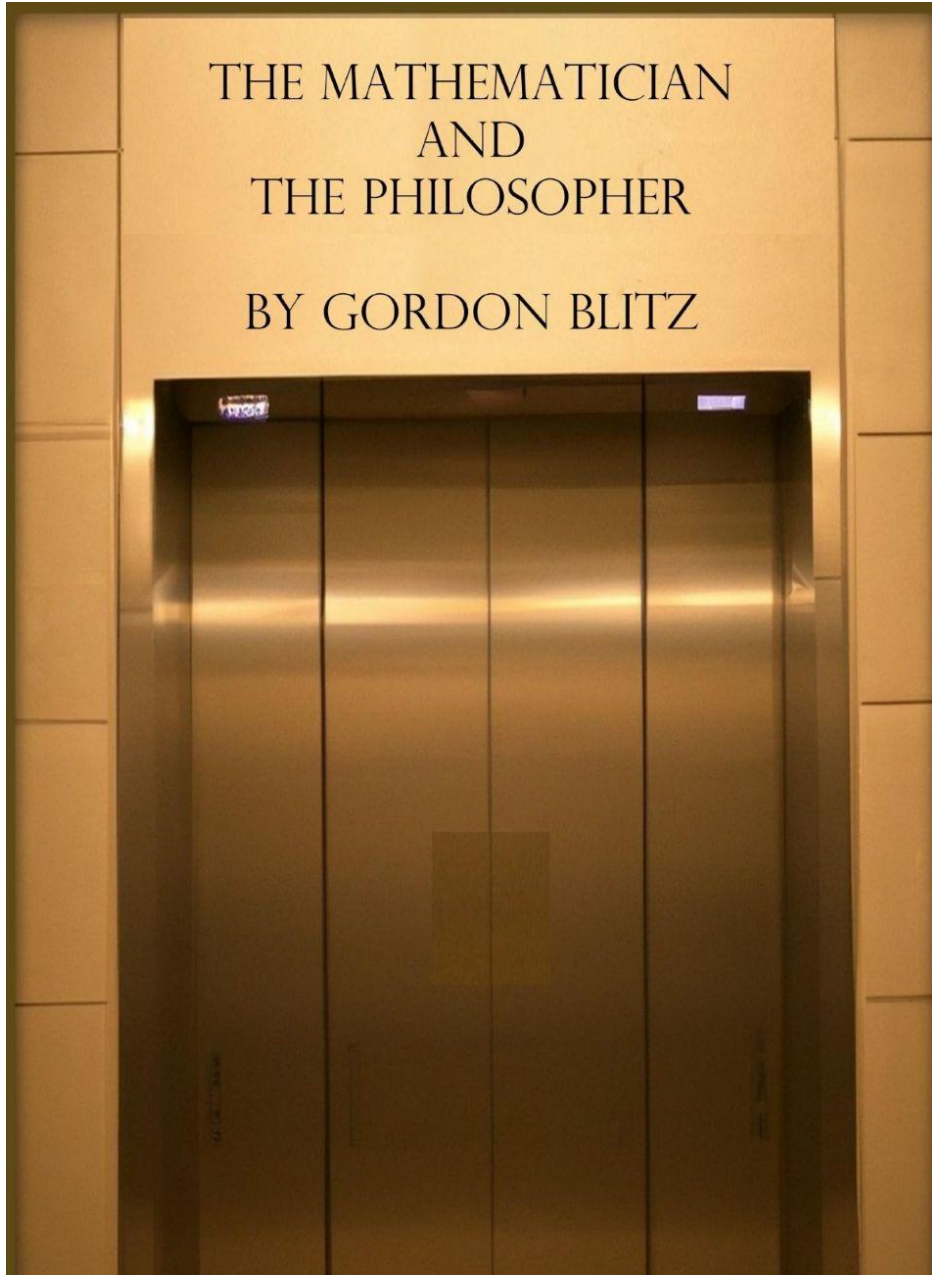


THE MATHEMATICIAN
AND
THE PHILOSOPHER

BY GORDON BLITZ



Lights come up. The interior of an elevator with two men; one is twenty-one years old (WADE) wearing glasses and dressed in a sport jacket and tie, and the other is nineteen years old (GABRIEL) wearing glasses and in a costume that a Greek Philosopher might wear (toga, sandals). After WADE pushes the elevator button, he looks up at the floor numbers.

GABRIEL

Oh, you're going to the same floor.
That must be a good omen.
What do you think?

WADE ignores the comment and then mumbles to himself.

WADE

I don't believe in omens. I would
more likely be figuring the odds of
that happening.

GABRIEL

I didn't hear what you said.

