

*Klesis - Philosophical Review* - 2012: 24 - *The philosophy of David Lewis*

**David Lewis: the life of a philosopher**

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*David Lewis and Maggie the cat, at home, in 1989. Photo ©  
Stephanie Lewis*  
*In a sense, all life is told*



\* Michele Salimbeni preparing a thesis at EHESS whose title is *possible, and Images Possible Worlds* (under the direction of Frédéric Nef). His main research areas are metaphysics and ontology, including possible worlds from which he draws a new definition of the concept image. He is also writing the first biography (Italian and English) on David Lewis. To this end, he has recently met in Princeton, Stephanie Lewis has made available archives and materials necessary for the writing of this book will also be an introduction to his philosophy. He also is a director and screenwriter, he wrote and directed in Italy, his first feature film, *Under-the-sky* (2008) and various short films. He wrote, in addition, the scenario film *I magi randagi* Sergio Citti (taken from an original subject of Pier Paolo Pasolini), with which he won the Quality Award from the Ministry of Show and was nominated for the Nastro Argento as best Italian writer in 1997. He has worked with many directors including Andrzej Żuławski (on which he wrote the book *Il cinema di Andrzej Żuławski*, editions Res 2002).

*Klesis - Philosophical Review* - 2012: 24 - *The philosophy of David Lewis*

*a world system, to define a method that*

*we own*

Marguerite Yourcenar

*There are three rules for writing a biography, but*

*Fortunately no one knows the*

Somerset Maugham

## **I. Introduction**

David Lewis was the last systematic metaphysician twentieth century. Probably the biggest. Time will tell.

In the international philosophical community, he is known for the multiple and illuminating contributions developed in various fields philosophy as the philosophy of language, logic, ethics, philosophy of mathematics, theory of mind and metaphysics. It is renowned in particular for his bold defense of the reality of all possible worlds. But Lewis was not only famous for its theories about the plurality of worlds. In his writings, he proposed innovative theories of scientific laws, functional theories



mind, language conventions, causality, identity and many other arguments, forming one of the ultimate systems

coherent philosophical, impressive and sophisticated.

Many of his former colleagues consider today as one of the greatest metaphysicians - or "the philosopher most Systematic since Leibniz" (Mark Johnston). Certainly Lewis restored respectability to metaphysics seeking to reconcile scientific worldview with what appears to our senses.

The objective of this paper is to sketch a portrait of first man and the philosopher, his life and his intellectual journey. One also seek to return in the limits of possibility, the atmosphere historical and cultural background of America of those years. It is also a first approach to the voluminous biography philosopher which I undertook recently, writing.

Why a biography of David Lewis? Above all, because it is still no written for. Although Lewis is among the most important and influential philosophers of the twentieth century, it strangely does not exist at present biography of him being consecrated.

When preparing to write a biography, the recurring question is whether the private life of an author has had a decisive influence on

12

his work, his work. The question is even more relevant in the case a philosopher. Of course, among those who engage in this kind particularly literary, are present the following two positions: one that deny the influence of biographical events in the work and that according which that influence is evident. My sympathy goes instead to the second hypothesis: How does one divide work and life especially when it dedicated his own life to his work? When the work becomes our body and our environment, our events? However, we will develop not the argument here.



A biography is, above all, a portrait. Who was David Lewis?

Roberto Casati wrote that if "the pianist Bill Evans was the pianists, one that all jazz enthusiasts would listen, David Lewis was the philosopher of philosophers " 1. Lewis was not only a philosopher and a metaphysician who was successful, but also a figure fascinating and charismatic, and his life was full of habits that common sense have labeled as "extravagant". It is said that he conversed numbered paragraphs, it introduced students to metaphysics using examples from literature and film science fiction, he wrote his first book so important in a cafe in Los Angeles (the volume then won the prestigious J. Machete) and he traveled All railways in the UK, taking notes and writing metaphysics of articles that talked about time travel, of Cats who philosophized, flying pigs, monkeys speaking of counterparties and possible worlds 2. He was affectionately known "The Ghost in the Machine", reversing the famous expression of Ryle, *the ghost in the machine* is formed against dualism and appeared for the first time in the book *The Concept of Mind*.

He loved folk music, The Beatles, The Doors, Bob Dylan, the cats, Australia, where he became an admired philosophical figure, and trains. He was incredibly modest, shy, pale and described itself as well:

I am an analytical metaphysician of the old school, in search of assumptions about what are the elements of being [...] I am recognized to affirm that these elements must include many who are

<sup>1</sup> Casati, Roberto, "Lewis filosofo dei filosofi" *Shadowes*, October 21, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> These are some of the curious and original examples used by Lewis explain his philosophical theories.



philosophical conservative.

His long beard with two points is not for nothing in the reputation of the character. He left a few times his interlocutor baffled by the slowness with which he answered the questions him were addressed. He found himself in a conference, a seminar or dinner with friends, no matter. Succeeded several questions minutes of silence. Then he answered with accuracy and response seemed from paragraph a beautifully written book. Soul generous, imposing, always available for his students or critical colleagues, Lewis led his entire existence as an ideal loyalty to what he loved, for whom he loved. Stephanie R. Robinson, Steffi, his wife, he knew the eternal love: each to the other, gave his heart, metaphorically and when Lewis's condition deteriorated, Steffi literally gave him a gift that would bind their bodies to the end. The philosopher Peter Unger recalls this love as a person. Person never noticed it. Yet still, Steffi was there.

Cesare Pavese wrote: "What good is it to pass the time if you do not keep memory? "These pages are in memory of these days: full of stories, thoughts and possibilities.

