teenage interest in time travel was sparked by reading a really good science fiction story, and not by working their way through a physics textbook. Yes, when the physics eventually came later, it was very good—but the science fiction came *first*,

and it was pretty good, too.[20] It's in a 1937(!) tale, for example, that we find the claim for consistency around a closed loop in time, *decades* ahead of the physicists and philosophers.[21] And when you get to the final section of Chap. 4, I think you'll find it difficult to believe that Everett's many-worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics, dating from the late 1950s (which avoids the standard paradoxes of time travel) wasn't inspired by some youthful reading of science fiction from the 1930s and 1940s.

In a number of places in this book you'll find my comments on how science fiction has occasionally anticipated physicists on the subject of time machines and time travel. This is *not* to be interpreted as some sort of 'gotcha' in favor of science fiction. Far from it. When push comes to shove, physics *always* wins. This situation was specifically addressed by Joe Haldeman, in an afterword to his 2007 novel *The Accidental Time Machine*. There he wrote, about when he started in 1971 to write his earlier, now classic novel *The Forever War*, "I needed a way to get soldiers from star to star within a human lifetime, without doing too much violence to special and general relativity. *I waved my arms around really hard* [my emphasis] and came up with the 'collapsar jump'—at the time, collapsar was an alternate term for 'black hole,' though I was unaware of the latter term [because John Wheeler had invented it only 4 years before, as discussed in Chap. 1 and note 106]." And then Haldeman admitted "It's a truism of science fiction that if you predict enough things, a few of them are going to come true. . . . What I think it actually demonstrates is that *if you wave your arms around hard enough* [my emphasis], sometimes you can fly."

Now, there is one feature common to all books on time travel to the past (which is the central topic treated here, of course) that I would like to clearly state. It's obviously a subject of vast interest to physicists, and yet it offers (as far as I know) *absolutely no hope of suggesting even a single experiment for study*. (As far as I know, nobody is building a time machine in their basement.) A suggestion *has* been made that it may be possible to detect, in the *present*, the effects of the *future* operation of "man-made time machines, which could be of a size traversable by humans," that is, machines with a 1-m spatial extent offering a one second trip into the past.[22] With the best technology available today, however, the calculated effects on the proposed two-particle scattering experiment are orders of magnitude too small to measure.

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[20]The view expressed by Vladimir Voinovich's time traveler in his 1986 novel *Moscow 2042* (Science fiction . . . is not literature, but tomfoolery like the electronic games that induce mass idiocy.) is, I think, wrong. For an interesting presentation on the role of science fiction in exciting an interest in science among youngsters, see the paper by Frederik Pohl (1919–2013), "Science Fiction: the stepchild of science," *Technology Review*, October 1994, pp. 57–61. In this essay Pohl, a well-known writer of science fiction and editor of *Galaxy Science Fiction* and *If* magazines, writes "Science fiction is [the ultimate protection] against future shock . . . if you read enough of it, nothing will take you entirely by surprise." Not even time travel.

[21]P. S. Miller, "The Sands of Time," *Astounding Stories*, April 1937.

[22]S. Rosenberg, "Testing Causality on Spacetimes with Closed Timelike Curves," *Physical Review D*, March 15, 1998, pp. 3365–3377.

This situation is really unprecedented in the history of science.[23] To cynics, it may seem to be a bit like writing learned papers on the thermodynamics of fire-breathing dragons (which, like other mythological entities—and time machines, too—have yet to be seen)! This one fact has opened the doors—and has kept them open for decades—for philosophers and science fiction writers, who can endlessly debate back and forth on all aspects of time travel to the past with nary a single experimental fact to complicate their lives. For physicists the situation is naturally frustrating, but for philosophers and science fiction writers it's a dream come true. This isn't to say it's *all* basically theological in nature. Both the physicists and the philosophers *have* written many fascinating papers and books and, of course, so have science fiction writers. Mathematical physics *has* been advanced.

Still, despite all of the theoretical work done in the last 30 years, work that has made it reasonable to seriously talk of 'time travel' and 'time machines,' I suspect many would nonetheless agree with these words from more than 75 years ago: "Of all the fantastic ideas that belong to science fiction, the most remarkable—and, perhaps, the most fascinating—is that of time travel . . . Indeed, so fantastic a notion does it seem, and so many apparently obvious absurdities and bewildering paradoxes does it present, that some of the most imaginative students of science refuse to consider it as a practical proposition."[24] For some, time travel is an even more unlikely possibility than (as declared by Robert Lewis Stevenson) is the "welding of ice and iron." Not all physicists and philosophers view the time travel/paradox arguments as convincing, however. Provocative, yes, of course, but many are not yet prepared to write 'signed, sealed, and delivered' at the end.

So, keep reading and I think you'll discover why there *are* those who are not so quick to dismiss the possibility of following the fantastic world line of H. G. Wells' intrepid Time Traveller[25] into the future. And, just maybe, into the distant past, too.

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[23]Perhaps, however, I am too hasty. More recent theoretical calculations suggest that wormholes connecting our universe with other universes would, after converting into time machines, have characteristic thermal signatures. See P. F. González-Díaz, "Thermal Properties of Time Machines," *Physical Review D*, 2012, pp. 105026-1 to -7 which, however, concludes that a search for such signatures would be "quite difficult [with the] instruments available."

[24]I. O. Evans, "Can We Conquer Time?" *Tales of Wonder*, Summer 1940.

[25]The Time Traveller is never named in Wells' 1895 novel *The Time Machine*. An earlier (1888) attempt at a time machine story, with the awful title *The Chronic Argonauts* (the "chronic" was apparently inspired by the word *chronology*), so embarrassed Wells that he later called it "imitative puerile stuff," "clumsily invented, and loaded with irrelevant sham significance," and "inept," and so he hunted down and destroyed every copy of it that he could find. You can find *The Chronic Argonauts* reprinted in *The Definitive Time Machine* (H. M. Ceduld, editor), Indiana University Press 1987. The hero in that work *was* named: Dr. Moses Nebogipfel. There is one passage in *The Time Machine* that does tantalize; as the Time Traveller explores a museum of "ancient" artifacts in the Palace of Green Porcelain (they are, of course, artifacts of our *future*) he reveals that "yielding to an irresistible impulse, I wrote my name upon the nose of a steatite monster from South America that particularly took my fancy." Thus, the Traveller *has* given his name, but his signature exists only in the future, in a museum of the past that is yet to be built.

For Further Discussion

For time travel to the past to make any sense, the past must in some sense 'still be there.' This is a concept that we'll find later in the book to have significant support in relativistic physics, but for now let's limit ourselves to a purely romantic view. As an example of this, consider this passage by Canadian writer Grant Allen (1848–1899), from the Introduction to his 1895 time travel novel *The British Barbarians*: "I am writing in my study on the heather-clad hill-top. When I raise my eye from my sheet of foolscap, it falls upon miles and miles of broad open moorland. My window looks out upon unsullied nature. Everything around is fresh and pure and wholesome . . . But away below in the valley, as night draws on, a lurid glare reddens the north-eastern horizon. It marks the spot where the great wen of London heaves and festers." I personally find it quite tempting to imagine Allen somehow still there in his study of 1895, and of heaving and festering late-Victorian London, too, with H. G. Wells himself in the middle of it, still reading the first rave reviews of *The Time Machine*. In Wells' novel The Time Traveller journeys into the far future, while in Allen's work the protagonist is a twenty-fifth century anthropologist who has traveled back to the past of the late nineteenth century to study the 'British barbarians.' Read Allen's novel (it's available on the Internet, for free, as a Project Gutenberg book) and comment on the significance of its appearance at virtually the same time as Wells' great work. Why do you think Wells' novel is remembered, and Allen's is not?

In the opening paragraph of his paper "The Conundrum of Time Travel" (*Croatian Journal of Philosophy*, No. 37, 2013, pp. 81–92), Anguel Stefanov writes "Needless to say . . . the problems concerning time travel are being still tackled by science fiction only, but resolved by science proper neither theoretically, nor practically." Do you think this is correct?

