
Introduction to the Special Issue on David Lewis’s “The Paradoxes of Time Travel”

David Lewis’s “The Paradoxes of Time Travel” (1976) is the paper in the philosophy of time travel. Lewis’s paper has influenced all subsequent discussions of time travel, and the stance of any philosopher on this topic can be gauged by the extent of his agreement or disagreement with Lewis.

In his paper, Lewis laid out distinctions and doctrines necessary to make sense of time travel in general and travel to the past in particular: a distinction between (what he called) personal time and external time; a Four-Dimensional view of persons and other continuants; and an Eternalist framework in which past, present, and future are equally real. Travel to the past requires backwards causation and may sometimes generate causal loops. Travel to the past also gives rise to the famous Grandfather Paradox.

Lewis’s overall conclusion is that there are no genuine paradoxes of time travel and that time travel is no more

conceptually or metaphysically problematic than space travel. Time travel in our universe may be technically or even physically impossible, but it is not metaphysically impossible.

Now, however convincing Lewis may be at first read, critics can and have dissented from him at every stage. Should the personal time/external time distinction be drawn in the way Lewis drew it, or is there a better way? Can time travel occur on the Three-Dimensional view of continuants, or on a theory of time other than Eternalism? Is backwards causation really possible, and is there not something especially paradoxical about causal loops? Finally, does Lewis resolve the Grandfather Paradox successfully, and might one question the relativistic theory of ‘can’-judgements underlying his solution?

Depending on how these questions are answered, critics will range from moderate to extreme: from those who accept the possibility of time travel but disagree on details to



those who conclude that time travel (or, at least, travel to the past) is impossible. But all his critics owe Lewis a great debt for having made explicit the questions that need to be addressed.

The debate continues 50 years after the publication of Lewis's paper. The contributions in this Special Issue, beginning with an overview by

Ryan Wasserman, pay homage to Lewis's seminal paper and are testaments to the fecundity and longevity of Lewis's ideas.

The Editors would like to dedicate this Special Issue to the memory of a good metaphysician and a good man: Hugh Rice, formerly of Christ Church, Oxford, who passed away in March 2025.

Brian Garrett (ANU)

Jeremiah Joven Joaquin (DLSU)