## **I. Childhood and adolescence**

"The Splendid Splinter," Theodore Samuel "Ted" Williams, do not missed a shot. The audience held its breath, then explode screams of joy and applause. Sunday, September 28, 1941, great defender left the Boston Red Sox gets a batting average of .406, becoming the first player in professional baseball league, time Bill Terry in 1930 to get an average of .400. The clamor aroused by the event filled the air. In homes. In the bars. By the streets. Everyone spoke of "Splendid Splinter" athlete of the year, the hero of American sports. But for the husband Lewis, this was only a background rumor, which came from the outside, penetrating through the open windows, while inside we heard the first wailing of an infant. David Kellogg Lewis was born in Oberlin, Ohio, September 28, 1941, a sporting glory marred however by Sunday the shadow of the war that was soon offended the United States of America, giving this holiday a strange and menacing air.



*Klesis - Philosophical Review* - 2012: 24 - *The philosophy of David Lewis*

On the radio we passed *Green Eyes*, sung by Jimmy Dorsey and *Chattanooga Choo Choo*, recorded by the Glenn Miller Orchestra for *Sun Valley Serenade* movie, who will get a few months after the first disc Gold history. In the movie theaters were projected adventure cartoon rabbit Bugs Bunny deceitful, while a 25 year old hardly revolutionized the history of cinema with his first movie, *Citizen Kane*. Then the fateful day came, relentless and inevitable, and radiating atmosphere of possibilities darkens, Delita in aerial suicide bombers roar, the sound of bombs roar. Two months and ten days after the birth of young David, forces Japanese naval aviation attacked the naval base at Pearl Harbor, causing the entrance of the US into World War II. The shadow now had made disturbing, was that of darkness and death.

Lewis probably born at Allen Memorial Hospital in Oberlin, city founded in 1833 by two Presbyterian ministers and known to have been, the mid-nineteenth century, an important center of the movement abolitionist in the United States. He had curly hair, which became smooth around the age of three years. This was the year in which marine landed in Normandy. His father, Donald John Lewis (1905-1988), was Professor of Political Science at the University of Oberlin. His mother, Ewart Kellogg Lewis (1908-1968), was a medieval historian deemed 3. They were married in June 1933 and had three son David, the eldest, Donald born March 27, 1946 and Ellen, who was born on March 19, 1948. All three grew up in the house located at 255 E. College Street, the main street crossing the city from east to west, the university headquarters. There was a big house, painted in white, surrounded by towering trees and tall lawns. Behind, among the lilies, a pool with goldfish. The house included a basement where the young Lewis established his laboratory chemistry.



<sup>3</sup> His book *Medieval Political Ideas* (London, Routledge & Paul, 1954) provided a valuable introduction to the medieval political thought.

15

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**Page 6**

*Klesis - Philosophical Review* - 2012: 24 - *The philosophy of David Lewis*

*At home at 255 East College St., Oberlin. 1950*  
Photo by Ewart Lewis, © Stephanie Lewis

In the memories of his sister, David was a sweet child, bright and contemplative, always ready to explain everything. The photograph by his mother while David was nine shows in the role of



professor doing the lesson to his sister and his brother. Since childhood, the future philosopher had the habit of thinking about language, on its

nature and its functioning. The young Lewis was not a walker early, but he learned to speak early. However he stammered, scary and his parents, who feared that this was only a permanent disability.

A family friend, a psychologist, said however that it was normal and resulted from the willingness to talk as soon as possible. As quickly they had appeared, the beginnings disappeared shortly after.

David possessed a brilliant intellect, decidedly unusual, and when he spoke, he spoke with extraordinary precision and a choice careful of his words. This donation does not prevent him from living a childhood normal.

Like any American kid a few years, it chasing fireflies in the backyard during the summer nights, he played croquet, is masked Halloween night - "Practical jokes or candy? " he said, laughing at who opened the door at the customary rides night of 31 October. He ate the traditional turkey day

16

*Thanksgiving* and Christmas Day, he got up at dawn to open its gifts. On the shelf of the fireplace, it was often trains

Power: parents knew he liked particularly and

not want to miss the spectacle of its little eyes and a little asleep that dazzled, amazed. At Easter colored eggs and there

during *Memorial Day*, he was fascinated by the whole traditional parade. It pleased him to play pirates and war, building model airplanes and rockets with whom he was in narcotics

trips in the living room of the house, and then fight in with his younger brother, the "Space Pirates". "Our

house had a large living room; all full of switches ready to be operated and a large rocket motor which, at other times, the machine was

Wash the laundry <sup>4</sup>. Science Fiction remained a passion to age adult and was of great influence, a strong source of inspiration, some



time for some of his philosophical theories. Not having television at home, he went, with his brother and sister, hours reading the *Encyclopedia Britannica* sitting on the floor of the dining room. It loved science, chemistry, dinosaurs, radio, writing articles for periodic his invention and, more than anything else, these trains which materialized on Christmas Eve and whose passion accompany all his life.

It was also an experienced inventor: he entertained in the strangest building machineries, such as, copying a casino dealer, a "slot machine" which he had seen during one of his many trips as well as a mousetrap, but not a trap any, the "better mousetrap" that could conceive. He would have become a celebrity in the patenting. As sensitive child he was, he displeased to kill rodents poor. So he developed and conceived his trap so stun mouse by dropping a weight on their head.