Eventually every genre of writing becomes the target for parody, in which the *form* of the genre serves as the framework for what (it is hoped) is a humorous mockery. The most famous example of this, perhaps, is the annual

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton contest in writing a take-off on the long-winded opening line of the 1830 novel *Paul Clifford*, by Bulwer-Lytton (1803–1873). That opening line *is* a wonder (a masterpiece of purple prose): "It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents—except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the housetops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness." Here's a recent (from the 2015 contest) spoof: "The Contessa's heart was pounding hard and fast, like an out-of-balance clothes washer, which can get that way if you mix jeans with a lot of light things, though the new ones have some sensor thing to counteract that or shut off, but the Contessa's heart didn't have anything like that, so she had to sit down and tell Don Rolando to keep his hands to himself for a while." Science fiction isn't immune to such fun, and a good example of that can be found in the September 14, 2015, issue of *The New Yorker*, which has (on p. 50) "Eight Short Science-Fiction Stories" by Paul Simms. Here's the one I laughed hardest at: "The Gene-Splicers had tinkered with the DNA, producing a race of warriors who craved just two things: the thrill of battle and the taste of their own feet. They hungered for battle. They literally ate their own feet. None survived to reproduce, and within a few short years they were all gone. The Gene-Splicers chalked it up to experience, and decided to try harder the next time." That, and the other seven spoofs by Simms, cut across a wide swath of science fiction, but one theme noticeably absent was that of time travel. Try your hand at writing a *short* (fewer than 500 words) time travel spoof, and be prepared to read it aloud to an audience of your peers.

The tale "Through the Dragon Glass" by Abraham Merritt (1884–1943) appeared in the early pulp magazine *All-Story Weekly* of November 24, 1917. It described the discovery of a passage through an ancient Chinese mirror into an alternate world. One *might* think of this as an early conception of a wormhole, but more likely it may remind you mostly of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*. More interesting for us, in this book, is a story written 75 years ago that describes a gadget connecting two regions of spacetime, with a time shift of a week between the two regions. (See "Time Locker" by Lewis Padgett, in the January 1943 issue of *Astounding Science Fiction*.) The gadget falls into the hands of a crooked lawyer who, not understanding what he has, ends up accidently killing himself. As the story ends, the inventor of the gadget ruefully muses to himself that the lawyer

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"must have been the only guy who ever reached into the middle of next week—and killed himself!" The gadget is, in everything but name, a wormhole time machine. Speculate on how such a spacetime structure could appear in a *science fiction magazine*(!) decades before there was any discussion of such a possibility in the physics world.

Adjectives used to describe many of the stories in the science fiction pulps included *primitive*, *trashy*, *tawdry*, *silly*, *absurd*, *crummy*, *ludicrous*, and *cheap*. One early pulp magazine actually boasted, of its contents, that they contained "sensational fiction with *no* philosophy." Speculate on how such a low-level 'literary' form could have been so successful in finding an enthusiastic audience for time travel paradox tales, tales that are in fact by their very nature simply *stuffed* with philosophical issues. As an example of the tremendous emotional power a particularly well-written time travel story can deliver, read Isaac Asimov's "The Ugly Little Boy" (*Galaxy Science Fiction*, September 1958). Asimov rated this story as among his most favorite of all the many he wrote. If you can read it without ending in tears, well, ... An excellent modern historical work on the pulps (of all genres, not just science fiction) is by Lee Server, *Danger Is My Business: an illustrated history of the fabulous pulp magazines, 1896–1953*, Chronicle Books 1993.

A literary fascination with time was already 'in the wind' when Wells wrote his *Time Machine*, as with Oscar Wilde's 1890 novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Even decades earlier than that one can find a hint of time travel of a sort in Edgar Allen Poe's 1841 short story "Three Sundays in a Week." And just 4 years later Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote his haunting poem "The Old Clock on the Stairs," with these opening words:

Somewhat back from the village street
Stands the old-fashioned country-seat.
Across its antique portico
Tall poplar-trees their shadows throw;
And from its station in the hall
An ancient timepiece says it all,—

"Forever—never!

(continued)

Never—forever!"

The most interesting of all pre-Wells time travel fiction to appear in a mass-audience publication was, I think, the short story "The Old Folks Party" by Edward Bellamy, printed in the March 1876 issue of *Scribner's Monthly*. In this story a group of teenagers, who belong to a weekly discussion club, agree that at their next meeting they will all come dressed and behaving as they believe they will be dressing and behaving 50 years in the future. Also attending will be the grandmother of one of the young ladies. The meeting of the "old folks" takes place, and it invokes such powerful feelings of mortality that, at last, one of the young men can stand it no more: "Suddenly Henry sprang to his feet and, with the strained, uncertain voice of one waking himself from a nightmare, cried:—'Thank God, thank God, it is only a dream,' and tore off the wig, letting the brown hair fall about his forehead. Instantly all followed his example . . .." The young people then began to laugh with relief at once again being young, until they notice the grandmother is crying. Her granddaughter instantly knows what is wrong and says, "Oh, grandma, we can't take you back with us." Read, compare, and contrast, these works by Wilde, Poe, Longfellow and Bellamy, with the 'scientific' presentation of time travel by Wells.

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My name is on *Time Machine Tales* as the author, but there are many others without whose help I could not have written it. For this, the revised and updated third edition of the original 1993 book *Time Machines*, I am enormously grateful to the publisher, Springer Science + Business Media, and to my physics editors at Springer, Dr. Sam Harrison and his assistant Ho Ying Fan in New York City. They made an intellectually demanding and inherently lengthy project (one that could easily have turned into a nightmare) a pleasant one. Springer's New York City-based editorial assistant Irene Bruce smoothly handled the administrative details of transforming the book from typescript to print. And to Serguei Krasnikov in Russia, Frank Arntzenius and Roberto Casati in England, Francesco Gonella in Italy, and Geoff Goddu and Archille Varzi in America, I offer grateful thanks for permission to reprint from their publications.

But the story of this book actually begins long before 1993.

Nearly four decades in the past, in 1979, when time travel was still mostly just a nutty idea used by science fiction writers and a few rogue philosophers—proposing to give a serious seminar on time travel at the weekly college *physics* seminar would almost certainly have resulted in getting the bum's rush out the nearest door, or maybe even tossed through the closest window (or, God forbid, *off the roof*!)—I wrote my first time travel tale for *Analog Science Fiction* magazine. Bought by then editor Ben Bova (you can read it in Appendix A), he also bought another time travel tale from me soon after he had become the fiction editor at the newly created *Omni Science Fiction* magazine (you can read it in Appendix B). (Years later, Ben's successor as *Omni*'s fiction editor, Ellen Datlow, bought a third time travel story from me—"The Invitation"—which you can read if you can locate the July 1985 issue.)

Those fictional experiences, and my discovery of Princeton philosopher David Lewis' seminal 1976 essay on the *logical* possibility of time travel, led me to plunge into a deeper study of the *physics* of time travel, to the point where as the 1980s ended (1988, to be precise) I thought a book should be my next writing project. Alas, nobody else shared that thought. I spent the next 3 years looking for a

publisher among numerous university presses; as I looked, the pile of rejection letters, like entropy, grew steadily larger.

The editor at one well-known university press, in fact, simply laughed at the idea of a scholarly time travel book when I called him on the telephone (e-mail was then still in its infancy) to ask, after a long period of no response to my written proposal, if he had gotten it. (Perhaps, I told myself, the mail truck carrying my precious document had fallen into a hyper-dimensional spacetime warp: how pathetically desperate is the anxious academic writer!) Later, I published a number of math/physics books with that same press (but now with new editors) and so there were no lasting hard feelings.

That laughing, unresponsive editor wasn't alone in his opinion, I have to admit, and it wasn't until 1991 when Maria Taylor, the publisher at the Press of the American Institute of Physics (AIP Press), decided to take a chance (a *big* chance) and publish the first edition of *Time Machines*. She made that decision in large part because of two extremely supportive reviews of my proposal from the academic physicists Edwin Taylor (MIT, and a former editor of *The American Journal of Physics*) and Gregory Benford (University of California, Irvine, as well as being an award-winning writer of science fiction who occasionally used the time travel theme). After the original *Time Machines* appeared, Ben Bova asked me to use it as a guide to writing a book on time travel for the new Writer's Digest series on science fiction that he was editing, aimed specifically at would-be story writers; that book came out in 1997 as *Time Travel*. Later, Trevor Lipscombe, then editor-in-chief at the Johns Hopkins University Press (and my former math editor at Princeton University Press), reprinted *Time Travel* (with a new Preface) in 2011.

