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David Lewis, *Papers in Philosophical Logic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. vi + 234, \$54.95 (hbk.), \$17.95 (pbk.), ISBN 0-521-58247-4 (hbk.), 0-521-58788-3 (pbk.).

David Lewis, *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. x + 453, \$64.95 (hbk.), \$19.95 (pbk.), ISBN 0-521-58248-2 (hbk.), 0-521-58787-5 (pbk.).

David Lewis, *Papers in Ethics and Social Theory*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. x + 255, \$59.95 (hbk.), \$19.95 (pbk.), ISBN 0-521-58249-0 (hbk.), 0-521-58786-7 (pbk.).

### DAVID LEWIS: A VIEW FROM DOWN UNDER

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The David Lewis is a fabulous beast: half American, half Australian; metaphysician extraordinaire; defender of the physicalist faith; he who is immune from the incredulous stare.

The three volumes above (which I will refer to as Volumes 1, 2, and 3, respectively) amount to his collected papers—or those that have not already been published in *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford University Press, Vol. 1, 1983, Vol. 2, 1986). (The introductions to the first two volumes list a few minor papers that have not been republished at all.) The papers, together with his books, *Convention: a Philosophical Study* (Harvard University Press, 1969), *Counterfactuals* (Blackwells, 1973), *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Blackwells, 1986) and *Parts of Classes* (Blackwells, 1991), constitute the Lewisian *oeuvre* (to date). Having the papers in the three volumes accessible in one (or is it three?) place(s) makes it possible to form (or at least, made it possible for

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me to form) a clear perspective of the breadth and depth of Lewis' philosophy for the first time.

From this perspective, several things are clear. The first is that Lewis is a philosopher of the first rank. His ideas range over some of the most central philosophical problems: from the nature of reality, through the foundations of logic and what it is to be a person, to—though we are less accustomed to thinking of him in connection with this—foundational issues in ethics. His contributions to these areas, though often contentious, are never superficial. They have a depth and rigour that compels one to engage—whether or not one ends up agreeing.

Next, it would be wrong to think of Lewis as a systematic philosopher, that is, as a philosopher, like Hegel, who has an overall world-view which he spends his life articulating and defending. Rather, Lewis works like this: he gets interested in puzzles and problems; he likes to solve them; he does so by applying his technical expertise, his great ingenuity, his prowess in the thrust, parry, and counter-thrust of philosophical debate. Of course, in the process, certain themes emerge and come to take up a substantial part of the philosophical effort. These are the themes that we particularly associate with Lewis: a story about possible worlds, an analysis of counterfactuals, a physicalist theory of mind, and so on. Each of these themes informs and provides resources for the others, so that in the end something like a grand picture emerges. But there are always lots of other puzzles and problems out there to engage with.

Another thing that is very clear is the impact that Australasia, and particularly Australia, has had on Lewis' thinking. He is undoubtedly a Yank:

Must we conclude that those Soviet Officers who stand ready to retaliate against us are in a better moral position ... than their American counterparts? As an American, I hope that this isn't so. ('Devil's Bargains and the Real World', Vol. 3, ch. 16, p. 207; written in 1984.)

Yet the tenor of his work is so often Australian. Examples of Ozzie Rules Football, Ned Kelly, Melbourne trams, and so on, abound. Numerous Australian linguistic idioms are deliberately employed. Volume 2 is dedicated to the philosophers, past and present, of Sydney and Canberra; Volume 3 is dedicated to the philosophers, past and present, of Melbourne. (Volume 1 is dedicated to the philosophers, past and present, of Wellington and Uppsala—well Sweden's not so far away on a fast plane.) Nearly a third of the 61 papers were first published in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* or some other Australian-originating publications. And in Volume 2 in particular, the influence of Armstrong and numerous other Australian philosophers is patent.

Finally (and to what extent this is related to the previous point, I am unsure), Lewis has a distinctive way not only of doing philosophy, but also of writing philosophy: clear and unpretentious, frequently impish, a style that often sounds like him talking to you. And who else could get away with stating his central philosophical position on an issue like this:

$S$  knows that  $P$  iff  $S$ 's evidence eliminates every possibility in which not- $P$ —Psst!—except for those possibilities that we are properly ignoring. ('Elusive Knowledge', Vol. 2, ch. 25, p. 425.)