When it should go to the hospital to be removing the tonsils, he read greedily a series of small books on science, with a list experimentation. This was his first contact with science. After What he tried some of these experiences at home and also made into a or two demonstrations in classrooms, the largest of its indifference companions immersed in other thoughts. However, he did not like sports (except swimming), folk dances and in class the school in general. Specifically, he disliked the unclear way teachers had to administer the lessons. "I like things be ordered and methodical "lamented Lewis in his early

4Autobiography written at the age of fourteen.

autobiography written at the age of fourteen. And at school, of course, all was not "orderly and methodical." Everything was subject to arbitrary decisions: go to science lessons or music one day determined were equal. He also deplored the fact that the class is not subject a minimum of discipline. The teacher did not know at all



maintain order: the class was chaotic. Lewis remained shocked when, because of the misdeeds of a student, the teacher was holding the entire class au beyond school hours. Another example: when he entered the school elementary, to his surprise, he discovered that he had to learn colors, and was even more surprised when he realized indeed, his classmates did not know.

Lewis was an excellent spirit, always ahead for the level School classes he attended. When he was about five, his mother began to teach him to read. Then, when, due to a polio, he was forced to stay in bed for almost one year and consequently lose a year of schooling, he read everything within reach hand and on his return to school, was even more advanced than many children his age, so he "jumped" not one but two class. Enthusiast Greek mythology he read every book he spotted on the subject. His was quick imagination, intelligence, always brighter. Already teenager, he argued, following the example of his parents, causes democratic politics.

But above all, he was traveling. The trips were probably the part the most exciting of his training and staff development. Long, endless travel, on the road from one coast to the other America as in the best pages of Kerouac. In automotive, the family crossed the Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Yellowstone Park, Wyoming, Lake Tahoe, Nevada, Estes Park in Colorado, Washington DC, Michigan, California, Massachusetts. During these trips he recorded meticulously time and mileage milestones and kept a diary opinions family on motels, where he should one day return. His predisposition to systematization was already clear. The vast American landscapes spun before his eyes and we can only imagine the impression they made the young Lewis. On main road Thatcher, Lewis met the Indians. It was common see around town, since it was in territory India and the neighboring country was full of houses called their characteristics "Wikiups". But for a boy of fourteen, the meeting with Native Americans, with their marked features, which told of the earth



origins, was an exceptional event and put her in turmoil imagination. Lewis had happened to Thatcher after crossing the continent by car and stopping at Oberlin, Berkeley management. The city of California was selected by the father to enjoy the free time obtained in the part of his sabbatical. But first, why not visit the grandmother and uncle? These parents lived in the Indian city of Arizona, and for the young Lewis these days were those redskins.

At the end of the summer of 1947, he spent one or two weeks in Charlevoix, Michigan. It was a perfect place for a holiday of a child, "With three lakes, two beaches, a real drawbridge, cabins in wood and rent rowing boats. " The horrors of the war, barely over, could not contaminate these places of peace and nature.

However, it was not just the holidays and travel tourist. The whole family was moving, often for long periods, according to the father, according to its obligations with universities scattered throughout the territory or looking for places where he could write books. They will spend a few were in Ann Arbor, Michigan, a long time in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where his father was established to use the Harvard library for one of his volumes, another summer in Middletown, Connecticut; many summers also Berkeley, California. At Harvard, an uncle who worked as researcher at the Faculty of Medicine showed the young Lewis sound laboratory. This was his first official meeting with the real scientific research. Lewis had barely finished elementary and fourth, during this summer, legendary and unforgettable when everything seemed possible, he learned to ride a bicycle.

After many wanderings the Lewis family returned to Oberlin and David enrolled in 1954 at Oberlin High School. The following year, he visited New York, for the first time. The vast metropolis is: the center of the modernity. These are the years of the end of McCarthyism, the Platters, the nuclear tests on Bikini Atoll, the disappearance of Wittgenstein's death a few years before and the theatrical release of *The Searchers* *desert*, Technicolor masterpiece of John Ford.

Lewis then began writing his autobiography: 40 sheets typewritten. When, in the last page, he notes, "my philosophy is more than anything else, philosophy literally, love of knowledge, "the young man of 14, who barely



began his chemistry studies, does not yet know that it will become one of the most influential English-language philosophers of the twentieth century. He adds: "I feel that there must be a pattern to all that the past determines the future,

19

*Klesis - Philosophical Review* - 2012: 24 - *The philosophy of David Lewis*

there must be some natural laws, or perhaps only such it would be possible to deduce all the characteristics of the universe this alone. This is a scientific way of looking at the universe. " And think it is still a teenager! The same that during those summers, each day would watch the trains into the station and remained fascinated, enchanted, immobilized as a moth facing strong light source.

That time never returned and the young David knew this and wrote in his autobiography: "All this experience an end, everything will be too fast; we made the bags and headed back to the house. "

## **II. Swarthmore College, Oxford, Harvard. The years of training**

In 1957, Lewis enrolled at Swarthmore College to study chemistry. Located 17.7 km southeast of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Swarthmore University, founded in 1864, is one of the first US private universities in liberal arts to science studies human. He won the *National Merit Scholar* and this award shall have had some weight in Lewis decisions quickly abandon chemistry studies to go to philosophy.

The turning point actually happens in 1959, during a stay of one year, at the prestigious University of Oxford, where he had gone with his father. After hearing the lesson of Gilbert Ryle, the English philosopher who discussed the existence of the spirit in his famous book *The Concept of Mind*, student in chemistry understands that there is his way. JJC Smart defends hypothesis, also supported by David Armstrong, wherein the stay Oxford have contributed decisively to bring young Lewis conceptual analysis and to take her to behaviorism



Ryle, pointing toward a materialistic philosophical conception of the mind. So it interrupts its course to Swarthmore and passes the academic year

1959-1960 at St. Catherine's Society of Oxford University, under the by Jean Iris Murdoch, the famous writer. Murdoch, teacher in philosophy at Oxford from 1948 was student of Wittgenstein, during this year of revelations, Lewis read, discovering the Wittgenstein the second period, that of the *Philosophical Investigations*. But it does not stop not the Austrian thinker, he also discovers William Wollaston and will listen the teachings of Austin, attending his final lesson it follows Berlin, Grice, Hart, Strawson, and of course Ryle. Among his teachers Oxford, figured along Murdoch, then the guardian Simopoulos in philosophy from St. Catherine's Society. At Oxford, Lewis celebrates ten-eight years.

