



60-Second Adventures in Thought

The Grandfather Paradox

Will Time Travel ever be possible?

Rene Barjavel was a French journalist and science fiction writer who spent a lot of his time thinking about time travel.

In 1943, Barjavel asked what would happen if a man went back in time, to a date before his parents were born, and killed his own grandfather?

With no grandfather, one of the man's parents would never have been born – and therefore the man himself would never have existed.

So there would be nobody to go back in time and kill the grandfather in the first place.

Or the last place – depending on how you look at it.

The Grandfather Paradox has been a mainstay of philosophy, physics and the entire *Back to the Future* Trilogy.

Some people have tried to defend time travel, with arguments like the Parallel Universe Resolution – in which the changes made by the traveler create a new, separate history, branching off from the existing one.

But the Grandfather Paradox prevails.

Although the paradox only suggests that traveling backwards in time is impossible – it doesn't say anything about going the other way...