Of course, these points about Lewis are hardly new; they will already be well known to many. But the collected papers give them a salience that even Sir Les Patterson could hardly miss. (Footnote for Northern Hemispherical readers: Patterson is one of the more crass creations of the Australian comic Barry Humphries.)

I now turn to the papers themselves. Only one of the papers in the three volumes is previously unpublished ('Why Conditionalize?', Vol. 2, ch. 23, written in 1972). The others (which include a handful of book reviews) are all reprinted as they originally appeared, except for the correction of typographical and editorial errors, and the occasional new footnote expressing an afterthought. Four of the papers are coauthored, including the delightful 'Casati and Varzi on Holes' (Vol.2, ch.10). The coauthor of this is another fabulous beast, the Steffilewis: half philosopher, half financial wizard; interlocutor extraordinaire; sharer of a kidney with the Davidlewis. Each volume contains an introduction which briefly describes the contents of the papers in it; each volume has an index, which will make Lewis-scholarship easier.

Volume 1 (17 essays) is the shortest. Its papers cover many different topics, including issues in grammar, semantics for conditionals, relevant logic, empirical significance, the Lucas arguments against mechanism, and set theory. Though there is plenty of interest to find in these papers, this volume has something of the feel of a collection of left-overs. Lewis' most important papers in the area are largely already published in *Philosophical Papers*. It is notable, for example, that all but one paper in the volume were published before 1989, and about half were published before 1979.

Volume 2 (25 essays) is the most substantial and most coherent of the three volumes. It starts with 'New Work for a Theory of Universals'. This, says Lewis in the introduction to the Volume:

marked a big turning point in my philosophical development. Formerly I had been persuaded by Goodman and others that all properties were equal... Eventually I was persuaded, largely by D.M. Armstrong, that the distinction I had rejected was so commonsensical and so serviceable ... that it was foolish to try to get on without it.

That distinction takes on a distinctively Lewisian form in the paper, which sets the scene for discussions of one or another aspect of the theory of properties in the first quarter of the Volume. The theory of mind and perception take up another third of the Volume. These papers are particularly important since they provide a statement of Lewis' physicalism not to be found in any of his books. The papers in the rest of the volume cover a variety of topics ontological and

epistemological. Almost all the papers in the volume are post-1980; half are post-1988.

If Australian philosophy has had an effect on Lewis, then—though this cannot simply be read off from the papers in these volumes—the converse is equally the case. The discussion of universals and, of course, materialist theories of mind were standard fare in Australia well before Lewis' regular visits there. But his work has had an enormous impact on the way that these positions, and disputes about them, are conceptualised and debated there. To give one notable example: to invoke possible worlds, and their doings, in such debates would have been near anathema in the 1960s. Yet Australian metaphysicians now do this largely without blinking. Naturally, Lewis is not solely responsible for this, but he has played a major role in it; citations to papers in Volume 2 in work by resident Australians writing on the topics—as can be turned up by a quick literature search—suffice to demonstrate this. There is a certain irony in this. Worlds, both possible and impossible, have played an important role in Australian logic. This interest certainly predates Lewis. But Lewis' intervention has built a bridge between Australian logic and Australian metaphysics of an unexpected—and perhaps not always appreciated—kind.

Volume 3 (19 essays) is perhaps the most diverse of the volumes. Calling it 'Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy' is, I think, slightly misleading. There are certainly papers in the volume that fall squarely under that title, on topics such as tolerance, nuclear deterrence, and punishment. But many of the papers deal with issues that fit the rubric only somewhat loosely: the semantics of deontic logic, decision theory, convention, the nature of desire, the philosophy of religion, freewill. This seems to be the volume where anything that did not fit happily into either of the other two was put. Some of the papers here go back to the 1970s—indeed one even goes back to the 1960s. But by and large, the papers are from the mid-1980s onwards.

In most of the important areas covered by these volumes, Lewis' views are well known, at least in outline. There is therefore very little point in summarising them here. Nor is there any hope of engaging with all the issues covered. In the rest of this review I shall simply, therefore, discuss a couple of central Lewisian themes. I do not claim that these are the most central, or the most important. I choose them mainly because they relate to aspects of Australian philosophy with which Lewis has no philosophical sympathy—the dark side of Australian philosophy.