20

***Klesis - Philosophical Review*** - 2012: 24 - *The philosophy of David Lewis*

After the important English experience, Lewis returned to the States States with the firm determination to pursue his philosophical studies. Us are at the beginning of the sixties and the hosts in America Boiling a nation involved in the Cold War, at maximum tension, and the side of the Vietnam War begins - not yet like it suspect - the tragic epilogue; America watched in amazement the early Bob Dylan, the singer who changed the thinking of a generation. In this context, therefore, Lewis resumed his studies at Swarthmore College, for the second time, awarded the *National Merit Scholar* (1960-1962). Among its professors, we count the philosophers and Richard Monroe Beardsley Brandt, Joe Conard, economics professor, Jerome Schaffer, Michael Scriven. While being among his companions include Gilbert Harman, Allan Gibbard, Barbara Hall (now Hall-Partee) and Peter Unger: these were his first philosophical interlocutors. Between everyone, particularly Lewis read Unger, who will also become him one of the most important philosophers of his generation. Here knotted bonds of friendship which continued to be offered years.

During this period, David Lewis enters the *Phi Beta Kappa Society*



(ΦΒΚ: which means "guiding philosophy of life" student elected composed of the brightest students in the third and fourth academic year, he became associate researcher and consultant with the Hudson Institute, a position he held until the mid seventies (1962-1975). During the academic year 1962-1963, it is as Woodrow Wilson Fellow.

5), A club

In June 1962, he graduated with the highest grade in Philosophy [BA in Philosophy, High honors]. The title of the thesis led by Monroe Beardsley is "Can Ethics be Reasonable? ". Lewis, this now, is ready to enter the most prestigious American university, that of Harvard.

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise and live fully the true meaning of its creed. " On August 28, 1963 Lincoln Memorial Washington, Martin Luther King spoke these famous words to the 250,000 people who had gathered to during the march for work and freedom. These are the years of the civil protest and struggle for the rights of blacks. Exactly one month after September 28, David is 22 years old, the same age as Bob Dylan, in front of the Lincoln Memorial, the day of the speech of Protestant pastor, *When the singing comes in ships*. It was during this period in the fall, Lewis entered Harvard to continue his studies in philosophy in

*5philosophia biou kybernetes.*

21

sponsored by Willard Van Orman Quine. Quine, who then held the chair Edgar Pierce philosophy, and who was from Ohio (Akron) as Lewis was obviously an important role in the formation of young philosopher <sup>6</sup>. Besides Quine, among other Lewis Teachers Harvard, one account Goodman, Putnam, Schelling and Williams.

During the fall of 1963, Lewis participated in a seminar held by the Australian philosopher Adelaide, JJC Smart, visiting Harvard. Smart was one of the earliest and most influential advocates of the theory of identity about the *mind-body problem*, theory which holds that states



mental are reducible to physical processes in the brain. This Seminar consolidated the position Lewis always closer Australian materialism. An argument supporting this position will be exposed Then in his first article, "An Argument for the Identity Theory" published in 1966. Smart, recalling their meeting said: "I learned much more of him than he of me. " But the seminar was fundamental Lewis, above all, because of another encounter between the student Stephanie R. Robinson, who also participated in the seminar. David and Stephanie marry Sept. 5, 1965 in New York, resident together until the death of the philosopher. On their wedding day, him, almost 24, she 21 (she was born 3 August 1944). Stephanie, who wrote David's famous article "Holes" (1970), then devoted himself to the economy.

The meeting between David and Stephanie, the most important of their lives, happens in the fall that will change forever America. 22

November President JF Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas.

The following year, during which Lewis obtained his Master in Harvard [MA in Philosophy], starts in this charged atmosphere drama and pessimism, a great dream assassinated by a bullet, a nightmare Atomic which is increasingly obsessive. A good report is the Kubrick film *Dr. Strangelove*, released in US theaters on 28 In January 1964 and will be one of the favorite films of Lewis.

A year before the end of his doctorate, submitted to it a first professional academic job at UCLA where Lewis taught as assistant professor from 1966 to 1970. So he went to California, the land of possibilities.

6 Besides Lewis, other Harvard students became famous: among them, Donald Davidson and Daniel Dennett.



### **III. Los Angeles and possible worlds**

There are times in the life of a man during which all seems to converge on a single goal, which all contribute thoughts, all his actions, traveling the same road, next one direction possible. At such times, what we call History, a succession of events understood as parts of spatial properties time, occurs on small personal stories, giving birth to this state of things particularly fertile for intuition, for creation. These moments are consumed quickly, without those who live realizing it, they spend as rain. And most often, they do not return. The years pass David Lewis in Los Angeles belong to such moments.



*Klesis - Philosophical Review* - 2012: 24 - *The philosophy of David Lewis*

It was during his years in California Lewis creates his theory of possible worlds 7, First outlined in Articles' Counterpart theory and quantified modal logic "(1968) and "Anselm and actuality" (1970) and developed in the book following: *Counterfactuals* (1973, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford) and most importantly, much discussed in the *Plurality of Worlds On the* (1986, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford), his most important work, where theory is exposed with great skill and systematically.

