

REPORT ON THE MISSISSIPPI PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION MEETING OF APRIL 7, 1990

The 40th annual spring meeting of the MPA was held at Millsaps College. Six papers were presented:

1. The second-prize student paper read by Steve Fesmire (Millsaps) was a study of "Reasonableness" excerpted from a thesis on reasonableness and belief in God. "Reasonable," he maintained, refers to a process of checking that available evidence is not inconsistent with a belief, while "rational" refers to the logical formulation of the belief. Though distinct, the two are always intertwined. Conflicting beliefs, including theism and atheism, can all be reasonable. --It was objected that this reasonableness criterion is useless because it is too permissive. The role of epistemology in determining moral and religious beliefs was the focus of discussion.
2. Richard Howe (UM) read the first-prize paper on "William Lane Craig's Kalam Cosmological Argument," deftly demonstrating the impossibility of an actual infinite by marching through a long but not endless succession of arguments. For Craig, the impossibility of an actual infinite means that the universe must have had a beginning, and the universe having had a beginning means that it must have had a cause of a personal kind. --Perhaps the main objection to Craig's demonstration of the absurdity of infinite temporal regress was to point out that his theism involves absurdity too.
3. Steve Smith (Millsaps) argued in "Gender and Embodiment" that physical sexedness must have some effect on personal character, given the structure of the embodiment of intention, and to that extent he supported the assumption of ordinary gender thinking that a body type is a "basis" of character type. --Bickle and Sharkey noted that on the eliminative materialist view of human nature, Smith's picture of intention (as an unextended point centering impressions and expressions mediated by a body) can be expected to drop off with the rest of outmoded "folk psychology."
4. Paul Sharkey (USM) answered his question "Psychotherapy: Philosophy, Science, or Quackery?" by arguing that it had better be philosophy. To think of the "talking cure" on the model of medical intervention is to take part in an irresponsible though widespread SCIENTIFYING of reality. Since psychotherapy is best seen as an education process, those most qualified to practice it are teachers, and these teachers must be devoted to discussion of moral issues and reflection on themselves, i.e. they must be philosophers. --In discussion we saw how the labelling of human problems as "diseases" has changed and can be expected to change in the future.
5. John Bickle (UM) stated "Wilfrid Sellars' 'Unknown' Argument for Scientific Realism" against the anti-realist position of van Fraassen. Insofar as scientific theories postulate entities beyond the observable ones on which empirical generalizations are based, are scientists committed to believing in the reality of such entities or can they remain agnostic about them while granting them pragmatic significance? The Sellarsian point is that theories involve statements of identity between the observed and the postulated that cannot not be meant ontologically. --Keehley

suggested and Bickle agreed that an important line of further exploration would be analysis of the possible metaphorical function of the "is" in those identity statements.

6. Rita Hinton's (MSU) Presidential Address was on "Proper Names." She concentrated on the listener's problem of disambiguating the reference of proper names: if there are five people named John in your family and a family member speaks to you of "John," how do you determine who is meant? David Lewis' theory of conversational "scorekeeping" predicts the operation of several factors (involving the appearance of needed presuppositions, salience, points of reference, and relative modality). Hinton said that some days she thinks cognitive science will solve such problems, some days she thinks it won't. --Discussion moved to the question what sort of work has been done on decision-making in ambiguous conditions.

Business meeting

Ted Ammon, John Bickle, Bennie Crockett, Rita Hinton, Dick Johnson,¹ Jay Keehley, Bill Lawhead, Wallace Murphree, Paul Sharkey, Steve Smith, and Forrest Wood attended. Secretary-Treasurer Steve Smith testified to the MPA's deepening financial crisis as he reported a balance of \$55.54, down \$86.25 from last year and down \$164 from two years ago. It was decided to hold the dues at \$10 per year but try to enhance revenue by asking one member of each department to encourage others to pay dues. I hereby ask the following individuals to perform this function:

BILL LAWHEAD at UM, WALLACE MURPHREE at MSU, FORREST WOOD at USM

These elder statesmen are all loyal dues-payers--and this is their reward.
(I've noted on their copies of the MPA directory who hasn't paid yet.)

Officers were elected for 1990-91 as follows:

Secretary-Treasurer: Steve Smith

Vice President and Program Chair: John Bickle

President: Bennie Crockett

We decided to meet on the coast next year, either at the William Carey or USM facility, with the details to be worked out between Bickle, Crockett, and Wood. We also decided to compose a statement honoring Tom Flynn on the occasion of his retirement from his regular faculty appointment, and to invite him to give us a paper at our next meeting.

Many members have paid their dues for 1990-91; others will be reminded by a check on this page. **UNLESS MORE MEMBERS PAY DUES WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO MAINTAIN OUR PROGRAM OF STUDENT PRIZES.** There was strong sentiment at the meeting for keeping this going.

Respectfully submitted, Steven G. Smith, Secretary-Treasurer

_____ Your dues of \$10 for 1990-91 are respectfully solicited!

¹Addition of Johnson corrects minutes as distributed [6-8-90]

