

## **Report on the Mississippi Philosophical Association meeting of April 22-23, 2005**

The 55th annual meeting of the MPA was held at USM with around 24 attending the Saturday program (Dr. Ruse had a much bigger audience Friday night).

Friday, Michael Ruse (Florida State U.) sketched the history of "The Evolution-Creation Struggle: A Very American Story." The struggle was heightened by a variety of factors: 18th-century rationalism linked to evolutionism while emotional pietism linked to biblical literalism; 19th-century British reformers touted evolution while social conservatives opposed it; the 19th-century American slavery debate reinforced biblical literalism on the pro-slavery side; pre-millennialism and dispensationalism embraced creationism, especially in the influential Scofield Bible of 1909, and laid particular stress on Noah's flood; and the Scopes trial of 1925, after which evolution was suppressed for many years in American school textbooks. The new Intelligent Design thinkers Michael Behe and Phillip Johnson have pre-millenarian ideas and socially conservative concerns also.

Saturday began with Neil Manson's (UM) paper on "Contemporary Design Arguments: An Overview." Bayesian design arguments have problems: (a) the alleged improbability of the "fine-tuned" physical values of our universe can't be demonstrated in a proper probability space in which all the identified probabilities add up to 1; (b) "irreducibly complex" structures that supposedly couldn't have been built without design guidance could have been produced by simplifying changes, as in an arch bridge produced by subtraction of stone; and (c) the alleged improbability of the great assemblage of prerequisites for intelligent life in our world can be countered by appeal to a great number of universes.

Michael Fitzgerald rose heroically to the challenge of finding a 14th-century philosopher of nature in "Conrad of Megenburg and His 'Book of Nature'." An active opponent of "English logic" at the University of Paris--associating Ockhamism with professional vainglory and neglect of ethics--Conrad later wrote an encyclopedic "Book of Nature," the first such book in German. Aristotle's biology had only recently become available in the West and Conrad was one of its first interpreters.

Ken Curry (USM) presented a Curry and Smithka paper, "The Biological Species Understood as a Homeostatic Property Cluster Kind." This is an ontological thesis about species--a posteriori, evolutionary, and explanatory (we can study and make predictions about homeostatic vectors), building on an idea of Boyd's. Speciation involves a breakdown and re-emergence of homeostatic cohesion among properties. The cohesion among a species' properties has horizontal (synchronic) and vertical (diachronic) dimensions. No one property is necessary or sufficient in distinguishing a species.

Patrick Hopkins spoke on "'Naturalizing' Homosexuality: Biology, Sexual Orientation, and the Nature/Culture Distinction." There has been a shift in argumentation: some critics of homosexuality have accepted that homosexual orientation can occur naturally but now conceive it as a pathology, like alcoholism which can also have a genetic predisposition, and argue for correcting it on the basis of a more frankly prescriptive norm of the "natural." An assumption that each bodily organ can be assigned one primary proper function is still influential.

We lunched at Panino's. Excellent manicotti, I found.

Chris Meyers (USM) brought up "Wittgenstein's Private Language Argument and the Use of Introspective Reports in Psychology," examining a study in which descriptions of orgasm were collected to try to determine how similar or different men's and women's experiences are. Despite the prevalence of "tension and release," "tingling," and "pulsating" in the descriptions, the private language argument warns that expressions for private experience as such cannot have genuine meaning because they cannot perform public ostension or follow public rules.

In "Betraying Stories: Trauma and Adaptive Speech in the Writings of Merleau-Ponty," Kristen Brown (Millsaps) used Merleau-Ponty's idea that bodily beings are fundamentally communicative (and that the primary level of communication is bodily) to criticize Judith Herman's account in *Trauma and Recovery* for wrongly assuming that the linguistic expression of trauma must somehow be representational; instead, trauma-inspired language expresses corporeal desire. There was agreement in discussion that Merleau-Ponty's point is better made without distinguishing "higher" from "lower" life forms.

John Kimble (UM) presented the first-prize student paper, "Sociobiological Accounts of Morality and Religion and Their Problems." Sociobiological explanations of moral and religious beliefs (Richard Dawkins, Pascal Boyer) do not adjudicate their truth. Moral and religious beliefs are not subject to that kind of confirmation or disconfirmation.

Jonathan Miles (UM) argued in the second-prize student paper, "The Possibility of Theistic Science," that although Intelligent Design Theory has so far been more a protest against Darwinism than a research program, a valid theistic science can be practiced so long as supernatural causes aren't invoked where natural causes may be found. It would be well suited to study how design and agent causation occur.

Paula Smithka's (USM) Presidential Address was on "The Biological Species Understood as Parts to a Whole: An Examination of the S-A-I Thesis." The Smithka-Curry view is nominalist-particularist, like the Species-As-Individuals view, but avoids SAI's implausible commitment to considering species members parts of a whole and the species as an ontological subject of possessed properties.

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In the business meeting, we elected Ken Curry President, Neil Manson Vice-President and Program Chair, and Steve Smith Secretary-Treasurer for 2005-2006. Suggestions for the 2006 meeting should be communicated to Neil Manson.

The MPA bank balance was \$158.08, undepleted this year since USM is covering all expenses for the 2005 meeting including the student prizes.

All full-time employed philosophers are respectfully asked to pay their \$10 dues for the coming year (if they didn't pay at the meeting) to support our program.

Steve Smith, Secretary-Treasurer