Lewis taught at UCLA from 1966 to 1970 and he settled with Steffi in the Santa Monica neighborhood in front of the ocean. The department philosophy was then a nursery for research formal semantics, with colleagues such as Rudolf Carnap (one of founder of the Vienna Circle in the twenties, emigrated to the United States fleeing Nazism), Donald Kalish, Hans Kamp, Richard Montague, who Lewis dedicates *Counterfactuals*, David Kaplan and Barbara Hall-Partee that Lewis had already known the Time of Swathmore College. But these were as the years of against-Culture in Los Angeles and throughout the California, the hippie movement, the Doors, Lewis loved, the Grateful Dead, the electric turn of Bob Dylan. Years of Juvenile challenge immortalized by the splendid *Zabriskie Point* Antonioni (so unfairly attacked by almost all critics and only defended by Alberto Moravia). During these years "Electrical" in the philosophy department at the prestigious University of California we lived a kind of Golden Age and the modal search particular stimuli that came from the intellectual environment had a great influence on the first publications of the young philosopher. In Indeed, the long Californian sojourn coincides with his first publications, important articles on the philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, the philosophy of logic and metaphysics. Lewis benefits from the endless exchange of ideas and discussions he had with



Montague, Kaplan and Unger, who in the meantime had come to find him on the UCLA campus. But in those years, he also learns Lewis suffers from chronic diabetes.

While still a PhD student, David Lewis wrote, as we have said before, his first article, "An Argument for the Identity Theory," which will be published in *The Journal of Philosophy* in 1966. In this article, now considered a classic

<sup>7</sup>This personal supposition was confirmed by Peter Unger during our discussion Greenwich Village, New York, in May 2012.

24

*Klesis - Philosophical Review* - 2012: 24 - *The philosophy of David Lewis*

philosophy of mind, he resumed the position of Smart and improving. The goal is to provide the Australian philosopher theory a "base solid." For Lewis, each mental state is physical. More precisely, each mental state is caused by some physical events and thus some physical effects. The Lewis hypothesis is that non-necessarily but in fact - every experience is identical to a physical condition, especially some neurochemical states. That we will characterize later as functionalism.

Also in 1966 he published in *Philosophical Review*, "and Percepts color mosaics in visual experience," an interesting article and still little known about perception and visual experience.

In March 1967, he supports under the direction of Quine's thesis PhD at Harvard (Ph.D. in Philosophy). The title of the dissertation is "Conventions of Language".

The academic community can now only welcome in its elite, a new philosopher. Lewis has not yet reached 26 years old but is already recognized as an influential philosopher who was preparing shortly to renew contemporary metaphysics.

In the late sixties he published, as we have said, yet two important items that will be the basis for theories counterparties, one of the most controversial aspects of the metaphysics Lewis and his famous theory on the plurality of worlds "Counterpart



Theory and Quantified Modal Logic ", " Anselm and Actuality " respectively appeared in *Journal of Philosophy* in 1968 and *Nous* in 1970. Two highly technical articles, especially in terms of first, where Lewis makes ample use of written following formulas the notation of symbolic logic. They can be considered both as the foundations of the thesis he will call later realism

Modal. According to this thesis, the possible worlds are not only entities abstract used to give an explanation to the two modal concepts of possibility and necessity, but they are concrete and real entities like our own universe. For Lewis, "there are so many ways in which a world could be done, and each of these many ways is a how a world is made. " Each of these worlds is a "large object physical "concrete. In other times, for supporting theses enough like Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake. For the philosopher American, the price for defending this theory, considered absurd, was cheaper. His theory is simply going against what Lewis defined as common sense. The reaction of others philosophers was almost unanimously disbelief. They struggled to accept

25

a thesis which, according to some, was borderline of literature and science-fiction. Indeed, Lewis who loved science fiction literature quoted in his articles, SF writers like Robert A. Heinlein, the author of *Stranger in a Strange Land* , the 1961 novel considered a sort of bible of the hippie movement of the time<sup>8</sup>. Heinlein, Lewis cites, among other things, the new *By His Bootstraps* 1941 and *All you Zombies* 1959 in his article "The Paradoxes of Time Travel" (1976). Similarly, in "Counterpart Theory and Quantified Modal Logic" Specifically, he took the news of L. Sprague de Camp, appeared in October 1940 in the journal *Unknown Fantasy Fiction* , "The Wheels of If" in which a New York lawyer finds himself traveling every morning in a parallel universe with ever different identity as inspiring counterpart theory.



This unusual approach leaves many of his colleagues perplexed or stunned. Certainly, the climate of these years is conducive to science-fiction: April 2, 1968, the year of the publication of the article cited above, fate in theaters in *2001 Space Odyssey*, the famous metaphysical odyssey Stanley Kubrick and, a year later, July 21, 1969, the man arrives on the moon. Beyond the reluctance remains lucidity with which the young metaphysician illustrates what a counterpart in "Counterpart Theory and Quantified Modal Logic ":

The counterpart relation is our substitute regarding the identity between things in different worlds. While some say that you are more worlds in which you properties to a certain extent and that different things happen to you in a To some extent, different, I prefer to say that you are in the world current and in no other, but you have counterparties in several other worlds. Your counterparts like you much, either content, context, etc., in important respects. They you look more like you than anything else in their world. But they are not really you. Because each is in his own world and you alone here in this world. We can still say talking approximately, that your counterparties you in other worlds, and that you are the same thing; but he would be better to say that your counterparties are individuals you would have been if the world had been done otherwise.

8 Despite many false rumors about this novel, one of whose themes is typical of the time free love and radical individualism, it seems that Charles Manson was inspired by well just be a rumor.

During that time, in today's world, few days before Christmas, December 21, 1968, in Oberlin, Lewis's mother dies.

