



# A World Without Time: The Forgotten Legacy of Gödel and Einstein

By Palle Yourgrau

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In 1942, the logician Kurt Gödel and Albert Einstein became close friends; they walked to and from their offices every day, exchanging ideas about science, philosophy, politics, and the lost world of German science. By 1949, Gödel had produced a remarkable proof: *In any universe described by the Theory of Relativity, time cannot exist*. Einstein endorsed this result reluctantly but he could find no way to refute it, since then, neither has anyone else. Yet cosmologists and philosophers alike have proceeded as if this discovery was never made. In *A World Without Time*, Palle Yourgrau sets out to restore Gödel to his rightful place in history, telling the story of two magnificent minds put on the shelf by the scientific fashions of their day, and attempts to rescue the brilliant work they did together.

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# A World Without Time: The Forgotten Legacy of Godel and Einstein

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### Editorial Review

#### From Publishers Weekly

What if time is only an illusion, if it doesn't actually exist? Yourgrau, a Brandeis professor of philosophy, explains that Einstein's general theory of relativity may allow for this possibility, first realized by the great logician Kurt Gödel. Gödel is best known for his incompleteness theorem, one of the most important theorems in mathematical logic since Euclid. In a typically brief paper written for a Festschrift to honor his friend and Princeton neighbor Einstein, Gödel theorized the existence of what have come to be called Gödel universes: rotating universes in which time travel is possible. But if one can travel through time, how can time as we know it exist in these other universes, since the past is always present? And if time doesn't exist in other universes, then it may not exist in ours either. Yourgrau (*The Disappearance of Time*) writes that Gödel's paper was almost universally ignored, and he claims that since the logician's death, philosophers have gone out of their way to try to denigrate his work in fields other than logic. This book will appeal to fans of Douglas Hofstadter's *Gödel, Escher, Bach* and to Einstein junkies, and makes a fascinating companion to Rebecca Goldstein's *Incompleteness* (Forecasts, Dec. 20), but all readers who enjoy a good thought experiment or having basic preconceptions about their world challenged will enjoy this. (Jan.)

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#### From [Booklist](#)

\*Starred Review\* During the half-dozen years before his death, Einstein's best friend was the Austrian logician Kurt Gödel. Famous for his incompleteness theorems demonstrating that formal mathematical systems could not fully describe reality, Gödel was spurred by Einstein's theories of relativity to discover that, in any universe fully described by those theories, time doesn't exist. He did this by proving the possibility of time travel, the catch being that if a past point in time can be reached, then it cannot have passed, which contradicts intuitive understanding of time. Einstein died before he could respond to Gödel's revelation. Since then, except for troopers such as Yourgrau (this is his third and most popularly pitched book on Gödel), philosophers have ignored the implications of time not existing in physical reality, which are that time must be an ideal and that philosophically long-discounted Platonism, which asserts the reality of the ideal, needs reconsideration. Such studied ignorance springs, Yourgrau says, from philosophers' disdain for Gödel as a mere logician. He was also powerfully, pathetically eccentric--different from but not unlike Einstein in that respect--and Yourgrau relieves and arguably also informs demanding passages on Gödel's work by sketching his life and personality as well as his thought. *Ray Olson*

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### About the Author

**Palle Yourgrau** is a Professor of Philosophy at Brandeis University. His 1999 monograph *Gödel Meets Einstein*, the only book-length work on Gödel's cosmological ideas, has caused a resurgence of interest among philosophers in Gödel's ideas about time and relativity. He lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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