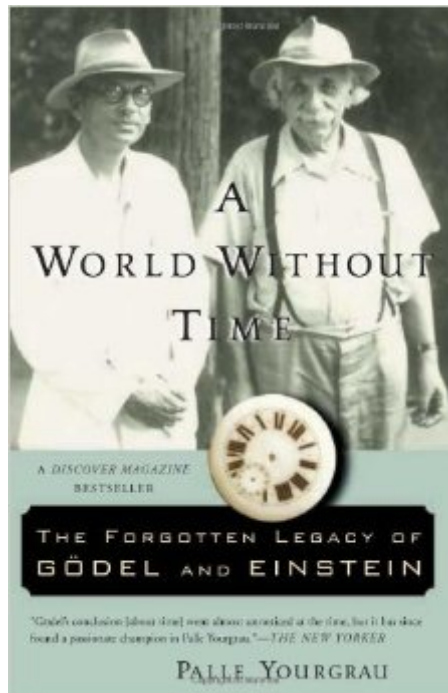


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A World Without Time: The Forgotten Legacy Of Gödel And Einstein



Synopsis

In 1942, the logician Kurt Godel 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, Godel 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 Godel 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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It seems to me that, more and more frequently, two books on the same or closely related subjects come out from different publishers almost simultaneously. I suspect an epidemic of corporate espionage. In 2003/4, did we really need two books with the identical title "Lincoln at Copper Union" about a pre-campaign speech in New York by the eventual president? Why was "The Empire of Tea" published within 6 months of "Tea: Addiction, Exploitation, and Empire"? (Perhaps they were tied to an epic mini-series that I missed.) Kurt Gödel and his work have been largely ignored of late, yet now we suddenly have two books attempting to resurrect interest. Palle Yourgrau's "A World Without Time: The Forgotten Legacy of Gödel And Einstein" was published in January 2005, and "Incompleteness: The Proof and Paradox of Kurt Gödel" by Rebecca Goldstein just one month

later. Both are small-format books, and thus both attempt to squeeze already dense subject matter into unreasonably constricted space. Both use Gödel's personal and intellectual friendship with Einstein as a systematizing motif. Each author dedicates considerable time to rehearsing the history of The Vienna Circle, where Gödel spent formative years, and the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, where Gödel and Einstein completed their careers. And both Goldstein (a mathematician and novelist) and Yourgrau (a professor of philosophy) attempt to give a summary of Gödel's important theorems that would make them accessible to the non-specialist. However, the two books differ in important respects. Goldstein, when dealing with Gödel's professional work, focuses almost exclusively on that concerned most directly with mathematical logic: his Incompleteness Theorems.

Beyond the apocalyptic sense, we might be running out of time; not the 'time' handed down from a Homeric Chronos or from Ecclesiastes (For everything there is a season...) or Prufrockian events (There will be time, there will be time. To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet...). Einstein's General Theory of Relativity (GTR) introduced a much more elemental, modern and, at least for some of us, counter-intuitive idea of 'time' that melded a constant (the speed of light) and a mass-curved geometry into spacetime, whose effect was, nevertheless, relative! In GTR, the temporal space from "here" to "there," from "now" to "then," massively complicated, shrinks and expands in the tangled warp. At least it did until Kurt Gödel, in his searing analysis, added new, astonishing gyrations befitting his place as a preeminent mathematician, erstwhile physicist and most celebrated logician since Aristotle. Palle Yourgrau, the Henry A. Wolfson Professor of Philosophy at Brandeis University has devoted a great deal of his academic career to understanding Gödel and particularly what most of us take for granted - the concept of time - which Gödel believed was THE key issue of philosophy (p. 111). In *A World Without Time*, Yourgrau continues the explication of Gödel's insights into GTR that he explored earlier with his *Gödel Meets Einstein: Time Travel in the Gödel Universe* (Open Court Press, 1999). Gödel and Einstein were colleagues and close friends at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, NJ, where both had been given safe haven from the Nazi scourge of the 1930s. Together, they walked to and from their offices talking philosophy, politics and especially relativity theory.

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