The doctoral thesis on Conventions and on language, qu'écrivit



Lewis in a Los Angeles coffee and pastry, the *C'est Si Bon Patisserie*, then became his first book: *Convention: A Philosophical Study* (1969, Harvard University Press). The volume is dedicated to Steffi. One of the main objectives of the book is upgrade the arguments about Carnap analyticity, support a defense Carnapian analyticity. He is Interestingly, the book was partly a rehabilitation analytical distinction / synthetic facing the famous refusal to Quine, Director thesis which is derived the text. In these pages where he demonstrates how spokesman meanings, Lewis argues that the agreements are coordination games. The application of game theory to the analysis conventions, understood as coordination problems was, in any so inspired by Thomas Schelling, a Harvard economics professor who used game theory in his studies on the strategy of conflict. Lewis, at the time, was also influenced by DC Williams and his approach quadridimensionnaliste time and by Goodman, in particular by design properties.

The same year as the publication of *Convention*, Lewis writes *Confirmation Theory*, a short book or a long article, which was never published. Lewis takes some arguments of this text in the 1999 Article entitled "Why Conditionalize? ".

We are now at the beginning of the seventies. Seems, among other "Holes" written in both hands with his wife. Compound dialogue form, the article is considered by Smart as one of the most entertaining but also instructive in philosophy ever written. The protagonists of this dialogue are Argle who, like Lewis, is interested about the holes, which appear not to be material entities (why identify holes through the line of the borders of the area in which they are located, what is the constituent material?) and Bargle which on the contrary, supports the existence of the holes.

Not far from the dwelling place of Lewis, in Santa Monica, 14 September 1970 Carnap turns off. Like Quine, Carnap had many influence on Lewis: he wrote a lot on modal logic and we can easily imagine how his interpretation of worlds possible today considered standard, had stimulated the young metaphysician as to whether to offer his personal view. TO the occasion of the speech for the *Behrman Award*, May 11, 1991, Lewis said: "My ancestors are historical, above all, Leibniz and Hume. [...]"



And more recently, Mill, Ramsey, Carnap the metaphysician (not confused with the anti-metaphysician Carnap, who is better known) and Quine. Among my teachers, Quine addition, I think the one that most me Donald Williams was formed. "

With the death of Carnap also symbolically ends the period California. Lewis still go one year in Oxford ( *American Council of Learned Societies Fellowship* , 1970-1971), before moving definitely in Princeton, New Jersey, where he stayed alternately with long periods in Australia - regarded as a second homeland - until the day of his death.

#### **IV. Princeton and Australia**

In 1970, David Lewis was promoted to Associate Professor at the University of Princeton. This is the year in which he published in the journal *Synthesis* , "General Semantics", a masterpiece of the semantics for worlds possible. It is curious to note how in June the same year Bob Dylan receives, always at Princeton doctorate *honoris causa* . From 1973 will be Professor of Philosophy. He was named *Class of 1943 Professor of Philosophy* at Princeton University. In what is clearly one of the oldest and most prestigious American universities (Founded in 1746), Lewis taught until his early demise.

July 1971 JJC Smart invites Lewis to give courses to Adelaide University as *Lecturer Gavin David Young* . Between Lewis and Australia is the thunderbolt. The American philosopher is right Following out due to its original method. During the conferences, by example, it presents to the public metaphysics using pictures drawn science fiction. Again, his interest in science fiction combined with philosophical research. He will remain in Australia all summer and, starting from this initiatory journey, he will return annually Stephanie company. This is the beginning of a fruitful and lasting exchange. The thought Lewis will leave an indelible mark in the community Australian philosophers and their theories. Lewis loves almost everything Australia: colors, endless expanses, arid, rain forests North, deserts of central areas, the imposing red rocks



millennia, perhaps remind him of those famous *Monument Valley* Children visited in 1951 and immortalized in the legendary westerns of John Ford, kangaroos he uses as an example to explain counterfactuals, in his second book, cities, the ocean. Everything, really everything. But above all, he loves Australian football, becoming a fervent

28

*Klesis - Philosophical Review* - 2012: 24 - *The philosophy of David Lewis*

bear - they say he was planted with seasonal ticket Essendon, the team of the city of Melbourne, he and Steffi are became members. Also, take a special place in his heart folk songs, the *birdwatching* and of course Australian trains although his favorite ones are circulating on the English channels. Lewis could spend hours by train to admire the scenery or write the philosophy, without getting tired and in the basement of his house Princeton, he bluntly pointed down a wall to be able to conveniently install a miniature railway and so travel in his imagination adored electric trains.

Every summer, he was there in Australia since the summer break American coincides with the Australian winter - and even if he was never vacation: winter he worked in the American university and was in that of Melbourne, which became his adopted city. At the University of Melbourne, Lewis spent the whole day writing in the library of Department of Philosophy. Among the most important friendships, besides that he had with Smart, there one with David Malet Armstrong quickly became one of the best friends of Lewis and one of his most assiduous correspondents. The important intellectual exchange between two philosophers surely played a fundamental role in their positions respective metaphysical. Summer after summer, Lewis visit other universities and participates in annual conferences. He is always available for exchanges with colleagues and students. Australia is so important Lewis even today, many are convinced that it was Australian nationality.

On 5 May 1972 he presented to St. Louis, to the *Western Division of the*



*American Philosophical Association* , a response to Donald Davidson entitled "Meaning without Reference". 1972 was also the year which his first book, *Convention: a Philosophical Study* , receives the award Franklin J. Machete.

In 1973 he published the important article on causation, "Causation" and, especially the second book *Counterfactuals* . This contains the famous chapter "Possible Worlds" in which, with a solid prose, lucid and perennial, Lewis expresses his ideas on the modality by exposing the foundations of its own metaphysical system and those of the theory of the plurality of worlds.

