

Report on the Mississippi Philosophical Association meeting of April 2-3, 2004

The 54th annual meeting of the MPA was held at Millsaps with around 15 attending.

On Friday evening, April 2, **Paul Churchland** (U. of California-San Diego) gave a Dunbar Lecture on "Impossible Colors: How Objective Brain Science Really Can Explain Subjective Experience." The "impossible colors," e.g. a green as dark as black, are opposite-color after-images lying outside the range of colors that can be perceived in the world; they are produced by reactions of opponent cells in the visual cortex. It was suggested that an analogous process can produce gender-identity afterimages: a gender-balanced face looks feminine after we've stared at an intensely male face but masculine after we've stared at an intensely female face.

On Saturday, we first heard the Undergraduate First Prize paper by **Angela Thurmond** (Millsaps), "Terrorism and Enmity," a critique of the premise that terrorism as such can be an enemy since the justification of violent acts is always relative to combatants' ideologies (e.g. the Boston Tea Party was a terrorist act in British eyes but not in the eyes of American revolutionaries). Commentator **Wendy Brady** (Jones County Junior College) defended the relevance of just war criteria as applied against terrorism.

Mary West (USM) then presented a further development of her assessment of Michael Lynch's account of truth, "A Moderate Approach to Truth: The Relativism of Metaphysical Pluralism." Crucially, Lynch admits the relativity of facts to conceptual schemes and so falls into relativism; instead of resisting this he should embrace it. Realism can be dropped; practical relativism can affirm all needed standards of truth.

Steve Smith (Millsaps) argued in "Appeals and Meaningfulness" that existentially orienting "meaningfulness" as distinct from logically discriminating "meaning" depends on an active relationship between subjects and beings in which beings appeal, i.e. project promises of mutual flourishing, and subjects are thereby given chances to commit somehow to partnerships with beings. This account of meaningful experience is more empirically attuned and open than are the dominant types of positivism, phenomenology, and value theory.

Independent scholar **Marvin Vining** caught us up on Shroud of Turin issues in "David Hume Encounters the Shroud of Turin." There are Humeanly respectable reasons to think the Shroud image is not a forgery, involving Jerusalem pollen, Roman coins, and Volckringer patterns (acid reaction imprints); those who want to affirm that the image is truly of Jesus should not spoil the natural-cause case by appealing to a miraculous "resurrection energy" as the cause.

For lunch, some of us went to Delhi Palace and there is some reason to think that others went to Keifer's (although it is possible that MPA members in fact ate at Keifer's for reasons other than the reasons I have to think that they did). The talk at Delhi Palace turned to the confrontation between USM President Shelby Thames and the faculty over the dismissals of Frank Glamser and Gary Stringer.

Jonathan Miles (UM) presented the Graduate First Prize paper, "Mostly Rational: Galileo's Telescope and Rational Meta-Criteria in Scientific Theory Choice," a challenge to a Kuhnian or

Feyerabendian relativist view of scientific rationality. A key point is that rational criteria transcending the contested paradigms motivated Cardinal Bellarmine to shift in 1611 to accepting Galileo's astronomy. General standards of logic can filter out flawed paradigms; the weight of evidence can motivate assent to a superior paradigm.

Paula Smithka (USM) presented "Bewitched by Language: Conceptual and Ontological Confusions Regarding the Nature of Species." Michael Ghiselin et al. have good reasons for thinking of a species as a grammatical subject, since much can meaningfully be said of a species, but talk of species as individuals is nevertheless systematically misleading insofar as it implies the existence of a logical subject, a particular, that doesn't actually obtain.

Bob Barnard's (UM) Presidential Address was "Rethinking Knowledge" Although it worked within the justified/true/belief framework it was not more Gettier shadowboxing. Knowledge is one end of a continuum, distinguished from various grades of belief by its relative value rather than by an intrinsic subjective quality. It is appropriate to assert (like Kant) that knowledge and truth do in fact obtain, even if a universal set of their sufficient conditions can't be specified. When truth is treated as a multiply realizable functional concept, this is no longer an embarrassment.