WADE sneezes. He looks embarrassed because he doesn't have a tissue.

WADE

Hey, do you have a tissue?

GABRIEL reaches into the shoulder bag that he is carrying.

GABRIEL

I always carry these around for emergencies.

GABRIEL hands WADE a tissue.

WADE

Thanks.

GABRIEL

I have a whole array of items. Chewing gum and
mints; you should try one. Leftover habit from when
I smoked. People used to complain about that smoky
smell. Now, they come in handy for bad breath. I also
have this spray and cloth to clean my glasses.

WADE looks disgusted when GABRIEL mentions smoking. Then WADE blows into his hand checking his breath.

WADE

Okay. Let me try a mint. And while you're at it, I need to clean my glasses.

GABRIEL hands over a mint and glass spray and cloth.

GABRIEL

You look nervous. Do have some sort of special appointment?

WADE

I'm applying for a job as a tax accountant, and they're having the second round of interviews.

GABRIEL

Oh, god! A tax accountant! I'm no good with numbers, and that type of job sounds so serious. Don't take this the wrong way, but I would be bored out of my mind in that profession. You're so young to be having a job sitting behind a desk all day long.

WADE

That's why I want it. I'm thoughtful and pensive.
(pause)

WADE looks up toward the floor numbers.

WADE (CONT'D)

This elevator is moving so slowly, and it's not stopping at any floors.

GABRIEL starts laughing. WADE looks angry.

GABRIEL

I can see by your face that you're wondering why I'm laughing. I'm sorry I laughed. It's funny how I've given you so many things. What would have happened if I wasn't sharing the elevator with you? And I was thinking about how funny it is being in this elevator. I'm a philosophy major, and I'm always trying to make a coherent sense out of the whole.

WADE

Let me stop you there. What is it with this outfit you're wearing?

GABRIEL

Oh, you mean this getup? It's part of my final exam to not only think like a philosopher but to look like one. A debate is being held in this building between two philosophers, and we're each supposed to take the role of one of them. I'm a bit early. Wanted to practice before the debate started.

WADE

I'm early too.

GABRIEL

See, we're both punctual. Nice coincidence, don't you think?

WADE

I suppose. But I'd still like to know how being in this elevator is funny.

GABRIEL

So, I realized that when the elevator door first opens, in a way we're taking a leap when we enter leaving the old reality behind as the door closes. And when we press the button, we activate energy to take us to our desired level. When this machinery moves, we can't influence the outcome. It forces us to let go. Then suddenly we get to our floor, the door opens, and we're at a different level; a different reality.

WADE

You make it sound like we're in a time machine.

GABRIEL

Exactly! The whole thing seems humorous to me. Like we're here, two strangers, taking this trip together. Like in a road trip movie.

WADE

You know, I just realized that I don't actually remember entering the elevator. It feels like I've just always been in it with you.

GABRIEL

And come to think of it, I don't recall how I got into the elevator either.

WADE looks confused. GABRIEL is looking at the walls of the elevator.

GABRIEL (CONT'D)

What do you think of these mirrors? They're supposed to reduce anxiety plus give a sense of space making it less cramped.

WADE

I don't like the mirrors. They make me feel self-conscious although I have to admit that being able to check my tie is helpful. I just don't want to see any of my flaws. When I was younger, I wished I was a vampire because they can't see their reflection.

GABRIEL

It's a blessing for me because I'm claustrophobic. Mirrors help me to avoid feelings of being trapped. Hey, have you heard of the *mirror rule*?

WADE

No, but I'm sure you're going to tell me.

GABRIEL

You *do* know about it. Where your right hand becomes your left hand in the mirror.

WADE

That's not the *mirror rule*. It's actually called the *left-right inversion*. The philosopher, Stephen Law, said it was an example of a problem that science couldn't solve. Philosophers and mathematicians, of which I am one, have been debating this forever. It was decided that it might be a scientific problem, but it was a trivial one at that.

GABRIEL

I can't believe that you know about Stephen Law. You actually brought up an excellent point. By the way, I'm Gabriel, and don't call me Gabe. It grates on me. I love my three-syllable name. . . Uh, doesn't it feel stuffy in here? Like there's no air circulating? You must be so uncomfortable. Who wears ties anymore?

WADE

My name is Wade.

GABRIEL

I can't remember ever wearing a tie. Does this somber attitude help with your job prospects? I don't know much about being a tax accountant. You must have been good in math.

WADE

It's important that I make a good impression.

GABRIEL

Do you want to have a debate about the mirror rule? It will be good practice for me, and maybe it will be good for your interview.

WADE

Uh, . . . I don't think so.