The year appears *Counterfactuals* , he received the National Science Foundation Grant.

We are now in the mid-seventies. 30  
April 1975 after twenty years of war in Vietnam ended. The one wants to forget

29

***Klesis - Philosophical Review*** - 2012: 24 - *The philosophy of David Lewis*

soon the horror of the conflict. Moist heat of the jungle, the *Landing Albany area* , the smell of napalm, the spectral aspect of Hanoi bombed by B-52, Saigon, the deafening noise of the AH-1 Cobra helicopters; and the dead, the endless lines of coffins covered in stars and stripes. In memory of Vietcong that arose from everywhere, US preferred to substitute a cinematic enemy came from the sea, the family beaches. Thus, millions will literally terrorize spectators *Jaws* ("The Jaws") Steven Spielberg. America was looking for a new innocence ready made popcorn, of bikinis and colors into monsters.

Lewis flies to Oxford, where on 15 May 1975, before the *bed Oxford University Philosophical Society* , its response to Dana Scott entitled "Is There Life on Possible Worlds? ".

The following year, in April, he published "The Paradoxes of Time Travel" then go to New Zealand in June-August 1976, as *Fulbright-Hays Fellowship* . Between the mid-seventies and mid-eighties, he made many trips and conferences



worldwide. Here is a brief list: *Hägerström Lecturer* , Uppsala, Sweden (May-June 1977), *Monash University Visiting Lecturer* , Australia (June-August 1979); *Howison Lecturer Berkeley* , California (October-November 1979); *New Jersey Regional Philosophical Association conference* , New Jersey (1 December 1979); Victoria University, *Visiting Fellow Wellington* , New Zealand (June 1980); *Australian National University Visiting Fellow* , Australia (July-August 1980); *La Trobe Visiting University Lecturer* , Australia (June-August 1981) *Monash University Visiting Lecturer* , Australia (June-July 1982). Intense years that his hunger is growing exponentially. Nothing can stop it.

He also continues to publish many. Besides the four books monographic ( *Convention: A Philosophical Study* , 1969; *Counterfactuals* , 1973. *On the Plurality of Worlds* , 1986. *Parts of Classes* , 1991), its production has, at one hundred articles, almost fully resumed in five volumes of collections of articles. Of the production of these years stand out for their scientific importance and original articles as "Subjectivist's Guide to Objective Chance" "Mad martian bread and bread", "veridical hallucination and prosthetic vision " , all three published in 1980, and" Why Ain'cha Rich? " "Are We Free to Break the Laws? "" Censored Vision "written under the Bruce LeCatt pseudonym, "New work for a theory of universals" "Against structural universals" and the splendid "Events" - obviously This is arbitrary and biased list.

30

***Klesis - Philosophical Review*** - 2012: 24 - *The philosophy of David Lewis*

On 28 September 1981 he was forty years old, and two years later it is the *American Academy of Arts and Sciences Fellow* .

In 1984, he received the *National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship* and returned to Oxford, where he participated in the prestigious John Locke lectures (May-June). This is a crucial moment in his life and his philosophical journey. During these lessons, the philosopher says all possible worlds exist concretely defending its realism



possible world with insight and subtlety. The text of these readings major will be the basis of his most important book, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, published about two years later, on 13 February 1986 and today is already considered a classic. With this book Lewis mark forever the debate in analytical metaphysics. The text outlines and advocates a systematic and comprehensive way, modal realism: the thesis on the plurality of worlds. In his opening words, Lewis writes, "The world in which we live is a very inclusive thing," and continues, a little further,

similarly the world is inclusive in time [...] Perhaps, as I believe the world is there a big physical object [...] The way things are, in the most inclusive sense, is how it is done whole world. But things could have been otherwise, so many ways. This book could have been finished before the date established. [...] Or could not exist: neither I nor any of my counterparts. Or there could be unattended. [...] There are so many ways a world could be done, and each of these many ways is one way a world is made. Will there be other worlds that are made in other ways? I say they exist. I support the thesis of the plurality of worlds or modal realism, that our world is a world among many others.

This is truly a manifesto written in a metaphysical precise and evocative prose. What is striking, beyond the truth of the system is the scale of that vision.

During the autumn of this year, during which he holds metaphysics at Princeton is, obviously, based on his book and his thesis, modal realism. This thesis will cause a vast literature and many criticisms.

In 1988, he went, as *Visiting Professor and Santayana Fellow* at Harvard University (January-June). At the beginning of the year, 23 January 1988 his father died in Oberlin.



In the fall, back to Princeton, he gave an introduction to course logic and participates in *Kant Lectures* at Stanford University in California (October-November). It is from this period that dates important article, "What Experience Teaches."

In May 1989, he lectures at Brooklyn College and the following fall, at Princeton, he teaches a course entitled "The problem of Evil. "

We are now in ninety years, Lewis  
forty-nine and one draws his portrait. It appears in the famous photography by Steve Pyke taken at Princeton. Photo, black and white, watch with whiskers and a shaggy beard, a similar pace to that of a member of ZZ Top. But, unlike the group members Texan rock, his eyes are covered with dark sunglasses, but highlighted by transparent circles that reveal watchful eyes, almost smiling - and yet a subtle veiled melancholy - busy watching his possible worlds. The image will be used for the cover of monographic volume for Daniel Nolan collection *Philosophy Now* .

*Melbourne: After going home a loss to Collingwood in 1984 . Photo © Stephanie Lewis*

In 1991 he published his fourth and final book, *Parts of Classes*



***Klesis - Philosophical Review*** - 2012: 24 - *The philosophy of David Lewis*

This is a significant step towards the renewal of mathematics to mereology. With this volume, Lewis offers us a new and very interesting philosophy of mathematics and a new point of view set theory. The book concludes with an appendix with writing John P. Burgess and AP Hazen in which is discussed the nature of relations between a singleton and its only member.

