Time travel: for some reason we seem to find the idea of it fascinating. Just this last year we have been privy to a host of new TV series centred around travelling backwards in time, or, at the very least, sending signals backwards in time. Timeless, Travellers, Frequency. All three of these series centre around the idea that in sending information backwards in time, either by sending a person, a consciousness, or a radio signal, we could (or indeed would) change the past in various unforseen ways. Timeless is about trying to preserve history in the face of time travellers bent on changing it; frequency is about trying to undo changes in the past brought about by changing still other events; Travellers is about trying to undo some terrible fate that befalls humanity. It’s easy to see why the idea of changing the past is fascinating: what is most interesting is not what one changes, but what other effects occur as a result of these changes; which ways are past events connected, in unforseen manners, to bing about the present, and how would the present be different if the past had been different in even small ways. In a way this reflects our interest in the fact that the present seems so very fragile, so precarious. For it seems that had things been only a little different, had contingencies gone just a little way other tan they did, things now might be very different indeed. Since so much of what does, in fact, happen is the product of small choices, it seems that who we are, and where we are, is fragile. Time travel shows ask us to reflect on this fragility, and to wonder just how the past is connected to the present: just how would the present be different, if the past had been different in certain ways.

Of course time travel movies and tv shoes invariably make philosophers crazy. All three of the shows just mentioned commit what is sometimes known as the second time around fallacy: the idea that the past first unfolded one way, and then later, when a time traveller went back (or we sent information back) we altered what had occurred, and the past, and the present, then unfolded differently.

\*not really the past – some other location in space-time. You don’t change what happened, you change where you are. You move, as it were, to be a better neighbourhood.

Decision – and evidence?

Connections to agency. What can we do in the past – what should we TRY to do in the past.

Is there something inexplicable about closed causal loops.

What should you try to do? Should you try to do anything? One case is the case in whch you travel to your own timeline, and then make things as they are. Should you try and do anything in this case? You can ony deliberate about what you can change – i.e. about things you do not know will happen. I can’t deliberate about moving pluto. But if I know what happened in the past, bcause I have more evidence,then perhaps I cannot deliberate about anything – and so I really do hae no agency at all. But that’s not quite right: because I don't’ have perfect knowledge about the past. I have evidence for a rnage of things, but that evidence ranges form better to worse. So, in cases where evience is scanty, or where the stakes are high, it might be raitonalto deliberate about what to do. For instance, suppose in the past my grandfather was capture dby a serial killer, who was known to be truly heinous. I know that my grandfather was killed, apparnelty by the serial killer, But I don’t know how he died; I don’t know wehehr or not he was tortured for the usual 20 days or not. Of course, nothing I do in the past will alter the present, since whatever I do, I did do. But I imight be able to make it that he died a peaceful death, rather than not. Since I don’t have evidence for how he died, it might be rational to travel back in time and bring it about, for instance, that he died peacefully in his sleep on the night of his capture (perhaps by slipping him a drug earlier in the day).

It has been suggested that what is odd about this, is that I now seem to have a reason to create false evidence. Suppose as I look into the case I find a bunch of evidence that suggests my grandfather did not die the peaceful death I was hoping for. There is an autopsy report, and some photos. Now, it seems, if I can travel back in time and fabricate that autopsy report and those photos, and somehow put them in the file, I have reason to suppose that the evidence that there was no peaceful death, is not good evidence at all. So, first I should travel back and create false evidence, then I should travel back again, and try and bring about the peaceful death. That looks weird.

But what is true for the past is true for the future as well. If David Lewis taught us anything, it’s that, by and large, the past and future should be treated symmetrically in many respects. It’s not some odd feature of the past that, once I know what I am going to do, or what happened, I cannot deliberate about what to do. That’s true of the present too; if I already know what I will do tomorrow, (by having already decided, or by being told by a prophet or a super computer) then I can’t now deliberate about what to do. Of course, I typically don’t know what I will do tomorrow (other than by first deliberating about it) in the way that I might well know what happened last year. So my ignorance is not symmetrical: I know more about the past than the future. That means in general it will be rational for me to deliberate towards the future, and not, generally, towards the past. At least, it will often be rational to deliberate towards the future, and not wards the past. But that’s not a difference in kind, it’s just a difference in degree: in how much we know about one direction as opposed to the other.

If I have excellent evidence that tomorrow, I will rob a bank, then the more certain I become that that is what will happen, the less it will make sense to deliberate about whether or not to rob the bank. Here, I’m in the same situation with respect to bank robbing as I am with meeting death in Aleppo. If I am certain to meet death at a set time, then it doesn't matter where I choose to go, since the place I end up will the place where Death is. If I go to France, Death will be there, if I go to Sydney, Death will be there. Of course, it doesn't follow from that, that given that I do go to Sydney, that had I instead gone to France, then Death would have been in France. If I am certain to rob a bank, then it doesn't matter where I go, it will turn out that wherever I go, I go somewhere with a bank, and I rob the bank, even if, had I gone elsewhere, I might well not have robbed the bank. But suppose I am not certain about the bank robbery. I have evidence that I will rob a bank – evidence that comes from future newspapers, a computer prediction and so forth. Now it seems that were I able to travel into the future, I would have reason to try to create false evidence, by creating a false newspaper trail according to which I rob some bank.

What is time travle isn’t relaly time travel at all –but just travel somewhere else, a lot like our past? What if time tavel is really universe hopping, or timeline hopping? Then when I go to some other place amd, sya, kill hitler, I don’t change the past – my past from which I came, is the same – I just go somewhere in which in their past, Hitler was killed. I might, then, live in a world that unfolds so that Hitler never grew up. That might well be a better world. On the view that we change the past, we can, as it were, clean up our own backyard: we can make things better, and different, from how they were and hence from how they are. On this view, the yard always stays the same but I can move house and go and live somewhere with a nicer yard. The same number of yards are messy, and clean, as there ever were, but I get to live somewhere nicer. Then time travelling is really just deciding where I would like to be; it is tyring to locate myself in the universe.

It’s a bit like learning that one of the 5 people in the room is a murderer, but not knowing which one 0 and not knowing whether or not it is me. Then learning that it is not me. The facts about the number of murders still remains the same, all I learn is that the murderer is not me: I learn some self locating information about which of the people in the room I am.

That’s how some quantum people think the world is, five dimensionally.

Agency – free will -