

LEWIS, HYWEL DAVID (1910-1992), university professor and philosopher

Name: Hywel David Lewis
Date of birth: 1910
Date of death: 1992
Gender: Male
Occupation: university professor and philosopher
Area of activity: Education; Scholarship and Languages
Author: Meirion Lloyd Davies

Hywel D. Lewis was born in Llandudno 21 May 1910 and brought up in Waunfawr, Caernarfon, the son of David John Lewis, a minister in the Presbyterian Church of Wales, and his wife Rebecca (née Davies). He was educated at Caernarfon Grammar School where he showed no great distinction and afterwards at the University College of North Wales (as it then was) at Bangor where he studied Philosophy, a subject that fascinated him and that was to be the consuming interest of his whole life. After gaining a first-class Honours degree in 1932 and an M.A. in 1934 he went on to Jesus College, Oxford where he came under the influence of H. A. Prichard and W. D. Ross. Before he had finished his research (he gained his B.Litt. in 1935) he was appointed a lecturer at his old department at Bangor. He was a lecturer there from 1936 to 1947 when he was appointed to the Chair. He had three main philosophical interests, political philosophy, ethics and the philosophy of religion. In 1955 he moved to King's College at the University of London on his appointment to the chair of the History and Philosophy of Religion, a post he held until his retirement in 1977.

He published over twenty substantial volumes in both English and Welsh including *Our Experience of God* (1959), *Freedom and History* (1962), *The Elusive Mind* (1969), *The Self and Immortality* (1973), *The Elusive Self* (1982), *Freedom and Alienation* (1985), *Gwybod am Dduw* (1952) [*Our Knowledge of God*] and *Pwy yw Iesu Grist?* (1979) [*Who is Jesus Christ?*]. He published dozens of articles and essays in English and Welsh periodicals. He was editor of the Muirhead Library of Philosophy for almost thirty years and he was one of the founders of the journal *Religious Studies* which he edited from 1964 to 1979. Wales has hardly produced a more energetic and prolific philosopher than H. D. Lewis.

Numerous honours came his way on many continents. He served as president of the Mind Association, the Aristotelian Society and the Royal Institute of Philosophy - the major philosophical societies. He delivered many of the most prestigious named lectures, among them the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh (1966-68), the Wilde Lectures at Oxford (1960-63), the Hobhouse in London and the Owen Evans at Aberystwyth (1964-65). He lectured and was visiting professor at numerous universities in the United States, Canada, India and Japan including Toronto, Boston, Philadelphia, Harvard and Madras. Following one of his visits to India he published a Welsh volume *Hen a Newydd* (1977) [*The Old and the New*], his impressions of the country and its religion. He was awarded an honorary D.D. by St. Andrews University (1964) and a D.Litt. by Emory University in the U.S.A. (1978).

Although he spent most of his life in London he made a significant contribution to Welsh life through the Guild of Graduates of the University of Wales, the Courts of the University of Wales and of Bangor. He served as secretary of the philosophy section of the Guild of Graduates for many years and was president on many occasions. He attended its conference every year and lectured on numerous occasions. He contributed a large number of articles to *Efyrdiau Athronyddol*, *Y Traethodydd*, *Y Llenor* and *Yr Efyrdydd*. He was a regular attendee at the National Eisteddfod and was a member of the Gorsedd of the Bards under the bardic name of Hywel Athronydd. He published many articles on various aspects of Welsh life and culture including two volumes of poetry, *Ebyrth a Cherddi Eraill* (1943) [*Sacrifices and other Poems*] and surprisingly, a volume of light verse *Gofidiau Patsy* (1988) [*Patsy's Woes*].

In philosophy he ploughed a lonely and unfashionable furrow being a trenchant critic of linguistic philosophy in general and logical positivism in particular. He insisted that philosophy had to concern itself with the traditional central themes such as the relationship of body and mind, free will, the existence of God and reason and experience. He held resolutely to an idealist position and argued strongly for the dualism of body and mind. He maintained that ethical standards were objective. In his theology he again advocated unfashionable views criticising Barthism and insisting on a central role for reason in religion. Advocating unfashionable views did not deter him in the least. It could almost be said that he revelled in opposing current views and enjoyed a heated debate. He could be remarkably stubborn at times and would not in any way compromise his beliefs. He was a forceful and effective public speaker captivating an audience despite his less than robust personality and slight frame.

He married Megan Jones 17 August 1943 but she died in 1962. He married for the second time Megan Pritchard 17 July 1965. He died on 6 April, 1992 and his funeral service was held at Bangor Crematorium before his ashes were laid in the family grave on the Great Orme in Llandudno. Two memorial services were held; one at Twrgwyn Chapel in Bangor when tributes were paid by the Rev. Principal Elfed ap Nefydd Roberts, Mr. Moses J. Jones and Dr. Meredydd Evans. The second service was held at the chapel of King's College in London with Professor Stewart R. Sutherland giving the tribute. A Festschrift *Religion, Reason and the Self* was published in 1990 edited by Professor T.A. Roberts and Stewart R. Sutherland in which there is a full list of his publications.

Hywel D. Lewis had one brother, Alun T. Lewis, Llanrwst, a writer who published six volumes, mainly of short stories, *Corlan Twsog* (1948), *Y Piser Trwm* (1957), *Blwyddyn o Garchar* (1962), *Y Dull Deg* (1973), *Cesig Eira* (1979) and *Dringo dan Ganu* (1985).

Author

Meirion Lloyd Davies

Sources

Hywel D. Lewis published an autobiographical essay in *Philosophers on their own work* (1983) (Berne)

There is a full list of his publications in *Religion, reason and the self essays in honour of Hywel D. Lewis* (1989)

Obituaries appeared in:

The Times on 14 April 1992 by O. R. Jones and on 16 April by Thomas F. Torrance

The Guardian (28 April 1992) by Father John Fitzgerald

The Independent (10 April) by D. Ben Rees

A memorial edition of *Y Goleuad* was published on 15 May 1992

a tribute by T. A. Roberts was published in *Efyrdiau Athronyddol* in 1992

Further Reading

Wikipedia Article: [Hywel Lewis](#)

Additional Links

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