On May 11 of that year he received the *Howard T. Behrman Award in the Humanities*, a prize of Princeton University. During his speech, Lewis is defined by these words: "I am a manufacturer systems reductionist. I am a philosopher conservative." The years ninety are a succession of publications; out, among others, "Many, Almost one goal" and "Mathematics is Mereology" an extremely interesting article *Philosophy of Mathematics*, "Evil for Freedom's Sake" or even "Humean Supervenience debugged" and "Reduction of mind".

These are also the years in which Lewis gives the university Princeton different courses, the list helps us to understand the his research interests: *Theodicy*, Fall 1992; *Philosophical Problems in Logic: Intensional Logic*, Spring 1994; *Metaphysics (Existence) "What There Is" revisited: Ontic Commitments, genuine and simulated*, Fall 1994 *Intermediate Logic*, autumn 1995; *Naming and Necessity: A Critical Examination*, Fall 1997 *Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, spring 1998; *Philosophy of Science*, Spring 1999; *Meta-Ethics: Error Theory*, Fall 1999.

Beyond publications and courses, he continues tirelessly to numerous conferences, including: University of Maryland, *Donald Williams Lecturer*, December 1991; University of Iowa, *Sievert Lecturer*, April 1994; Harvard University, *Lecturer Whitehead*, March 1999.

Thus, during a lecture at the Australian National University, discusses the interpretation of quantum mechanics of Everett



which, at first glance, could present analogies with realism Modal.

In 1995, he received the Melbourne University the title of *Doctor of Letters, honoris causa* . And in 1999 it was the turn of the University of York honor him with the title of *Doctor of the University England, honoris causa* .

But in the late ninety, his health begins worsen.

In January 2000 he underwent surgery for cataracts that restores her sight. The sight of one of his eyes had indeed never been

33

*Klesis - Philosophical Review* - 2012: 24 - *The philosophy of David Lewis*

right from childhood, and after this intervention, Lewis continues in quite wear glasses.

Another course, *Philosophy of language* in Spring 2000.

In July of the same year he submits to a kidney transplant. The donor was his wife. A month after the operation he seems well resumed and is a strong energy he possessed for many more years. Its production of articles resumes and accelerates. It seems returned to time when nothing could stop him.

On December 6 of that year, he completed the first draft of "Ramseyan Humility" and 14, he wrote short notes "of Counterparts States of Affairs ". Shortly after, Christmas Day, Quine dies. The course of things is sometimes strange: the exhaustion of a form of energy seems also initiate the mechanism that causes the extinction of which by its heat had supplied this form of energy, that fire, but nevertheless lives his own and exclusive energy reserve. Yet it seems there a splendid logic in all this: the conclusion of a design. Quine who had given so much to philosophy, now let his Will and anticipated conclusions which however would return to that had followed and exceeded. The community wanted this land of birth to say something. The earth was still waiting to become a new fertile soil.



## V. The last year

The year 2001, for analytical philosophical community falls under the sign of struggle. The recent disappearance of Quine has deprived the world academic from one of its most important representatives.

In spring, Lewis wishes to Princeton two seminars dedicated to two metaphysical themes that are dear to him: the time travel and causality. Then he left for yet another trip to Australia to participate to *Jack Smart Play* at the Australian National University. He does not know that this is the last time he sees the Australian continent. Under the eyes of its friends and colleagues in Australia, his condition appears suddenly worsened. On June 27 in Canberra, he presents "How Many Lives HAS Schrödinger's Cat? ".

Final written, final drafts. Some titles: "You Can not Win"

July 17, "Jack is Unprovable" on 27 July.

The University of Cambridge's famous of yet another honorary title:

*Doctor of Letters, honoris causa* .

34

Then one morning the unthinkable happens, even in the distance of all possible worlds. The images of the morning of September 11 will remain etched forever in the minds of many generations like the worst day ever. America, sixty years distance, is again attacked by surprise, the sky. Lewis was born since barely a month when Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

September 28: David Lewis sixty.

A month after the attacks at the World Trade Center on October 14, Lewis disappears prematurely at his home in Princeton, because of its chronic complications due to diabetes.

He is buried in the cemetery of the Presbyterian Princeton, the same



cemetery where Kurt Friedrich Gödel and John von Neumann. In *The Guardian*, it is presented as "one of the greatest metaphysicians of our time and perhaps of all time." The newspaper also reports that "The ultimate item on which he was working involves semantics of possible worlds to connect the personal identity of immortality" <sup>9</sup>.

We can be certain that one of its counterparties, that of the nearest possible world of ours is still writing the philosophy by imagining worlds. Conveniently seated in one of trains traveling without halt.

A famous article by Lewis begins with these words: "We know many things. If today our knowledge is still plus we owe to men like David Lewis

10

<sup>9</sup>In France, the daily *Le Monde* refused to publish an obituary of the unknown.

<sup>10</sup>Translation from Italian Serena Porino. This article would not have been possible without the availability and the precious help of Stephanie Lewis who enthusiastically welcomed the idea of this biography. To her will, therefore, my most affectionate thanks. A Special thanks to Sergio Gilles Lacavalla, Virgil style and "miglior fabbro" for his valuable suggestions; Ellen Lewis, for making me share his memories; Rose-Lewis Anderson; Ray Monk; Frederic Nef; Serena Porino for her Translation irreplaceable; Yann Schmitt; Peter Unger, for the valuable support he gave me and carried our illuminating discussions on Lewis; Achille Varzi; Dean Zimmerman, for the time he dedicated to me and for his friendship. I owe him a lot.