After Springer acquired AIP Press (and all of its books) in 1995, and Maria Taylor herself went over to Springer, she and I collaborated again on bringing out the second edition of *Time Machines* in 1999. And now, 18 years later, here (with a title slightly altered for reasons I give in "Some First Words") is its successor.

To Sam, Ho Ying, Irene, Ben, Ellen, Maria, Edwin, Gregory, and Trevor, thank you for your support. But my greatest debt of all, one I can never even begin to repay, is to my wife of 55 years, Patricia Ann, a woman of infinite tolerance. Who else would put up with someone who plays first-person-shooter video games at midnight (the bigger and the louder the explosions, the better!) and writes books on time machines, all the while claiming not to be crazy?

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Introduction

> Over the last few years leading scientific journals have been publishing articles dealing with time travel and time machines. . . . Why? Have physicists decided to set up in competition with science fiction writers and Hollywood producers?
>
> —John Earman (see note 25 of *Some First Words*)

Writing about time travel is, today, a respectable business. It hasn't always been so. After all, time travel, *prima facie*, appears to violate a fundamental law of nature; every effect has a cause, with the cause occurring before the effect. Time travel to the past, however, seems to allow, indeed to *demand*, backwards causation, with an effect (the time traveler emerging into the past as he exits from his time machine) occurring *before* its cause (the time traveler pushing the start button on his machine's control panel years *later* to start his trip backward through time).

Thus, when H. G. Wells published his breakout masterpiece, *The Time Machine*, in 1895, even those readers who loved it as a *story* (and not all did) were still quick to dismiss it as a *romantic fantasy*. It was, in their view, certainly an emotionally powerful tale of pure imagination, but nothing more. Reviewers of the day used such words as "hocus-pocus" and "bizarre," and called the work a "fanciful and lively dream."[26] Any one of the novels by Wells' contemporary, Jules Verne (even such super-technology ones like the 1865 *From the Earth to the Moon*) would have been ranked *far* above Wells' novella in terms of 'it could actually happen.'

Wells himself always denied that his time machine was anything more than a literary device[27] to get his Time Traveller into the far future. Indeed, in 1934, in the

[26]These reviews are reprinted in P. Parrinder, *H. G. Wells: The Critical Heritage*, Routledge & Kegan 1972. A modern reviewer has applied such negative characteristics to the Time Traveller, himself, calling him "a kind of Trickster figure" and "a quack and magician." See Robert J. Begiebing, "The Mythic Hero in H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine*," in *Essays in Literature*, Fall 1984, pp. 201–210.

[27]Wells was not the first to use a machine to enable time adventures, as the Spanish writer Enrique Gaspar (1842–1902) used one in his 1887 story *The Time Ship: A Chrononautical Journey*. It's Wells' tale we remember, however.

preface to *Seven Famous Novels* (published by Knopf), a collection of his novel-length scientific romances (as science fiction had been known before the term *science fiction* came into use), including *The Time Machine*, Wells made his position perfectly clear: "These stories of mine collected here do not pretend to deal with possible things; they are exercises of the imagination ... They are all fantasies; they do not aim to project a serious possibility; they aim indeed only at the same amount of conviction as one gets in a good gripping dream." Wells then went on to say in that same preface that all attempts before at writing fantastic stories depended on magic. But not in his works. "It occurred to me that instead of the usual interview with the devil or a magician, an ingenious use of scientific patter might with advantage be substituted." Wells' great contribution to time traveling story-telling was his introduction of a *machine*; science instead of magic, drugs, dreams, blows on the head, or suspended animation.[28] Not all modern science fiction writers have followed Wells' lead, however.

A science fiction tale by Clifford Simak (1904–1988), for example, the 1978 novel *Mastodonia*, incorporates an alien creature marooned on Earth (because of a spaceship crash centuries earlier) who 'makes time tunnels.' One of the characters in the story, who is attempting to start a time-travel agency using these tunnels, explains why not having a time *machine* is causing her difficulties with prospective clients: "The whole trouble was that I couldn't tell them about some machine—a time-travel machine. If I could have told them we'd developed a machine, they'd have been more able to believe me. We place so much trust in machines; they are magic to us. If I could have outlined some ridiculous theory and spouted some equations at them, they would have been impressed." I think that's off the mark. We trust in machines not because they are magic, but for precisely the opposite reason. They are *not* magic, but rather are *rational*. And to dismiss mathematics is to say that some non-natural—some supernatural—influence is at work.

But is a time *machine* actually possible? Or is the idea of a time machine simply "Nonsense" and "A bilgeful of crap," as a character bluntly puts it in the 1972 novel *The Dancer from Atlantis* by Poul Anderson (1926–2001). Wells, himself, addressed this point in an autobiographical essay (published in the *Cornhill Magazine*) that he wrote in July 1945 (just 13 months before his death) in even blunter words. Writing under the name of "Wilfred B. Batterave," he penned a very funny summary of his life titled "A Complete Exposé of This Notorious Literary Humbug." There he described *The Time Machine* as "[A] tissue of absurdities in which people are supposed to rush to and fro along the 'Time Dimension.' By a few common tricks of the story-teller's trade, Wells gets rid of his Machine before it can be subjected to a proper examination. He cheats like any common spook raiser. Otherwise it is plain commonsense that a man might multiply himself indefinitely,

[28]Examples of 'non-machine' time travel stories of the last four types are, respectively, H. G. Wells' "The New Accelerator" (1901), Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843), Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward, 2000–1887* (1888).

pop a little way into the future and then come back. There would then be two of him. Repeat *da capo* and you have four, and so on, until the whole world would be full of the Time Travelling Individual's vain repetitions of himself. The plain-thinking mind apprehends this in spite of all the Wellsian mumbo-jumbo and is naturally as revolted as I am by the insult to its intelligence." Funny, yes, but still pretty harsh stuff.

As one writer has argued,[29] Wells was, rather than presenting a scientific discovery, simply attempting to refute the nearly suffocating, unjustified (in his mind), smug optimism of the well-to-do of the Late Victorian Age. And so, on his journey to the year A.D. 802,701, the Time Traveller finds the awful decay of humanity in the cannibalistic subjugation of the Eloi by the Morlocks, the end result of class warfare between the working class (Morlocks) and the idle, parasitic upper class (Eloi).

The German social philosopher Karl Marx, if he hadn't already been dead for 12 years in 1895, would surely have nodded in vigorous agreement as he read *The Time Machine*, even as he would have regretted Wells' decision to have the victory of oppressed workers take so long. (What irony that he is buried in London's Highgate Cemetery, the Victorian Valhalla where he has spent the last century and more quite literally mingling with many of the capitalistic ancestors of the Eloi!) What Marx would have thought of *time travel* as a possibility is, however, far less certain.

How things changed in the years that followed *The Time Machine*. There was, at first, admittedly a 'slight' decline in literary merit as the newly developing pulp science fiction magazines picked-up and ran with the time travel genre. Many of the magazine time travel tales of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s were, frankly, simply awful. BUT—some were pretty good, too. And some were, in fact, *very* good. From the 1950s on, there have been ever more sophisticated time travel tales from ever more sophisticated writers.

In the academic communities of philosophers and physicists, too, big events occurred. I give the philosophers the edge, in fact, with the 1976 publication of a hugely important paper that opened with these dramatic words: "Time travel, I maintain, is possible. The paradoxes of time travel [to the past] are oddities, not impossibilities. They prove only this much, which few would have doubted: that a possible world where time travel took place would be a most strange world, different in fundamental ways from the world we think is ours."[30] That writer wasn't the first philosopher to write on time travel to the past, but none had expressed themselves in such powerful and unequivocal words in unmistakable support of the concept.