The first theme concerns Lewis' views on existence, his modal realism, and his analysis of fiction. Lewis was a student of Quine. He rejected many of Quine's views, especially, of course, most of Quine's skepticism about modality. But (at least) one important Quinean theme has played a pivotal role in his thought. This is the view that that over which one quantifies and that which one takes to exist are one and the same. Indeed, Lewis' rejection of Quine's view on modality is, in part, due to an endorsing of this view. We say that there are ways in which the world could be, even though it is not. If there is

no way to interpret this quantification as a *façon de parler*, then these ways, possible worlds, exist. There is another option here, though. *Prima facie*, it would certainly seem that there are many things that don't exist, including Father Christmas, Gandalf, and Zeus. Possible worlds and their denizens may be just such non-existent objects. This, of course, is Meinongianism, of the kind favoured by the late Richard Routley (*Exploring Meinong's Jungle—and Beyond*, Australian National University, 1980).

We would seem, then, to have a simple choice between these two positions; but things are not that straightforward. As Lewis points out ('Noneism or Allism', Vol. 2, ch. 8), there appears to be a simple translation manual between his modal realism and Meinongianism. Where the realist says that an object exists, the Meinongian says that there is such an object; where the Meinongian says that an object exists, the realist says that that object is actual (= this world or a denizen of it). What is the difference? Could we say that Routley is just a covert realist—or, with equal justice, that Lewis is a covert Meinongian?

One difference is that a Meinongian will usually want to say that there are objects of kinds that the realist will not want to say exist. Thus, typically, Meinongians will say that there are inconsistent and incomplete objects (i.e., objects  $a$ , such that for some property,  $P$ , both  $Pa$  and  $\neg Pa$ , or neither  $Pa$  nor  $\neg Pa$ ). But this difference, real as it is, is not a central one. A half-hearted Meinongian might balk at such objects; and a modal realist might simply grit their teeth, endorse a non-classical logic, and admit that such objects exist too.

Here is a more substantial difference. The realist wants to say that every object is actual from the standpoint of some world; but it is quite possible for the Meinongian to hold that some objects do not exist with respect to any world. Maybe, for example, every world is a world of concrete objects; abstract objects, like 3 or the notion of justice, are not concrete, and so, though perfectly good objects, are non-existent at all worlds.

We can even turn this into an argument for Meinongianism over realism. I recount a myth. When the Great Creator was creating the Plurality of Worlds she brought before her all the things she could think of, and informed them that they would be assigned to worlds on the basis of lot. David Lewis was assigned to world 4,037; Sherlock Holmes was assigned to world 37,942. Pity poor Infortuna. Her number never came up. She wanted to come into existence very badly, but never got the chance. She remained a non-existent object for ever. A coherent story? It would seem so, but it can make no sense for Lewis. To be true in a story is (to simplify) to hold at all the worlds realising the story. Consider such a world. Infortuna cannot exist at this world, or any other. Infortuna is necessarily non-existent: a perfectly consistent object, but Meinongian in essence.

The second theme I will discuss pertains to Lewis' views concerning classical logic and impossible worlds. The single most important difference between

the semantics of modal logic and the world-semantics of relevant logics is that the latter employ a class of logically impossible worlds, and in particular, worlds where contradictions may hold. Lewis rejects such a possibility out of hand:

No truth does have, and no truth could have, a true negation. Nothing is, and nothing could be, literally both true and false. We know this for certain, and *a priori*, and without any exception for particularly perplexing subject matters. The radical case for relevance should be dismissed just because the hypothesis it requires us to entertain is inconsistent. ('Logic for Equivocators', Vol. 1, ch. 7, p. 101.)

But at first glance there would seem to be as much reason to suppose that there are logically impossible worlds as to suppose that there are possible but non-actual worlds. After all, there are ways that the world could not have been: these are impossibilities. At a second, and more substantial, glance the reasons appear even more convincing (as has been pointed out, e.g., by T. Yagisawa, 'Beyond Possible Worlds', *Philosophical Studies* 53 (1988), 175-204). Many of the projects which Lewis is happy to analyse in world-terms would seem to require impossible worlds for their successful completion. Consider just a couple.

Counterfactuals. Suppose that intuitionist logic is not correct. (If you think it is, just choose some logic that you think is incorrect, and modify the examples accordingly.) Consider the conditionals:

If intuitionist logic were correct, the law of excluded middle would be invalid.

If intuitionist logic were correct, *modus ponens* would be invalid.

