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CENTRO CULTURALE DI MILANO

PERCORSI DELLA SCIENZA

"Un universo ospitale?"

interviene

Paul Davies

Introduce

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Paul Davies: a short biography

Paul Davies was born in London in 1946, and obtained a doctorate from University College London in 1970. He held academic appointments at Cambridge and London Universities until, at the age of 34, he was appointed Professor of Theoretical Physics at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne. From 1990 until 1996 he was Professor of Mathematical Physics, and later Natural Philosophy, at The University of Adelaide. He is currently Professor of Natural Philosophy in the Australian Centre for Astrobiology at Macquarie University, Sydney, and also holds the positions of Visiting Professor of Physics at Imperial College London and Adjunct Professor of Physics at the University of Queensland.

Professor Davies has published over 100 research papers in specialist journals, in the fields of cosmology, gravitation, and quantum field theory, with particular emphasis on black holes and the origin of the universe. His monograph *Quantum Fields in Curved Space*, co-authored with former student Nicholas Birrell, remains a seminal text in the field of quantum gravity. Davies is also interested in the nature of time, high-energy particle physics, the foundations of quantum mechanics, the origin of life and the nature of consciousness. He was nominated as one of Australia's ten most creative people by *The Bulletin* in December 1996.

In addition to his research, Professor Davies is well known as an author, broadcaster and public lecturer. He has written over twenty-five books, both popular and specialist works. They have been translated into more than twenty languages. Among his better-known works are *God and the New Physics*, *The Cosmic Blueprint*, *The Mind of God*, *The Last Three Minutes*, *About Time*, *Are We Alone?* and *The Fifth Miracle: the search for the origin of life*. His latest book is *How to Build a Time Machine*. In recognition of his work as an author, he was elected as Fellow of The Royal Society of Literature in 1999.

Davies was once described by the *Washington Times* as "the best science writer on either side of the Atlantic". His books explain advanced scientific concepts in simple terms, and explore the philosophical consequences of the latest ideas at the forefront of research. He likes to focus on the deep questions of existence, such as how the universe came into existence and how it will end, the nature of human consciousness, the possibility of time travel, the relationship between physics and biology, the status of the laws of physics and the interface of science and religion. He has also written a science fiction novel called *Fireball*.

Davies writes regularly for newspapers, journals and magazines in several countries, both about science and the political and social aspects of science and technology. He was a longstanding contributor to *The Economist*, and is a familiar columnist in *The Guardian*. In recent years he has also written extensively for other major publications, including *The Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes Magazine*, *Time Magazine*, *The Australian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age*, *The Bulletin*, *New Scientist*, *PM* (Germany) and *Conocer* (Spain). He was for two years a weekly opinion columnist for the *Adelaide Advertiser*. He is a Fellow of the World Economic Forum, and his ideas on a range of policy issues are often sought by politicians, public servants and businesses in Australia, the UK and elsewhere.

With longstanding experience in television and radio, Davies currently averages several appearances per week in various countries. Notable among his contributions to radio were a series of 45 minute science documentaries made for BBC Radio 3, and subsequently repeated on ABC. Two of these documentaries became highly successful books and one, "Desperately Seeking Superstrings," won the Glaxo Science Writers Fellowship. His television work has ranged from chat shows to scripting and presenting various documentaries. In 1995 he presented his own six-part series entitled *The Big Questions*, filmed at Coober Pedy in the Australian outback. A second series, *More Big Questions*, was screened on SBS Television in May 1998. Other recent television appearances included an entire episode of "Blessed Are They" on Border Television, contributions to *Horizon* and *Newsnight with Paxman* on the BBC, *Lateline*, *Quantum* and *Catalyst* on the ABC, *The Mysteries of Deep Space* on the Discovery Channel in the United States, *The Shape of the Universe* on Channel 4 in the UK and *60 Minutes* on Channel 9 in Australia, together with news

reports for the American Broadcasting Corporation, the BBC, the ABC and Channels 7, 9 and 10 in Australia. In early 2000 he devised and presented a three-part series for BBC Radio 4 on the origin of life, entitled 'The Genesis Factor.'

Davies's commitment to bringing science to the wider public includes a heavy program of public lecturing in Australia, Europe and the United States. In addition to addressing scientific topics, Davies also lectures to religious organizations around the world, and has had meetings with the Pope and the Dalai Lama. He frequently debates science and religion with theologians.

Davies believes that science is a cultural as well as an economic activity, and that the gulf between the sciences and the arts is damaging and must be bridged by both sides. As a supporter of the arts, he is frequently involved in literary and artistic events. He gave the keynote opening address of the 1998 Melbourne Writer's Festival, and has been a speaker at many other festivals, including Hay-on-Wye, Cheltenham, Edinburgh, Spoleto, Salamanca (Hobart) and Adelaide. He served on the South Australian Arts & Cultural Development Task Group, and was a member of the Committee of the 1999 Adelaide Festival of Ideas. He served on the Science World Advisory Panel of the Board of @t Bristol, a Millenium science project in the UK. His portrait painted by the noted South Australian artist Robert Hannaford was short-listed for the 1997 Archibald Prize and is currently on tour in Australia.

In 1991 Davies won the ABC Eureka Prize for the promotion of science in Australia. In 1992 he won the University of New South Wales Press Eureka Prize for his book *The Mind of God*, and in 1993 he was presented with an Advance Australia Award for outstanding contributions to science. *The Mind of God* was awarded the 1995 Templeton-CTNS book prize, and was also short-listed for the 1993 Royal Society Science Book Prize in the UK. *About Time* was short-listed for the 1996 Royal Society Science Book Prize. Two of Davies's newspaper articles have received high commendation in the Michael Daley Awards. In April 1999 the asteroid 1992 OG was officially named (6870) Pauldavies in his honour. He was awarded the 2001 Kelvin Medal by the UK Institute of Physics and the 2002 Michael Faraday Prize by the Royal Society for his contributions to promoting physics to the public.

The most significant award was the 1995 Templeton Prize for progress in religion, the world's largest prize for intellectual endeavour, presented by Prince Philip at Buckingham Palace. The prize ceremony, held at Westminster Abbey, was attended by 700 people.

In recent months, professional appearances have included special lectures at The Smithsonian Institution in Washington and UNESCO in Paris, and a panel discussion with the Dalai Lama in Canberra. He has also lectured in Adelaide, Sydney, Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Charlotte, Huntsville, London, Edinburgh, Canterbury and at NASA Ames in California.

In addition to his passion for both traditional and contemporary art, Davies is interested in the history of the second world war, politics and economics. He also enjoys keeping fit and discussing geographical trivia.