[29]R. M. Philmus, "*The Time Machine*; Or, the Fourth Dimension as Prophecy," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, May 1969, pp. 530–535.

[30]David Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, April 1976, pp. 145–152. Lewis (1941–2001) was a Princeton University philosophy professor.

Lewis' paper is also notable because it gives what seems to be a clear definition of just what it means to say one has 'traveled in time,' either to the past *or* to the future:

> What is time travel? Inevitably, it involves discrepancy between time and time. Any traveler departs and then arrives at his destination; the time elapsed from departure to arrival (positive, or perhaps zero) is the duration of the journey. But if he is a time traveler, the separation in time between departure and arrival does not equal the duration of the journey.

To understand this, we need to appreciate the distinction between the *personal time* of the time traveler and the *external time* of remote observers of the time traveler. A time traveler's personal time is measured, for example, either by the time kept by his wrist watch or, perhaps, by a burning candle. (This distinction had actually appeared earlier in Horwich's paper—see note 27 in *Some First Words*—published the year before Lewis' paper.)

I say I 'give the edge to the philosophers' because, while the first *physics* time travel paper had appeared decades earlier, its author wasn't really a physicist at all but rather was Einstein's friend, the world-famous mathematical logician Kurt Gödel. Gödel's paper was, in retrospect, a pivotal event in establishing the 'respectability' of *scientific* time travel; it's worthwhile to take some time here to explain this important point. For physicists (and for philosophers and science fiction writers, too) a 'time machine,' one either constructed by intelligent beings or occurring naturally, manipulates (all the while obeying the known laws of physics) finite amounts of matter and energy in a finite region of spacetime.[31] A 'time machine' would be declared to be *plausible* if it could be explained by a rational, scientific theory. Such a rational theory is found in Einstein's general theory of relativity. (His *special* theory of relativity applies in those situations where there is no gravity.)

Until Einstein, the theory of gravity used by scientists was Newton's—a theory that, although amazingly accurate for any situation encountered on Earth, does have observable errors in certain astronomical applications. In addition, Newton's theory is a descriptive one; it makes possible the calculation of gravity effects without offering any explanation for gravity itself. Einstein's theory not only gives the right answers, even in those cases where Newton's theory doesn't, but it also explains gravity. It does that by treating the world as a four-dimensional structure in which all four dimensions (three of space and one of time) are in a certain sense on equal footing. The resulting Einsteinian description of the world is that of a unified spacetime in which time and space are intimately intertwined, whereas Newton's theory keeps time and space separate and distinct.

[31] I am going to feel free to use words like *spacetime* without having to first write introductory essays on relativity theory and tensor mathematics, because such words have entered common use. All those Hollywood science fiction movies, even the crummy ones that routinely trash the laws of physics, have at least expanded the general imagination!

As Newton wrote of time, at the start of his 1687 masterpiece *Principia*, a work that revolutionized physics, "Absolute, true, and mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature, flows equably without relation to anything external, and by another name is called duration." This view of time would be, of course, discarded with the arrival of Einstein and his view of variable time depending on the state of the observer.

Unlike Einstein's view, Newton's view of the nature of time was entangled with theology. As one modern theologian has written, "Newton conceived of absolute time as grounded in God's necessary existence."[32] To quote Newton himself, in the *General Scholium* to the second edition of *Principia* (1713) he added words that didn't appear in the original: "God is a living, intelligent, and powerful Being; and, from his other perfections, [it follows] that he is supreme, or most perfect. He is eternal and infinite, omnipotent and omniscient; that is, his duration reaches from eternity to eternity; his presence from infinity to infinity; he governs all things, and knows all things that are or can be done. He is not eternity and infinity, but eternal and infinite; he is not duration or space, but he endures and is present. He endures forever, and is everywhere present; and, by existing always and everywhere, he constitutes duration and space. Since every particle of space is *always*, and every indivisible moment of duration is *everywhere*, certainly the Maker and Lord of all things cannot be *never* and *nowhere*."

Okay, I'll be honest—I really am not at all sure just what that means! Newton added these words to the *Principia* in response to criticism (from the influential philosopher George Berkeley (1685–1753)) that his original statements about absolute time were "pernicious and absurd notions," notions that were in fact atheistic in conception. That was a most serious charge in Newton's day, and he was trying (I think) to find some cover from those critics who spent more hours of the day thinking about God than of physics. Much more honest (in my opinion) are the witticisms 'time is just one damn thing after another' and 'time is what keeps everything from all happening at once.'[33] More funny than useful, yes, of course, but at least they're funny.

Newton's theological view of time is simply irrelevant to the modern physicist (although perhaps of more interest to the philosopher-historian) but in many cases it is of *central interest* to the science fiction writer. For example, Newton's religious

[32]William Lane Craig, "God and the Beginning of Time," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, March 2001, pp. 17–31, which discusses the question 'Why didn't God create the world sooner?' One irreverent answer is 'He was busy creating Hell for all those who ask that question,' but a more scholarly analysis can be found in Brian Leftow, "Why Didn't God Create the World Sooner?" *Religious Studies*, June 1991, pp. 157–172.

[33]This last 'definition' first (as far as I know) appeared in the work of the science fiction writer Ray Cummings (1887–1957), in his 1921 story "The Time Story," published in *Argosy-All-Story* magazine. He repeated the phrase in his 1929 novel *The Man Who Mastered Time*, and then again in the 1946 novel *The Shadow Girl*. ("This same Space; the spread of this lawn . . . what would it be in another 100 years? Or a 1000? This little space, from the Beginning to the End so crowded with events and only Time to hold them apart!")

mindset and its (perhaps!) connection with time travel is treated in my short story "Newton's Gift," originally published in *Omni Magazine* (January 1979) and reprinted in Appendix B at the end of this book. Wells' Time Traveller's view of time is more Newtonian than it is Einsteinian—and perhaps that's not such a big surprise, considering that Einstein was only 16 years old when *The Time Machine* was published.

From the first (1905) it has been known that Einstein's special theory allows time travel into the future via the well-known mechanism of *time dilation*. (The faster a rocket ship travels relative to Earth, the slower is the tick-tock of a wrist watch worn by a rocketeer, compared to that of an identical watch back on Earth.)[34] To return from the future, however, to travel back into the past to the instant after the traveler began his journey, had been thought to be impossible. It was Gödel's discovery that showed the general theory, which has passed every experimental test it has been subjected to (most recently, the September 2015 detection, from two massive colliding black holes, of gravitational waves—'ripples in spacetime'—generated more than a billion years ago in an effect predicted by the general theory a century ago), does allow time travel to the past *under certain conditions*. It is this availability of a *theory* that distinguishes time travel speculations from the outlandish fantasy speculations with which it is often unjustly lumped—speculations that *are* in the province of quacks (such as ESP, astrology, and mind over matter a' la spoon bending).

In his general theory, Einstein showed how spacetime can be either 'flat' (in the no-gravity, special relativity case of what is called a *Minkowski spacetime*[35]) or 'curved' (those situations with gravity), and he did that not by verbal hand waving, but rather by writing mathematical equations that obey all the known laws of physics: his famous gravitational field, nonlinear differential tensor equations. These complicated equations are notoriously difficult to solve in general, but in certain, special cases they *have* been solved. Those solutions describe how matter and energy and spacetime interact. As the popular saying puts it, "Curved spacetime tells matter how to move, and energy and matter tell spacetime how to curve." In that sense, gravity *is* curved spacetime.

In 1949 Gödel found one such special solution to the field equations that describes the movement of mass-energy not only through space but also *backward in time* along trajectories in spacetime that are called *closed time-like lines* or *curves*

[34]One pulp magazine science fiction story (F. J. Bridge, "Via the Time Accelerator," *Amazing Stories*, January 1931) got this right when its time traveler explains how his time machine works with these words: "Time as we know it is not universally absolute. The rate of its passage depends to a great extent upon the velocity of its observer with regard to some certain reference system. A moving clock will run slower with respect to a selected coordinate system than a stationary one." (Recall my earlier comments on the personal time of a time traveler.)

