

Report on the Mississippi Philosophical Association meeting of April 7-8, 2006

The 56th annual meeting of the MPA was held at Ole Miss.

THE PROGRAM

FRIDAY

7:00 KEYNOTE ADDRESS: Eugene Mills, Virginia Commonwealth University, "Searle's Haunted Chinese Room"

SATURDAY

9:00-9:40 Bryan Cwik, University of Arkansas, "Nonconceptual Content and the Bounds of Sense" (student essay contest winner--second place)

9:45-10:25 Dustin Tune, University of Mississippi, "Existential Neutrality and the Partial Quantifier" (student essay contest winner--first place)

10:30-11:10 Jim Shelton, University of Central Arkansas, "A Descriptive-Reference Theory of Proper Names"

11:15-11:55 Morgan Rempel, University of Southern Mississippi, "Nietzsche and Epicurus"

12:00-1:30 PICNIC LUNCH

1:30-1:45 Business meeting

1:45-2:25 Michael Fitzgerald, independent scholar, "Albert of Saxony and Socrates' Missing Finger"

2:30-3:10 Paula Smithka, University of Southern Mississippi, "The Prejudice of Carbonism"

3:15-3:55 Kristen Brown, Millsaps College, "Reading the Presocratics Through the Lens of Emerging Literacy"

4:00-5:00 PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: Kenneth Curry, University of Southern Mississippi, "Arthur Schopenhauer" (not delivered due to program running late--see [outline](#))

ABSTRACTS OF PAPERS

Jim Shelton, "A Descriptive-Reference Theory of Proper Names"

In this paper, I formulate the D-R theory. The theory locates a schema for providing a descriptive meaning of proper names. It is expressed: The meaning of a proper name, N, in world w, is a

definite descriptive phrase in the form of "The object that was named 'N' in a particular naming situation in world w." This avoids the problems with the reference theory but preserves the significance of the reference theory. These are the problems of the tautologous claims of identity statements using proper names, denial of existence using a proper name, and use of non-referring names. I then show how the D-R theory can answer the objections raised against description theories, the lack of a principle of selection of a description, undesirable ambiguity that results from multiple descriptive definitions and the unwanted necessity arising from selecting a descriptive definition. The truth behind causal theories is accounted for by showing that causal theories are relevant to the knowledge of the meaning of proper names not to the constitution of the meaning. Finally, I show how the D-R theory preserves rigidity of reference across possible worlds. This is done by the theory connecting naming situations to a particular world. 'Mark Twain' refers to the same individual in every possible world because it is keyed to a naming situation in this world.

Morgan Rempel, "Nietzsche and Epicurus"

Given that there are more than 100 references to Epicurus in the Nietzschean corpus, Nietzsche's attitude toward the Greek philosopher has received relatively little scholarly attention. This paper endeavors to at least partially redress this trend by examining several of Nietzsche's more provocative aphorisms on the topic. Certainly one of the more interesting aspects of Nietzsche's career-long engagement with the figure of Epicurus is its marked ambivalence in general, and with respect to the garden philosopher's relationship to Christianity, in particular. In places, Nietzsche enthusiastically celebrates Epicurus' valuable opposition to "latent Christianity" and insists Epicureanism came tantalizingly close to "winning" its world-historic struggle with Christianity for the hearts and minds of his beloved Roman Empire. Epicureanism, writes Nietzsche, was "the redemption doctrine of the pagan world". Yet alongside such strident contrasting of Epicureanism and Christianity, readers of Nietzsche also encounter passages where these two ancient philosophies are characterized as having a great deal in common (little of it good). Nietzsche accuses Epicurus, Jesus, and the respective movements they inspired of "decadence" and "nihilism", ultimately characterizing both worldviews as suitable primarily for antiquity's weak and suffering. In essence, while Epicurus' teachings have much to recommend them, and appealed to "better minds" than early Christianity did, both movements fall well short of any Nietzschean ideal. By examining the nuances that characterize his contrasting and comparing of these two ancient redemption doctrines, this paper sheds valuable light on Nietzsche's fascinating and ambivalent relationship with one of ancient philosophy's most interesting figures; Epicurus of Samos.

Michael J. Fitzgerald, "Albert of Saxony and Socrates' Missing Finger"

One of the current debates in contemporary metaphysics is the debate between the 'endurantist' and 'perdurantist' accounts of the persistence of concrete particulars through change. The current debate tends to focus on the perdurantist's Descartes-Minus Argument, which tries to show that the endurantist account runs afoul of the Indiscernibility of Identicals. The perdurantist argument tries to show the endurantist is committed to claiming: Descartes at t-1 is numerically identical with Descartes-Minus at t-1, even though Descartes-Minus is all of Descartes except his left hand and Descartes whole and complete with his left hand at the same time. In this paper, I will

argue that Albert of Saxony's 14th century version of an analogous argument, The Socrates' Missing Finger Argument, is both instructive and insightful. I conclude that Albert's response to the 14th century version avoids running afoul of the Indiscernibility of Identicals because he shows that at least one of the premises in that version is false. Extrapolating this result, the contemporary perdurantist Descartes-Minus Argument will also fail because of a false premise.

Paula Smithka, "The Prejudice of Carbonism"

Humans have been guilty of harboring a variety of prejudices: racism, sexism, classism, ethnocentrism, and anthropocentrism. Are humans also guilty of carbonism, the prejudice that life forms can only be carbon-based? If so, then two related issues arise. The first is a not-so-easily-answered biological question: What is life? Or, what counts as a living entity? The second is a normative question concerning the moral and/or legal status of alternative life forms.

With regard to the first, since all life forms as we know them here on Earth are carbon-based, we expect that any life forms found on e.g., Mars, asteroids, Saturn's moon Titan, would also be carbon-based. In fact, we might not even be able to identify a non-carbon based life form as a life-form. (One might recall Star Trek's Horta was a silicon based life form.) Furthermore, there is no agreed upon criteria among scientists for determining life from non-life.

Concerning the second issue: among the vast diversity of carbon life-forms on this planet, only a few are considered to be worthy of moral (and perhaps legal) consideration. Humans have historically occupied this favored place among life forms because we are "rational animals," though recently some moral and/or legal considerations have been extended to some non-human life forms, e.g. certain mammals or endangered species. Could non-human, non-carbon based entities deserve moral and/or legal consideration?

In this essay I investigate the nomological possibility of artificial life and artificial intelligence in relation to traditional human presuppositions about life and moral status, and suggest that humans may beg the question in favor of carbon life and human moral and/or legal worth.

In the business meeting, Neil Manson was elected President, Morgan Rempel Vice-President and Program Chair, and Steve Smith Secretary-Treasurer for 2006-2007. Interest was expressed in inviting religion scholars to future meetings accommodating both fields of study; soundings will be taken.

The MPA bank balance was \$246.08, again undepleted as Neil Manson worked out special funding for all the meeting's expenses.

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