The Biggest Blunder in Physics History

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The biggest blunder in physics history was Einstein's use of the word "relativity" to describe a theory in which he built a tiny tent around an even tinier twig, ignored the fact that the twig was attached to a sequoia tree, and then declared his twig tent to be identical in every way to the entire sequoia tree. The fascinating phenomenon he was describing was branch relativity, which is the metrical equivalent of how a single branch of a tree can look very similar to the tree as a whole. The only significant difference is that the branches of this tree are variously sized clumps of matter and energy — e.g., the entire universe, galaxies, solar systems, planets, and spaceships — that locally share the same unit definitions for measuring time and distance. What he almost completely overlooked, except for one deeply insightful paper in which he predicted the Twin Paradox, is the existence of an absolute, non-relative, universe-spanning metrics tree in which branch relativity is little more than an interesting and terribly misunderstood side note.

Unfortunately, a branch is never the same thing as a tree. The damage that Einstein's blunder caused to a century of physics theory — but, fortunately, not to physics practice — is almost incalculable. For example, the very word "spacetime" — which, to be fair, was Minkowski's idea that Einstein later picked up — must be abandoned as meaningless when the full set of relationships is mapped out. The alternative of a lumpier, tree-like universe — which I like to call the Cayleyverse in honor of the 1800s mathematician Arthur Cayley who first invented tree diagrams — follows many of the same rules currently used, but with some fairly spectacular differences.

For example, in a fashion closely analogous to General Relativity, the overall relationships of the terminal "buds" of the Cayleyverse define the structure whose curves create gravity. This "4-topiary" looks a lot like spacetime, and can use much of the same math. But unlike non-existent "spacetime," every point on this surface is a real and fully quantum instance of matter and energy. The barrier between the two becomes non-existent.

The Cayleyverse is a more accurate, more open-ended, and far more interesting way of looking at the quantum and topological structure of reality — and all you need to do to access it is get over Einstein's huge blunder.

Addendum on 2026-11-23: The *deeper* blunder was when Woldemar Voigt got the "Lorentz" signs wrong in 1887.

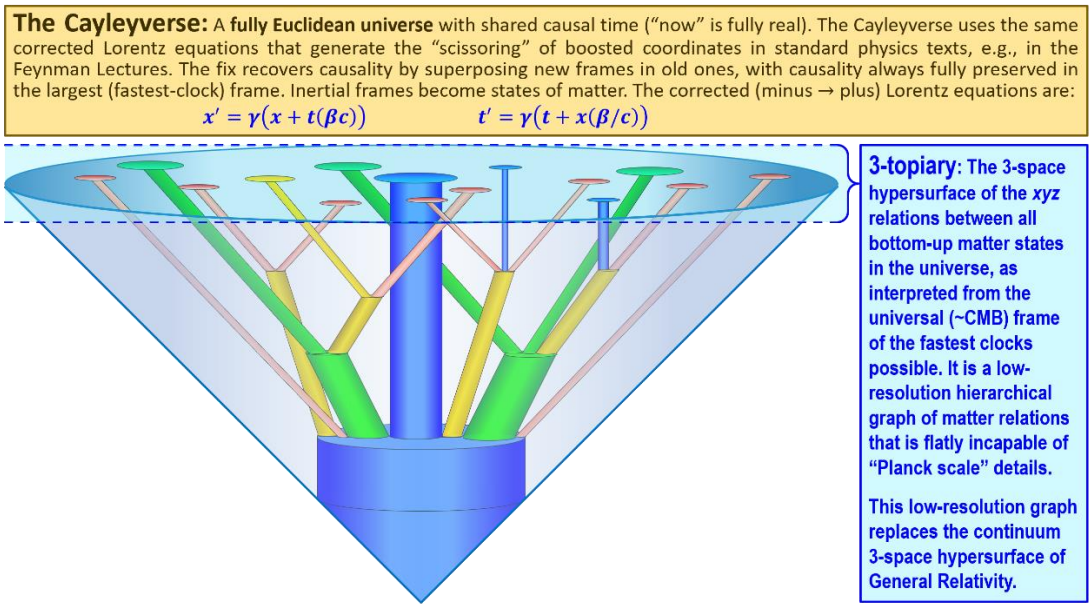


Figure 1. The Cayleyverse and its 4-topiary ("universal now") top-surface definition of curved spacetime