[35]Named after Hermann Minkowski (1864–1909), Einstein's mathematics professor in Zurich who gave the now well-known spacetime diagram interpretation of special relativity which, when originally presented by Einstein, was in the form of pure mathematics.

(called CTLs or CTCs, respectively).[36] These trajectories are such that if a human traveled along one, *always at a speed less than that of light* (that's what *time-like* means), he would see everything around him happening in normal causal order from moment to moment (for example, the second hand on his wrist watch would tick clockwise into the local future), but eventually the CTL/CTC closes back on itself and the traveler finds himself in his own past.

On the scale of the Solar System, general relativity has causality built into itself, but on much larger scales things can be a good deal more complicated. On a very large, astronomical scale, in fact, curved spacetime can result in violations of causality, with effects occurring before their causes. That is what the physics and the mathematics of Gödel's solution imply. That is what is meant by saying there is a scientific, rational basis for discussing time travel to the past. It is particularly important to note that travel along one of the closed time-like world lines discovered by Gödel requires a *machine*, some kind of accelerating rocket ship. That's because none of Gödel's CTLs/CTCs are what is called a *geodesic*. That is, none are *free-fall* world lines.[37] This machine does not, however, generate CTLs/CTCs where none existed before (CTL/CTC *creation* requires what physicists call a *strong* time machine) but rather simply makes use of the CTLs/CTCs that are inherent in Gödel's spacetime. A Gödelian rocket ship then is an example of a *weak* time machine.

I mentioned earlier that "certain, special cases" of Einstein's gravitational field equations result in CTLs/CTCs. What was the "special case" that Gödel solved? His solution of the field equations is for a rotating, infinite, static universe composed of a perfect fluid at constant pressure. In such a universe Gödel found that naturally occurring CTLs/CTCs pass through every point in spacetime; that is, time travel in Gödel's universe is *not* the result of a machine *manipulating* mass and energy on a *local* scale (the classic science fictional description of a time machine); rather, in Gödel's spacetime time travel is a naturally occurring phenomenon! The observable

[36]Kurt Gödel, "An Example of a New Type of Cosmological Solutions of Einstein's Field Equations of Gravitation," *Reviews of Modern Physics*, July 1949, pp. 447–450. A CTL/CTC is a special type of *world line*; the trajectory through spacetime of every particle in the universe is a world line that extends from each particle's past to its future. Our everyday experiences are with world lines that never cross or come close to themselves (which would put a particle at or near the same spacetime point more than once). That lack of experience with CTLs/CTCs that self-intersect is what makes time travel to the past so difficult for humans to grasp. For a discussion of *how* Gödel did what he did, see Wolfgang Rindler, "Gödel, Einstein, Mach, Gamow, and Lanczos: Gödel's Remarkable Excursion into Cosmology," *American Journal of Physics*, June 2009, pp. 498–510.

[37]It was discovered in 1969, however, that this isn't strictly true *if* one allows for a test particle (our 'time traveler') to be electrically charged. Then, naturally present electromagnetic forces acting on the particle could be sufficient to propel the particle along a Gödelian CTL/CTC. That is, no rocket would be required. See U. K. De, "Paths in Universes Having Closed Time-Like Lines," *Journal of Physics A*, July 1969, pp. 427–432. There are other solutions to Einstein's equations that do allow time travel on free-fall geodesics: see, for example, I. D. Soares, "Inhomogeneous Rotating Universes with Closed Timelike Geodesics of Matter," *Journal of Mathematical Physics*, March 1980, pp. 521–525.

universe is, however, *non*-rotating and expanding (astronomers see red-shifts in the spectrums of distant stars) and so, although Gödel's spacetime satisfies the general relativity field equations, its time travel property does not hold in the spacetime in which we live. (This may account for why the initial reaction in the physics/philosophical communities, to Gödel's discovery that time travel is *not* nonsense according to general relativity, was mostly indifference.) The failure to observe time travel in our universe may (somewhat surprisingly, I think) still have possible implications for us, however, as one philosopher has cleverly argued.[38] He points out that naturally occurring Gödelian time travel would endow the universe with properties particularly useful for the survival of intelligence (presumably that includes humans) against extinction from a multitude of cosmic disasters. So, for those who argue that the universe we live in was *made* for us (the advocates of various proofs of God's existence that have Him as Designer), we have an obvious question: why did He (apparently) skip incorporating time travel?

In an invited essay that appeared the same year as his time travel physics paper, Gödel specifically addressed the seemingly paradoxical aspect of what he had discovered: "By making a round trip on a rocket ship in a sufficiently wide course, it is possible in these [rotating] worlds to travel into any region of the past, present, and future, and back again, exactly as it is possible in other worlds to travel to distant parts of space. This state of affairs *seems* [my emphasis] to imply an absurdity. For it enables one, e.g., to travel into the near past of those places where he has himself lived. There he would find a person who would be himself at some earlier period of life.[39] Now he could do something to this person which, by his memory, he knows has not happened to him."

Gödel's nerve then failed him, and he defended the possibility of the paradox of a time traveler meeting himself in the past with what I think an astonishingly unconvincing argument (particularly so for a logician) based primarily on *engineering* limitations: "This and similar contradictions, however, in order to prove the impossibility of the worlds under consideration, presupposes the actual feasibility of the journey into one's own past. But the velocities which would be necessary in order to complete the voyage in a reasonable time are far beyond everything that

[38] Alasdair M. Richmond, "Gödelian Time-Travel and Anthropic Cosmology," *Ratio*, June 2004, pp. 176–190. Not all physicists think Gödel's result is actually time travel. At least two think it is all simply the result of mathematical hijinks, and that time machines must remain "an aspect of science fiction fantasy": see F. I. Cooperstock and S. Tieu, "Closed Timelike Curves and Time Travel: Dispelling the Myth," *Foundations of Physics*, September 2005, pp. 1497–1509. This skepticism towards Gödel actually started much earlier, when two physicists (one a Nobel physics laureate) incorrectly claimed Gödel had simply gotten his math wrong: see S. Chandrasekhar and J. P. Wright, "The Geodesics in Gödel's Universe," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, March 1961, pp. 341–347. It was those two physicists who had erred, however, as was pointed out by the philosopher Howard Stein, in his "On the Paradoxical Time Structures of Gödel," *Philosophy of Science*, December 1970, pp. 589–601.

[39] You'll recall that this is *precisely* the situation that Wells mentions in his "Notorious Literary Humbug" essay. If only he had lived just three more years, to see what he thought to be an absurdity actually appear in the serious writings of a brilliant mathematician!

can be expected ever to become a practical possibility. Therefore it cannot be excluded a priori, on the ground of the argument given, that the space-time structure of the real world is of the type described."[40] That is, Gödel was trying to head off critics of his rotating universe model who might point to the time travel result as proof that the model had to be flawed.

In a footnote Gödel says that the time traveler would have to move at least as fast as nearly 71 % of the speed of light, and that if his rocket ship could "transform matter completely into energy" then the weight of the fuel would be greater than that of the rocket by a factor of 10^{22} divided by the square of the duration of the trip (in rocket years). A trip to the past in Gödel's universe would require a time machine that looked like Dr. Who's telephone booth attached to a fuel tank the size of several hundred *trillion* ocean liners. These are formidable numbers,[41] but they require no violation of physical laws, and that's what really counts if time travel is to be disproved. Gödel's use of engineering limitations for explaining away backwards time travel is actually worse than simply being wrong, because the puzzle is not in practicality but rather in showing, assuming that general relativity is correct, how correct mathematical physics can lead to what seems to be a paradoxical conclusion. (And see note 12 again, for another reason the 'fuel argument' really has no force at all against the possibility of time travel in Gödelian spacetime.)

So, what did the great man himself, Einstein, think of all this? In the same publication as Gödel's essay, he *cautiously* replied as follows: "Kurt Gödel's essay constitutes, in my opinion, an important contribution to the general theory of relativity, especially to the analysis of the concept of time. The problem here involved disturbed me already at the time of the building up of the general theory of relativity, without my having succeeded in clarifying it ... the distinction 'earlier-later' is abandoned for world-points which lie far apart in a cosmological sense, and those paradoxes, regarding the *direction* of the causal connection arise, of which Mr. Gödel has spoken ... It will be interesting to weigh whether these are not to be excluded on physical grounds."

