

Report on the Mississippi Philosophical Association meeting of April 13-14, 2007

The 57th annual meeting of the MPA was held at USM with around 21 attending the Saturday program in the Thad Cochran Center.

Friday night **Clayton Sullivan** (USM) spoke on "The Case for Resentment," arguing that the Christian emphasis on forgiveness interferes with standing up to bad behavior when appropriate and defending ourselves against sociopaths.

The Saturday program, thrillingly interrupted by a tornado warning around 11:00 a.m., was as follows (abstracts provided by authors):

Bryan Norwood (MSU), prize-winning student paper: "Empiricism and Rationalism Resolved by Architecture? Locke and Descartes Reexamined through the Architectural Theory of Claude Perrault"

The influence of philosophy on the built environment is often transparent to architects, but in taking a serious look one can easily see that the presuppositions architects bring into their work are invariably connected to the philosophy of their day. Some works in architecture theory claim that French architect Claude Perrault (1613-1688) is "a representative of epistemological empiricism, as taught mainly by John Locke," while others call Perrault "a Cartesian skeptic and rationalist." Standard philosophical work often asserts that the empiricism of John Locke is directly opposed to the rationalism of René Descartes. This paper, in response to these claims, is an attempt to, first, look at the nature of these two schools of philosophical thought and to decide if the standard line of philosophy is correct and, second, to try to understand which school(s) influenced Perrault's work. In examining Locke's work the common understanding of Lockean empiricism is quickly called into question, and proceeding from this a much better understanding of his relationship to Descartes and ultimately to Perrault's theory of architecture can be discovered.

Steven Skultety (UM), "Aristotle's Competition Community"

Aristotle designs his ideal city of *Politics* Books VII and VIII with the explicit aim of promoting competition among citizens. After explaining why competition is a distinct form of conflict that differs in kind from civil war and class-based partisanship, I argue that competition is meant to play a role in many important areas of flourishing civic life. First, there shall be competition among proposals put forth in the ideal assembly. Second, citizens will compete for honor through traditional funding of military, dramatic, and ceremonial events (i.e. via competitive *leitourgia*). These citizens will then use the honor won from such funding, coupled with winning arguments made in the assembly, to attain the high honor of serving in competitive, prestigious offices. Finally, in the ideal city, the honors of *leitourgia* and office will not be sought as ends in themselves, but shall instead be used to gain a proportionally larger share of available political authority that can then be used for promoting the common good.

Mary Quin (Hinds CC), "Propositions and Photographic Images: Bridges to the Actual World"
What is the relationship between the photographic image and the actual world that it portrays? Is

it possible for a photographic image to depict in the same sense that a proposition describes a state of affairs? If p can describe the state of affairs in which 'lemons are yellow' then an image of a given state of affairs should be able to depict that same state of affairs. That is to say, a proposition is a statement describing a given state of affairs and a photograph is a depiction of a given state of affairs. P therefore serves as a bridge between our discussion about truth and the actual state of affairs. In a similar sense, photographic images serve as a bridge between the actual world and our depiction of the actual world. For instance, an image that is taken of a child playing soccer in Iraq depicts a state of affairs in which a child is actually playing soccer in Iraq. The limitations of propositions seem to apply equally to photographic images, such as when the proposition 'lemons are yellow' is an incomplete description of the actual world. In the same sense that propositions describe states of affairs, I will argue that photographic images perform a similar function for truth in the actual world, or in other words how photographic images serve as bridges to the actual world.

Steven G. Smith (Millsaps), "Historical Meaningfulness in Shared Action"

Theories of the historical referent tend to slide into objectivism (when they emphasize factual evidence and causal explanation) or subjectivism (when they emphasize experience and practical intelligibility). Neither sort of position can do justice to key claims of the other. The referents of historical claims can be appreciated as at once objectively and subjectively significant, however, if they are conceived as components of shared action. A historical proposition, like a joke, requires the discernment of a certain kind of meaningful form in data of experience and narrative. As joke-telling proposes a provocative incongruity, history-telling proposes a shared action. People vary in their uptake of these forms. One can fail to "get" the sharing of action just as one can fail to be aroused by incongruity. It's also possible to understand all particular jokes as elements in an all-inclusive joke, and that analogy shows the sense of "history" as a collective singular.

Michael Horton and Kamper Floyd (U. of Kentucky), "Content Externalism, Metaphysical Realism, and Truth"

Goldberg [under review] notes that many of the core arguments for content externalism assume some version of metaphysical realism. Furthermore, when some of the standard versions of metaphysical realism are combined with content externalism, we get untoward implications regarding the in principle knowability of thought-contents, namely, that it then becomes in principle possible to have a thought with a determinate thought-content but yet never be in a position to know that one is having a thought with that content. In other words, "how we represent the world's joints in thought could be more fine-grained than anything we humans could discern" (13, emphasis in original). Goldberg points out that such a conclusion may be fine so far as the extra-mental world is concerned, but that with respect to the mental world, "this can't be right" (20, emphasis in original).

Goldberg's argument is compelling. But the implications of combining content externalism with metaphysical realism are not as unruly as Goldberg suggests. Most versions of metaphysical realism presuppose a robust correspondence theory of truth. Goldberg takes this for granted. It is possible, however, to be a metaphysical realist without adhering to a robust correspondence theory of truth. In this paper, we explore this possibility and show its implications for Goldberg's argument. Read in light of our argument, Goldberg's position gives less reason, not more, to worry about skepticism about knowledge of mental states.

Neil Manson (UM), Presidential Address: "Environmental Ethics: Some Fundamental Problems"

In this paper it is argued that environmental ethics as a subdiscipline in ethics faces several broad problems. First, the rhetoric employed in the public arena by environmentalists is that of "expanding the sphere" of moral consideration. However, in order to include the appropriate entities - higher animals, all animals, plants, species, ecosystems, landscapes, or Gaia - into the realm of moral considerability, more than just an extension of traditional interpersonal ethics is required, especially in the jump to include non-animals. Unlike (arguably) the changes required for the elimination of racism or sexism, the changes required for the elimination of speciesism (or, even more, sentientism) are radical. Second, while environmental ethicists claim to eschew anthropocentrism, a strong dose of anthropocentrism is required to rebuff arguments for conclusions that would be deeply opposed by most environmentalists (e.g. for the conclusion that it is imperative to seed the galaxy with life, or for the conclusion that we need do nothing about global warming). Third, the conflict between individualist environmental ethics and holistic ones is intractable. The welfare of animals, plants, and species just does not line up with the welfare of the ecosystem as a whole.

In the business meeting, Morgan Rempel was elected President for 2007-2008, Steven Skultety Vice-President, and Neil Manson Secretary-Treasurer. The officers were asked to explore the possibility of the MPA meeting jointly with its Alabama counterpart on the Coast and/or with the Mid-South conference in Memphis.

Treasurer's report: balance a year ago 246.08; dues collected 60.00; expenses 150.00 for student prize, 12.00 bank charges = current balance 144.58.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Steven G. Smith

****OUTGOING**** Secretary-Treasurer