In the business meeting, these officers were elected for the coming year: Paula Smithka, President; Ken Curry, Vice-President; Steve Smith, Secretary-Treasurer. The treasury now holds \$50.58 (last year: \$77.83).

We read this memorial for **Jay Keehley** (MSU), who passed away on November 29, 2003, written by Wallace Murphree (MSU):

Jay T. Keehley (affectionately known as just Keehley) came to MSU as an ABD from Florida State in 1972. He soon completed and successfully defended his dissertation on scientific models as metaphors, and he and I remained as the only full-time philosophy professors on campus for nearly two decades.

Keehley was as charming and tender-hearted as anyone I've ever met; however, he never shied away from disagreements (with students, colleagues, or the administration), and his general approach to teaching was confrontational. Indeed, it seemed he deliberately cultivated the tough-guy image to his students. So, when we were not pretending to be Whitehead and Russell (reflecting our dissertations), we sometimes played good cop and bad cop with our problem students--and Keehley was an exceptionally effective bad cop.

Keehley was a person of many interests and talents. He played the guitar some, and was an accomplished drummer. He loved fast cars and motorcycles. He was an excellent point guard on the Department's (short-lived) intramural basketball team; he loved to ski, and he ran in marathons and worked out as long as he had strength to do so. He once took courses in aviation, and some time later received his license to drive big trucks.

Keehley always thought "outside the box." Some typical examples follow: 1) When the administration criticized him for lack of publications, Keehley proposed a moratorium on writing until we could catch up on the reading. 2) When invited to give a presentation in an MHC program on unused resources in Mississippi, Keehley wrote a paper in praise of "Mississippi Mud." 3) When asked to brainstorm on how we might attract students to our summer school classes, Keehley proposed a "university on wheels"--where he would drive from town to town offering seminars in the back of his semi. 4) More recently, when the Department was trying to find additional funding the spring term of 2000, Keehley proposed that we staff an off-campus office with engineers prepared to handle the Y2K problems that PC users would encounter. Although he was an excellent stand-up lecturer, his teaching techniques were also often imaginative and spontaneous. For example, once in a large auditorium class he challenged a disruptive student to the stage for an arm-wrestling contest over a lit candle; Keehley won, and the student became a good citizen of the class.

Keehley became increasingly distressed by, and critical of, the limitations imposed by academia. He developed the University's business ethics course as a first attempt to make contact with the 'real world," and shortly thereafter he enrolled in law school at Ole Miss, where he received his JD. Thereafter, he practiced law--first in Columbus and then in Starkville (where he was counsel for the Oktibbeha County School Board)--while he retained his position in the Department at MSU.

Having not been reared in an evangelical climate, Keehley apparently never felt the religious pressure to make a personal commitment as an adolescent that many of us did. Then, as a graduate student, he came to view religion through the eyes of Logical Positivism and, to the horror of many of his students, he vigorously maintained that stance both personally and professionally throughout all but the last portion of his life. In fact, he seemed ashamed to be part of the Department of Philosophy AND RELIGION, and perpetually sought to distance philosophy from "the nondiscipline to which it was administratively tied."

However, as he was fighting lung cancer--and wanting desperately "to live to see his children through high school"--he apparently for the first time came to accept the questions religion addresses as significant and cognitively meaningful. Then, no doubt impressed by the support a Christian group of Starkville business people had shown during his illness, he accepted the Christian faith, and joined a small Baptist church outside of Starkville. There he was buried. The officiating minister hardly mentioned his role as a professor or lawyer, but talked rather of the post-conversion Keehley. Among other remarks, he said that Keehley had developed a strong identity with the New Testament character, Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul.

Keehley leaves behind his lovely wife, Lisa; a stepson, Thomas; a daughter, Courtney; and twin children, MolliKate and Maison.

All full-time employed philosophers are respectfully asked to pay their \$10 dues for the coming year to support our program. THIS MEANS YOU _____
Steve Smith, Secretary-Treasurer