Despite the mathematical physics of Gödel, showing the possibility of time travel to the past, many philosophers are not quite so sure. As one expressed his concerns, "No science-fiction staple poses more philosophical difficulties than time travel, but there is still no consensus as to whether time-travel fictions exhibit logical, metaphysical, or physical impossibility."[42] The best-known and possibly

[40]Kurt Gödel, "A Remark About the Relationship Between Relativity Theory and Idealistic Philosophy," in *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist*: volume 7 of *The Library of Living Philosophers* (P. A. Schilpp, editor), Open Court 1949.

[41]For the analysis of a rocket powered by matter/anti-matter, a known physical process that satisfies Gödel's energy requirement for time travel, see E. Purcell, "Radioastronomy and Communication Through Space," in *Interstellar Communication* (A. G. W. Cameron, editor), W. A. Benjamin 1963.

[42]Alasdair Richmond, "Time-Travel Fictions and Philosophy," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, October 2001, pp. 305–318.

oldest of the paradoxical situations that seem to be part-and-parcel of time travel is the so-called *grandfather paradox*,[43] expressed this way by philosopher David Lewis in his pioneering 1976 paper (see note 5):

> Consider Tim. He detests his grandfather, whose success in the munitions trade built the family fortune that paid for Tim's time machine. Tim would like nothing so much as to kill Grandfather, but alas he is too late. Grandfather died in his bed in 1957, while Tim was a young boy. But when Tim has built his time machine and traveled to 1920, suddenly he realizes that he is not too late after all. He buys a rifle, . . . and there [Tim] lurks, one winter day in 1921, rifle loaded, hate in his heart, as Grandfather walks closer, closer . . .

So, there's the puzzle. Tim can obviously achieve his goal—he has a loaded gun, he's an excellent shot, a clueless granddad is coming ever closer—but if Tim actually does kill grandfather, years *before* Tim was (will be) born, then how can Tim *be* born? And if he is not born, then how can Tim ('now' not in existence) travel back through time to kill grandfather? What a confusing mess, right? So, the only possible conclusion to all this is that the starting premise, that time travel makes sense, must actually be nonsense. Right?

Well, maybe, but then what of Gödel with his time traveling rocket ship? That's hard-as-diamond, unshakeable mathematical physics, for heaven's sake. We can't just ignore *that*! Lewis offers a way out of this conundrum, and when we get to the book's discussions on paradoxes (that's plural because, believe it or not, there are other paradoxes even *more* perplexing than that of killing granddad in the distant past) we'll return to his solution.

Ever since Lewis wrote his paper, philosophers have been particularly fascinated by the grandfather paradox and have shown themselves to be at least as inventive as the science fiction writers in discussing it, or variations on it.[44] Here, for example, is a twist on that paradox that I think particularly clever, one that avoids the murderous spirit of the tale told by Lewis and Horwich:

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[43]The origin of this paradox is probably lost in time (the irony of that is *so* appropriate!), but I have traced it at least as far back as to the science fiction pulp magazine *Science Wonder Stories* which published, in its December 1929 issue, an editorial essay titled "The Question of Time Traveling." It challenged readers to think about the following scenario: "Suppose I can travel back into time, let me say 200 years; and I visit the homestead of my great great great grandfather, and am able to take part in the life of his time. I am thus enabled to shoot him, while he is still a young man and as yet unmarried. From this it will be noted that I could have prevented my own birth . . .."

[44]Even before Lewis' paper, Paul Horwich had reduced the grandfather paradox to *autoinfanticide*—a time traveler tries to kill his younger *self*—in "On Some Alleged Paradoxes of Time Travel," *The Journal of Philosophy*, August 14, 1975, pp. 432–444. But not all philosophers share this fascination. Earman (see the opening quote), for example, dismisses *all* of the science fiction paradoxes that are so beloved by fans of the genre as "while always good for a chuckle," they are just "crude and unilluminating means of approaching some delicate and deep issues about the nature of physical possibility." I think Earman is fundamentally correct, although I wouldn't go so far as to characterize the paradoxes as mere "chuckles." They are, after all, the source of much of the intellectual motivation prompting the exploration of the physics of time travel. An excellent example of this is found in the paper by the Russian physicist S. V. Krasnikov, "Time Travel Paradox," *Physical Review D*, February 14, 2002, pp. 064013-1 to 064013-8. The physics of the grandfather paradox is of *great* interest in this paper.

> Sarah has just completed building her time machine. She decides to test the machine on herself tomorrow morning at which time she intends to travel back one day. In the meantime, she goes home, puts some salve on the burn she received that day, and goes to bed. In the morning, Sarah, with coffee in hand, sits down to read the morning paper. She opens the paper to the following headline: 'Famous physicist found dead.' On the front page is a picture of her body, salve burn clearly visible on her arm, inside her pristine time machine. Underneath is the caption. 'Nobel-prize winning physicist found dead yesterday in mysterious device that materialized near city hall.' Extremely shaken, Sarah returns to the lab and destroys the time machine.[45]

Can any sense be made of this? We'll come back to this question later in Chap. 5, when we discuss the possibility (or not) of time being *multi*-dimensional.

Now, to conclude this Introduction, let me end with two amusing, connected short stories (in epistle form) that nicely describe the issues we'll take up in the rest of this book. The rejection letter for the denial of a research grant to fund the construction of a time machine has just been received . . .

That Useless Time Machine[46]

Dear Review Committee:
It is not our practice to raise complaints against a negative review report. We believe in peer refereeing and we respect it, whatever its content and consequences. However, in the case of our latest grant application (project named 'The Time Machine') we find it necessary to express our astonishment at the motivations with which our request for funding was turned down. Your main objection appears to be that our project is 'philosophically interesting' but 'practically useless', by which you mean that the project 'has no potential for applications.' We do not quite think that the main criterion for judging the scientific value of a project should be its practical usefulness, but never mind that. Let us agree that usefulness is a relevant criterion, especially when large amounts of money are involved. Why should that be a reason to turn down our project? Quite frankly, we cannot think of a project with better application potential than ours. Some examples:

- Cultural tourism: one could send herds of history fans back in time to witness the crucial episodes of the French Revolution, or to watch the Egyptians build the pyramids, or to videotape Socrates' lectures.
- Exotic safaris: we have already received several applications for dinosaur hunting expeditions (they got extinct anyway).

[45] G. C. Goddu, "Time Travel and Changing the Past: (Or How to Kill Yourself and Live to Tell the Tale)," *Ratio*, March 2003, pp. 16–32.

[46] Story by Roberto Casati (Senior researcher at CNRS, Paris) and Achille C. Varzi (Professor of Philosophy at Columbia University). Originally published in *Philosophy*, October 2001, pp. 581–583, and reproduced here by kind permission of the authors.

- Error detection: we could take a closer look at our past mistakes and learn how to avoid them in the future.
- Historic documentaries: think of the huge saving in set design, costumes, special effects, etc. (How much did *Gladiator* cost?)

And so on and so forth. Honestly, can you think of a project with better prospects for useful and thrilling applications?

Sincerely Yours,
The 'Time Machine' Research Group

Dear 'Time Machine' Research Group:
Thank you for your letter. We agree that it would be interesting to exploit a time machine for the uses that you suggest. It would also be remarkable if we could use it to prevent all sorts of unpleasant events that happened in the past. It would be remarkable, for instance, to be able to go back to November 22, 1963, and prevent Lee Harvey Oswald from killing John Kennedy, or to go back to April 14, 1912, and steer the Titanic around the iceberg. It would be excellent indeed to be able to do such things. However, suppose your project were to be successful. Suppose you *will* manage to build a time machine. Then why *didn't* you do any of those things? Why is it that our past history is still full of such sad events? Either this means that your project is doomed to fail and you will never manage to build a time machine; *or* it means that the project will succeed but that you are not going to use your time machine for these good purposes. In the first case, logic shows it would be pointless to support your project. In the second case, ethics dictates that it would be wrongdoing. Either way, you must concede that the reasons against your project are overwhelming.