GABRIEL

So if you're a mathematician, why aren't you doing research or teaching?

WADE

It doesn't interest me. Research jobs are hard to come by, and I would hate to be a teacher. The money will be better as a tax accountant. But I love numbers, and I like puzzles. Solving a mathematical equation is no different than a puzzle. I could spend hours at it.

GABRIEL

Are you that nervous about this interview?

WADE

Yes. I heard it's like being cross-examined in court or feeling like you're facing a firing squad.

GABRIEL

I don't know why anyone would put themselves through that. It's like being in a torture chamber.

A strange sound is heard. WADE and GABRIEL hear the sound but try to ignore it.

WADE

How are you planning on getting a job without going on an interview.

GABRIEL

Well, I still have a few years to worry about that. An I *do* want to teach. I'm sure there's a shortage of philosophy teachers, and I've got a load of other choices.

WADE

Getting a degree in philosophy doesn't seem very practical. Despite what you say, I don't believe there are jobs out there.

GABRIEL

You are *so* wrong! I enjoy thinking through problems from multiple angles, and that's valuable to *any* organization. The name, '*Philosophy*', derives from the Greek, '*Philosophia*', meaning love of wisdom. That's why philosophers like to ask the big questions, like, 'What is Truth?'

WADE

I hope you find the truth.

GABRIEL

Hey, What's with the elevator? Our floor was lit up, and it didn't stop. This is crazy! Why aren't the doors opening? Oh, god, the top floor says seventy! I didn't realize that this building was so tall.

GABRIEL looks nauseous and suddenly crumples to the elevator floor. Wade looks in the callbox for a phone and realizes there isn't one.

WADE

Gabriel, just calm down, okay? If you faint, you might hurt yourself.

GABRIEL

We're trapped! Why isn't the alarm working?

WADE

Look, someone is going to know we're in here.

GABRIEL

You don't know that! There could be a whole bunch of elevators on the first floor.

The elevator suddenly stops. The doors automatically open, and they see that it has stopped between floors.

GABRIEL

Close those doors! I don't want to look at a bunch of bricks! If there's an earthquake they might crumble, and we'd be crushed. And look at the crack in the mirror. Can you imagine if the mirrors got loose and fell? We'd die from being stabbed by shards of glass.

WADE removes his tie and sports jacket and unbuttons his shirt collar. GABRIEL remains on the floor. The lights suddenly go out, and it is totally dark.

WADE

(in the dark)

It must be a power failure.

The lights come back on, and the elevator jerks and begins moving again. WADE is thrown to the floor. GABRIEL reaches out and hugs WADE.

GABRIEL

Thank you. It feels good to hold someone. I'm glad you didn't move away. I'm kind of a touchy-feely guy. It's instinct. What about you?

WADE

Totally the opposite. I can't remember the last time someone held me, let alone a stranger.

GABRIEL

I'm a harmless stranger. Honest I am! But you're sure this cuddling is okay with you?

WADE

It actually feels good. I'll tell you if I get uncomfortable.

WADE and GABRIEL remain on the floor. They stare into each other's eyes.

GABRIEL

Uh, . . . Thank goodness the elevator is moving again, but Wade, why is it going so fast? And look at the elevator floor numbers; they're flickering on and off! What does it all mean? What is the cosmic question we're expected to answer from all this! Where's the answer? Oh, god! We're going to crash!

WADE and GABRIEL clutch each other in fear.

WADE AND GABRIEL

We're going to crash!

The lights go out again, and it is totally dark. The elevator is heard suddenly coming to a screeching halt. The lights flicker on and off and then come up again.

WADE

Oh, my god! We're safe, and I'm not hurt! Gabriel!
Gabriel! Are you okay?

WADE notices GABRIEL lying at the other side of the elevator with his face down. WADE goes over to GABRIEL and frantically nudges him until he starts to move.

WADE

Oh, thank god! I thought you were dead! Did you hit your head?

GABRIEL

I don't know what happened. Maybe I passed out for a moment. If I *did* hit my head that explains why I have a headache.

WADE is so relieved that GABRIEL is not hurt, he grabs him and hugs him tightly. During the hug, GABRIEL takes his hands and holds WADE's face and kisses him passionately. Suddenly a voice is heard.

VOICE

You guys really took a long time to figure this out.
Usually people don't spend this much time in Purgatory.

And this is the first time we've had guests kissing in the waiting room. I guess you've earned the right to move on.

WADE and GABRIEL nervously laugh, There is a flash of lightning and clap of thunder, and all goes totally dark. When the lights come up, the elevator is empty.

VOICE

Welcome to heaven, guys!

THE END

