

REPORT ON THE MISSISSIPPI PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION MEETING OF APRIL 11-12, 2003

We held the 53rd annual meeting of the MPA at Ole Miss.

On Friday evening, April 11, former Ole Miss philosopher Michael Lynch (Connecticut College) gave our keynote address on "The Value of Truth," arguing that minimalist deflations of truth (cf. Michael Horwich) leave us unable to explain why we prefer the real world to various illusions that would render some of our beliefs irremediably false but without any cost in utility. Discussion revolved around why we hold truth to be an intrinsic value. There are communicative considerations: it must always be possible to question the truthfulness of speakers and claims.

Saturday's program began with Christopher Adair-Toteff's (MSU) paper on "Max Weber's 'Unpleasant Truths'." Adair-Toteff examined the conception of truth involved in Weber's critique of positivism and Romantic rationalism in his 1918 address "Science as a Vocation." In the Comment, Bill Lawhead (UM) argued that Weber's ideal of "value-free" inquiry promotes scholarly voyeurism and arbitrary decisionism.

William S. Larkin (Southern Illinois U.-Edwardsville) addressed "The Authority of Inner Sense," claiming that "a broad perceptual model of introspection is both naturalistically interpretable and adequate to account for first person authority." That certain "privileged introspective judgments" are immune to subjective irrationality is sufficient to ground a good bit of first-person authority. In the Comment, Allan Hillman (UM) called attention to Sydney Shoemaker's argument that problems with the Ordinary Perceptual Model of belief-grounding apply also to the Broad Perceptual Model that includes introspection.

Mary West (USM) read the prize student paper, "Contextual Truth: The Subjectivity of Objective Science," taking a Lynch-influenced pluralist approach to the truth of propositions and data. In the Comment, Tyler Simon (UM) pointed out that if science is the only epistemic game in town it functions in a way, despite its revolutionizability, as an absolute context of truth.

Scott Wilson (UM) argued in "Contractualism, Direct Moral Status, and Animals" that contractualism can grant moral standing to nonhumans even though they are not rational contractors. In the Rawlsian original position, rules are adopted that protect all human beings regardless of their ability (e.g. the retarded as well as the mentally normal); the same sort of agreement should be extended to all sentient beings, as all such would e.g. desire not to be subjected to cruelty. In discussion it was suggested that the contractualist premise can be cut out of this argument entirely if the key point is just that cruelty is bad.

Ken Curry and Paula Smithka (USM) pursued their examination of the biological species concept in "Horizontal and Vertical Dimensions of the Ontology of Species Taxa." Horizontal (morphological) determinations of species membership are contingent while vertical (genealogical) connections are necessary. Horizontal specieshood endures through the time of ordinary observation; vertical specieshood perdures through a longer time exceeding direct observation. Horizontal species identification is burdened with the problems of justifying essence judgments (e.g. how we judge that Descartes is still Descartes after losing a hand); vertical

species identification needs an appropriate internal cohesion principle. In discussion it was asked whether we are really forced to accept two different species concepts as opposed to recognizing two dimensions of species.

The Presidential Address by Patrick Hopkins (Millsaps) was "The Truth Can Be Depressing: On Optimism, Falsehood, and Happiness." Psychological research tells us that pessimists see the world more accurately while optimists are happier, thanks in part to illusions about self and world to which they are prone and an explanatory style geared to these illusions. We all took a 10-question test to see if we are pessimists at risk of depression, stable pessimists, flexible optimists, or stark raving optimists who are dangerous to themselves and others. A difficult disjunction is posed: do you want your children to be happy or lucid? One conclusion: after all, truth is only one value among others!

In the business meeting next year's officers were elected: Bob Barnard as President; Ted Ammon as Vice-President, contingent on his acceptance (subsequently obtained); and Steve Smith as Secretary-Treasurer. A meeting at Millsaps is anticipated for next spring around the beginning of April. It was suggested that we do more to encourage student involvement in MPA; that we introduce distinct undergraduate and graduate divisions in the student essay contest; that we continue to invite guest speakers and arrange for commentators on papers; and that we reach out to the philosophers of neighboring states.

The balance in the treasury is \$77.83, down from last year's \$112.85.

Steve Smith made this statement in memory of Millsaps philosopher Bob Bergmark:

Bob Bergmark died on March 10, 2003 after a characteristically wry battle with cancer. He received an A.B. from Emory and S.T.B. and Ph.D degrees from Boston University, where he studied with the personalists Edgar Brightman and Peter Bertocci and in 1949 edited *The Philosophical Forum*. He came to Millsaps College in 1953 to teach philosophy and, for a time, to serve as the college's Director of Religious Life. He was Vice-President of the Mississippi Philosophical Association in the first year for which we still have officer records, 1955-1956, and President in 1956-57, repeating this sequence in 1963 through 1965. Later he served for eight years as Secretary-Treasurer of the MPA.

In 34 years of teaching at Millsaps Bob made a deep impression on generations of students, many of whom filled the Recital Hall at Millsaps at his memorial service on March 30. His clarity and poise, his critical edge, his warm concern for his fellow beings, and his irrepressible humor obviously became the very face of philosophy for a large number of Millsaps alumni I have met through the years. That is why Jack and Wylene Dunbar established the Millsaps Dunbar lecture series in his honor in 1988. He drew a considerable crowd for his own inaugural Dunbar lectures on "Knowledge, Belief, and Commitment" (now collected in the *Addresses of the Mississippi Philosophical Association*). I should add that Bob made a deep impression also on the junior colleagues he brought to Millsaps, his philosophical godchildren: Michael Mitias, Ted Ammon, and me.

Bob worked hard, it need hardly be said, as a college teacher, but he also worked hard for peace and justice in the world. He was a leader in the civil rights struggle and the target of considerable segregationist hostility. He was a purposeful world traveler, too, visiting countries all across Europe and Asia and leading study groups several times to China. He taught a pioneering course at Millsaps called "Oriental Philosophy."

Here is a story he liked to tell about himself (you'll find it in his autobiographical sketch in the Addresses volume): "During the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, I served on the board of directors of the Mississippi Council on Human Relations, an integrated statewide organization working for racial justice and equality. When a Black Student Organization was formed on the Millsaps campus, the students invited me to be their faculty advisor because all student groups were required to have a faculty advisor. I told the students that it was an honor to be asked and that I was delighted to accept their invitation, but suggested that I was lacking in one significant qualification. 'That's all right,' responded one of the students. 'You're the best we can do right now.' It was a happy relationship."

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Full-time employed philosophers (those who didn't pay at the meeting) are urged to send in their annual dues of \$10.

Respectfully submitted, Steven G. Smith, Secretary-Treasurer