Cordially Yours,
The Review Committee

Dear Review Committee:
Certainly you have noticed that our suggestions for practical applications of the time machine did not include any uses that could result in an alteration of the natural course of history. As a matter of fact, we believe that no such alteration is logically possible. According to our project, it is logically possible to *visit* the past but not to *modify* the past. No time traveler can undo what has been done or do what has not been done. So the logic is safe. This does not mean that the time traveler will be ineffectual during her stay in the past, of course; it simply means that what she is going to do is something that she has already done. An accurate catalogue of all the past events would include an account of the arrival of the Time Machine from out of nothing as well as an account of all the actions and reactions that followed. And ethics is safe, too. For, if indeed we managed to go back to Dallas, we could not stop Oswald from doing what he did. Nobody would be able to stop Oswald because nobody was able to stop him (and nobody was able to stop Oswald because nobody will ever be able to do so, even if they came from the future). Alas, the past is full of sad events but there is nothing that we can do about that.

Respectfully Yours,
The 'Time Machine' Research Group

Dear 'Time Machine' Research Group:
We appreciate the distinction between changing the past (impossible) and affecting the past (possible). However, this simply reinforces our initial impression: your project has no practical value. If in order to travel to the past one has to have been there already, and if one can only do what has already been done, then *á quoi bon l'effort*? Why should we invest in a 'Time Machine' at all? We are afraid that our decision is now final.

Yours with best wishes,
The Committee

Well, all seems to be certainly lost with *that*. But, wait, perhaps not. Maybe, with just one more *really good* appeal, The Committee's rejection can be reversed! If *you* were on the Review Committee, and had just read the following letter, how would *you* vote?

A Useful Time Machine[47]

Dear Review Committee:
We regret your continued decision to reject our proposal. Even though you have told us your decision is now final, we humbly ask your indulgence for one last appeal. We believe you have misinterpreted a crucial part of our proposal.

You maintain that our 'Time Machine' project 'has no potential for applications' and has 'no practical value.' You ultimately base this claim on the fact that "If in order to travel to the past one has to have been there already, and if one can only do what has already been done, then *á quoi bon l'effort*? Why should we invest in a 'Time Machine' at all?" Your argument however is a misinterpretation of our own comments that 'According to our project it is logically possible to visit the past but not to modify the past ... This does not mean that the time traveler will be ineffectual during her stay in the past, of course; it simply means that what she is going to do is something that she has already done.' We regret the awkward and easily misleading locution of the last sentence, but such are the perils of talking about time travel. Regardless, please consider our clarification.

Certainly if we were proposing that the time traveler *be* 5 years old again, we would be proposing something not worth the effort—our proposed time traveler has already turned five and cannot do so again. But we are not proposing that the time traveler do things that have already occurred in her own personal past, but rather in

[47]Story by Geoff Goddu (Professor of Philosophy at the University of Richmond, Virginia). Originally published in *Philosophy*, April 2002, pp. 281–282, and reproduced here by kind permission of the author.

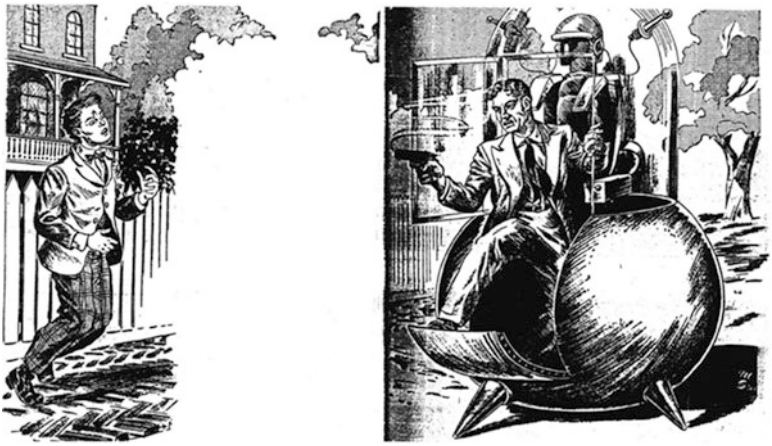
her personal future. The time traveler has not yet, from her personal temporal perspective, travelled back to, say, the library at Alexandria in 100 BCE. When she does travel back to 100 BCE to obtain scans of the books in the library before its destruction, she will be older than she is now. When she returns she will be still older (and we hope wiser, i.e., in possession of valuable information to which neither you nor we currently have access).

But is it true that as of 2002 AD [the year this letter was written] the time traveler has already visited Alexandria in 100 BCE? It could well be. But whether or not it is depends upon whether it is *also* true that our project will be successfully funded and completed. Because time travel into the past involves reverse causation, certain past events, such as the time traveler visiting 100 BCE, will be dependent upon certain future events, such as the successful funding and completion of our project. Hence, if it is not true that our project is both funded and completed, then it is not true that our time traveler has of 2002 already visited 100 BCE.

But suppose we were to learn now, before the funding and completion took place, that our time traveler had indeed been present at the library in Alexandria in 100 BCE. Would this imply that there was no reason to expend the effort to fund our project? After all, if the travel has 'already' happened, why bother funding the project? Firstly, such an argument does not imply that a 'Time Machine' would have no practical application, but rather expresses the futile hope that one could in fact get the practical benefits (if time travel is successful, we obtain the desired information) without expending the effort at all. Secondly, the hope is futile, for if we learn right now that our time traveler had been present at the library in 100 BCE, we would then know, assuming no other possible funding source, that you *will* expend the effort to fund our project. To deny this last is to make the impossible suggestion that even though your support is truly a causal antecedent of the successful trip, there is now no need for you to actually expend the effort to provide funding.

Hence, the effort is far from pointless, for the project will only succeed through your and our efforts. And success will generate, not only all the practical applications we outlined in our first letter, but, in addition, a host of information gathering applications such as more accurate historical research, lost item location identification, legal testimony verification, etc. Even if, as we (and you) acknowledged, no one could now prevent Oswald from killing Kennedy, wouldn't it be worth verifying that Oswald was the lone killer of Kennedy? Also, the information gathering need not be restricted to the past. For example, information concerning the prices of various stocks 10 years from now would be extremely valuable to a suitably cautious and prudent investor. Surely you cannot object to our information gathering in the future on the grounds that 'it will already have been done.' And just think, the information we obtain could be what allows you to obtain at very low prices those stocks that in the future will be extremely valuable and allows your esteemed committee to dramatically increase your support of worthy scientific endeavors.

Again, we ask you to reconsider your original decision.
Respectfully yours,
The 'Time Machine' Research Group



A time machine inventor makes an experimental test of the grandfather paradox! (Illustration from "Thompson's Time Traveling Theory" by Mortimer Weisinger), *Amazing Stories* March 1944 (art by Malcolm Smith). Reprinted by arrangement with Forrest J. Ackerman, Holding Agent, 2495 Glendower Ave., Hollywood, CA 90027.

Not everybody likes time machines as a science fiction gadget, not even otherwise enthusiastic devotees of the genre. For example, in a Letter-to-the-Editor published in the December 1931 issue of Astounding Stories*, one seventeen-year-old fan had this to say: "There is only one kind of Science Fiction story I dislike, and that is the so-called time-traveling. It doesn't seem logical to me. For example, supposing a man had a grudge against his grandfather, who is now dead. He could hop in his machine and go back to the year that his grandfather was a young man and murder him. And if he did this how could the revenger be born? I think the whole thing is the 'bunk.'" As this book will demonstrate, this young reader was not alone in that opinion. As this book will also demonstrate, in the last few decades that view has been rapidly evolving.*

For Further Discussion

Read again the penultimate sentence in the last letter from The 'Time Machine' Research Group, and then think about how you would respond to the following questions.

(1) Would *you* invest in a stock market if you knew somebody else had a time machine giving *them* advance information on stock performance?
(2) How might the existence of a time machine influence the future of the stock market, in general? For an early science fiction look at these questions, see Lee Laurence, "History in Reverse," *Amazing Stories*, October 1939.

