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Creative Nonfiction

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Time Traveling: Not How We Imagined

Today, many people believe flying and breathing underwater is impossible, despite the fact the first parachute was used in the late 18th century, the first plane was invented in the early 20th century, and the first scuba suit was tested in the early 16th century. These innovative advances may not allow us to breathe underwater like Aquaman or fly like Superman, but this shortcoming of our imagination does not mean we have not achieved the intent of the action. As humans we know we have limitations, but limitations do not always create impossibilities. Just because we need external tools does not mean cannot achieve great feats. Regarding acts no human has done before and acts we consider fanciful, we are too quick to label things impossible. I believe we treat time travel the same way. We may not be able to travel through time how we imagine Marty McFly or Dr. Who does, but we can reposition ourselves within time using modern technology and humanity's organization of time.

To understand how humans can realistically time travel at the greatest extent, we need two human inventions: time zones and aviation. The closest places in the world with the greatest time difference lie on either side of the International Date Line (IDL) in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. The IDL is halfway around the world from the prime meridian, and is the line where the furthest ahead and furthest behind time zones meet. The Line Islands of Kiribati lie on the western side of the IDL in time zone UTC+14, and Baker Island sits on the eastern side in time

zone UTC-12. The islands have a 26 hour time difference and are 1,326 miles away from each other. They should provide an example of the maximum temporal distance one can time travel; however, Baker Island no longer has a functioning airport. Since our purpose is to realistically discover the greatest amount of time that can be traveled, we will use American Samoa in zone UTC-11, instead of Baker Island. At a distance of 1,432 miles away from the Line Islands, American Samoa is the next closest location with an operating airport. The time difference between these locations is 25 hours, so when it is 11:30 p.m. on December 30th at American Samoa it is 12:30 a.m. on January 1st at the Line Islands.

Currently, the fastest aircraft in the world, that can carry a human passenger and fly the needed distance of 1,432 miles is the SR-71 Blackbird. The Blackbird can fly at a top speed of 2,500 mph and can travel 3,337 miles on internal fuel. With this plane, the trip from the Line Islands to American Samoa will take approximately 34 minutes, meaning one can potentially change their temporal location by a maximum of 24 hours and 26 minutes into the future or past.

The preceding example shows many stipulations and restrictions affect the human ability to time travel, but that does not infer impossibility. One could argue the example does not meet Marty McFly's definition of time travel and that we do not break the laws of physics itself. One may also believe the example is merely moving across time zones as fast as possible to avoid the effects of the human-designed temporal system. These arguments are not wrong; however, they are placing unnecessary restraints on the definition of time travel by saying what occurs cannot qualify as time travel. Why should movement across time zones to experience a non-chronological change in temporal location not be considered time travel? If we used the same limitation on the definition of flying, then flying in a plane would just be called floating,

parachuting would be called falling, and scuba diving would be called swimming. Our ability to time travel, fly, and breathe underwater is already limited because we are human, so we should not further diminish our abilities because of a technicality. Simply because we cannot execute actions in the way we imagined or hoped does not mean we have to consider them impossible, this lack of exactitude just means we are doing the best we can with the resources currently available.

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