The first conditional is true; the second is false; and there would seem to be very little doubt about these facts. If there are no impossible worlds, then there are no worlds at which intuitionist logic is correct. Hence, both conditionals are vacuously true. To invalidate the second conditional, we need to consider an impossible world where intuitionist logic holds, and note that *modus ponens* is still valid there. Lewis (*Counterfactuals*, p. 25) suggests that we never need to deny vacuously true counterfactuals. This is just not so. Conditionals with logically impossible antecedents are asserted and denied all the time in debates in logic.

Propositional content. It is plausible to suppose that the propositional content of a sentence may be identified with the class of worlds at which the sentence holds. Now, consider someone, call him 'Priest'. Priest believes that the liar sentence is both true and not true, but not that pigs both fly and do not fly. It would seem, then, that the propositional contents of these two claims must be distinct. To separate them, we need to consider worlds where one holds but not the other. These must be impossible worlds.

Lewis countenances the possibility of such worlds ('Relevant Implication', Vol. 1, ch. 8)—if I may put it like that—but points to a problem. Could there not be sentences that are true at *no* worlds, possible or impossible, and might not some of these have different meanings? Not if you play your cards right. In the semantics of relevant logics every sentence holds at *some* worlds, so the problem does not arise. But could this not be an artifact of the paucity of the language? Suppose that we define a new connective,  $-$ , whose truth conditions are the familiar-looking: for every  $\alpha$  and every world,  $w$ :

$-\alpha$  is true at  $w$  iff  $\alpha$  is not true at  $w$

A classical logician might take these to characterise our vernacular negation. For a relevant logician, they may characterise a perfectly sensible notion, but whatever it is, it is not negation. Anyway, given the truth conditions, for no  $\alpha$  is  $\alpha \wedge -\alpha$  true at any world. Yet surely someone might believe that  $-(\beta \wedge -\beta)$  but not that  $-(\gamma \wedge -\gamma)$  for some disparate  $\beta$  and  $\gamma$ . (This objection was put to me by Lewis in conversation many years ago.)

Not necessarily. If  $-$  is not negation, then it is a legitimate but purely technical notion, and we would seem to have no grasp of its sense independent of the formal-semantic construction. If, according to the construction,  $\beta \wedge -\beta$  and  $\gamma \wedge -\gamma$  have the same sense, then so be it. (See, further, my introduction to the special issue of the *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* on impossible worlds, no. 4, 1997.) Even if, in the end, we are forced to suppose that they do not have the same sense, the matter is still not settled. The fact that  $\alpha \wedge -\alpha$  is true at no world does not stop  $\alpha \wedge -\alpha$  being true at some worlds too, at least if you are not only a relevant logician, but a dialetheist.  $\beta \wedge -\beta$  and  $\gamma \wedge -\gamma$  may yet hold at different worlds.

To pursue any of the above issues further would take us deep into the luxurious growths of Australian rain forest—philosophically speaking. This is not the place to do that. And in any case, it is a path that Lewis refuses to go down. The last quotation from Lewis that I gave continues:

This [refusal to entertain something simply on the grounds of inconsistency] may seem dogmatic. And it is: I am affirming the very thesis that Priest and Routley have called into question, and—contrary to the rules of debate—I decline to defend it.... They have called so much into question that I have no foothold on undisputed ground. So much the worse for the demand that philosophers always must be ready to defend their theses under the rules of debate.

Philosophical debate, then, according to Lewis, has its limitations. And even when one can engage in it, it is likely to be indecisive:

Philosophical arguments are never incontrovertible—well, hardly ever. Their purpose is to help expound a position, not to coerce agreement. ('Reduction of Mind', Vol. 2, ch. 18, p. 304.)

What, then, settles matters such as the reality—or otherwise—of worlds, or the possibility—or otherwise—of true contradictions? Perhaps, in the end, it is simply a matter of who is toughest in staring down the incredulous stare.

Lewis' views about the nature of philosophical debate, both its methodology and its potency, are well worth further reflection; but this is not the place for it. Let me end by returning to the wider perspective. Whatever one makes of the positions that Lewis expounds, his philosophical work, its ideas and arguments, are profound, rich, and challenging. The three volumes of his papers will help greatly to engage with it, and are much to be welcomed.<sup>1</sup>

### Note

<sup>1</sup> This review was written before the sad death of David Lewis. I considered rewriting it after his death since I thought that parts of it might be considered disrespectful. But David (and Steffi) Lewis read the review and approved of it. I therefore decided to leave it as it is, as a tribute not just to his philosophy, but to his sense of humour.