One writer has speculated that Wells' model for the Time Traveller was the American inventor Thomas Edison. (See Martin T. Willis, "Edison as Time Traveler: H. G. Wells' Inspiration for His First Scientific Character," *Science Fiction Studies*, July 1999, pp. 284–294.) As Wells worked his way from *The Chronic Argonauts*, through revisions, to the final *Time Machine*, the story's hero evolved from Dr. Nebogipfel to the Philosophical Inventor to the Time Traveller. The one individual who could have inspired all of these various hero types was, according to Willis, Edison, a world-famous Victorian-age celebrity whose story was well known to Wells. If Wells had today's scientific personalities available as potential inspirations, who do you think he would use? How might that choice affect the story and structure of *The New Time Machine*?

The idea of *personal time*, used by the philosopher David Lewis (note 5) to consistently interpret time travel stories, has been used in a quite different way (although time travel gets a few words, too) by the philosopher Roy Sorenson. In his paper "The Cheated God: Death and Personal Time," *Analysis*, April 2005, pp. 119–125, Sorenson asks you to imagine an immortal god. For some reason this god runs afoul of a demon, who curses the god in a curious way. (The 'telling of a story' is a common technique in philosophical papers and, while foreign to what readers of physics papers are used to seeing, is not without some charm. Just be sure to always keep in mind that its

(continued)

primary use is as an *attention-grabbing* device, but as far as having any other merit, well, that's often another story.) The curse is such that the life span of the once immortal god is reduced to that of a normal human life span and yet, perhaps surprisingly, the god will still never die. As Sorenson writes, "[The god] will live forever. But [the god] will not have a better life than a mortal. The demon has harmed [the god] as gravely as death harms mortals." How, you might wonder, is this to be done? As Sorenson explains, "[The god] lives half of its now mortal span, followed by a trillion years of nothingness, then a quarter of its mortal span followed by a trillion years of nothingness, then an eighth of its mortal span followed by a trillion years of nothingness and so on ad infinitum." Sorenson's argument is simply an exotic form of the high school summation of the geometric series $\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{8} + \cdots = 1$, where there are an *infinite* number of terms to the left of the equality. (Each term represents a period of time during which the god is conscious, and each + represents a trillion years.) Sorenson picked a trillion years of nothingness between consecutive periods of consciousness for (I suggest) dramatic reasons, but suppose instead that he had picked 1 μs for the period of nothingness. Discuss what effect this would have (if any) on the life of the god. Consider two cases:

(a) There is no minimum time duration for consciousness, and
(b) There *is* a minimum time duration such that, for any shorter duration, a consciousness remains 'unaware' even though it is *not* in a state of nothingness.

After working all night making some final calculations, a physicist carefully solders a final resistor into the control module of the world's first time machine and then steps into the gadget that is a sure bet to win the next Nobel Prize in physics. As she does, she notices that it is precisely 8:10 in the morning, as indicated on both her wrist watch and the clock on the lab wall. After settling into a plush leather seat she pushes the time machine's power button, the machine glows with a flickering blue-red halo and hums with a mighty throb for a while and then, at precisely 8:15 by her wrist watch, she steps out of the machine and back into her lab. She notices the clock on the wall now reads 8:05. That is, she took 5 min of personal time (8:10 to 8:15) to travel 5 min of external time into the past (8:10 to 8:05). On the one hand she certainly seems to be a time traveler, in that she exits the machine before she enters it. (Ignore the issue of there being *two identical* physicists in the lab from 8:05 to 8:10!) On the other hand, the elapsed personal and external

(continued)

times are *equal*. Does this suggest a need to modify or expand David Lewis' definition of a time traveler? As you ponder this question, you might want to read the following four papers: (1) Paul R. Daniels, "Lewisian Time Travel in a Relativistic Setting," *Metaphysica*, October 2014, pp. 329–345, (2) Douglas Kutach, "Time Travel and Time Machines," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Time* (H. Dyke and A. Bardon, editors), Wiley-Blackwell 2013, pp. 301–314, and (3) Frank Arntzenius, "Time Travel: Double Your Fun," *Philosophy Compass*, November 2006, pp. 599–616. A bit more demanding (but worth the effort) is the long chapter "Time Travel and Time Machines" by Chris Smeenk and Christian Wüthrich, in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Time* (C. Callender, editor), Oxford 2011, pp. 577–630 (see page 580, in particular).

> The idea that information is physical has given rise to a series of discoveries which indicate that physics has much to say about fundamentals of computer science.

The above quotation is the opening sentence to a most interesting paper by the physicist Dave Bacon, "Quantum Computational Complexity in the Presence of Closed Timelike Curves," *Physical Review A* (70), 2004. (When he wrote, Bacon was at Caltech, but he is now a software engineer at Google.) The title of Bacon's paper, translated into blunt English, is "It Would Be Really Neat If We Could Merge a Time Machine With a Computer." That is, to further quote from Bacon's paper, "One could [efficiently] solve a hard problem by trying out a solution to the problem, sending one's computer back in time, attempting a different solution to the problem, sending one's computer back in time, etc., until a solution to the problem has been found." There then follows a pretty sophisticated analysis on the self-consistent time evolution of a quantum system, ending with Bacon's frank admission that "we would not be honest if we did not end this paper with the caveat that this work is at best a creature of eager speculation ... Practical considerations are humorous at best." Read Bacon's paper and discuss what he means by "a hard problem." (There *is* a technical term used by computer scientist for such problems: NP-complete.)

The occasional theological commentary in this book may strike some as a bit odd for a topic treated with heavy doses of deep mathematics in the physics literature but, as you'll see on the following pages, theology is an unescapable dimension to any informed discussion of time travel. A literary connection

(continued)

between time travel and theology has, in fact, existed for a long time. As pointed out in Paul Alkon's *Origins of Futuristic Fiction* (University of Georgia Press 2010), "The first time-traveler in English literature is a guardian angel who returns with state documents from 1998 to the year 1728 in Samuel Madden's *Memoirs of the Twentieth Century*" (published in 1733, nearly three centuries ago). Madden was an Irish-Anglican clergyman whose book was satire rather than science fiction, but its time traveling aspect was a first. As Professor Alkon also writes, "Madden [was] the first to write a narrative that purports to be a document from the future. He deserves recognition as the first to toy with the rich idea of time-travel in the form of an artifact sent backward from the future to be discovered in the present." Your assignment: read and discuss Alkon's book.

You'll recall that Gödel cast his view of time travel in the form of a self-encounter in the past. In Frederik Pohl's "Let the Ants Try," we find a science fiction tale that appeared essentially simultaneously with Gödel's paper (*Planet Stories*, Winter 1949), in which a time traveler journeys back forty million years. Upon stepping out of his time machine, he hears a "raucous animal cry" from somewhere in the nearby jungle. Later, after other adventures in time, he returns to near the same point in spacetime. After stepping out of his time machine, he sees himself in the distance—the earlier version of himself during the first trip. Then, suddenly, the time traveler meets a violent death: "As his panicky lungs filled with air for the last time, he knew what animal had screamed in the depth of the Coal Measure forest." In fact, self-encounters had appeared in science fiction *years* before Gödel's paper. In the 1942 story "Minus Sign" (*Astounding Science Fiction*, November) by Jack Williamson, for example, a spaceship battles with itself while traveling backward in time. How do you think a scientist like Gödel would have liked these two stories? (Who knows, maybe he *did* read them!) If you could travel back in time to 1949 to ask him if such tales had been an inspiration, do you think he would be intrigued, amused, or instead would he be insulted?

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About the Author

Paul J. Nahin was born in California, and did all of his schooling there, including a PhD in electrical engineering from UC Irvine (1972). He is now emeritus professor of electrical engineering at the University of New Hampshire. Prof. Nahin has published a couple of dozen short science fiction stories in *Analog*, *Omni*, and *Twilight Zone* magazines, and has written 18 books on mathematics and physics. He has given invited talks on mathematics at many prestigious institutions, and has appeared on National Public Radio's "Science Friday" show (discussing time travel) as well as on New Hampshire Public Radio's "The Front Porch" show (discussing imaginary numbers). He advised Boston's WGBH Public Television's "Nova" program on the script for their time travel episode.