

REPORT ON THE MISSISSIPPI PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION MEETING OF APRIL 4, 1992

The 42nd annual meeting of the MPA was hosted by Mississippi State University. We heard three papers in the morning, went to Oby's for lunch, and came back for two more. (Copies of a sixth paper, the first-prize student essay by Adam Smith [MSU] on "The Morality of Euthanasia," were distributed; Mr. Smith could not read it as he was taking the MCAT. The second-prize paper was "Heidegger and the Philosophy of Science" by James Whittington [MSU].) Afterward, Paul Jacobs guided some members on a tour of the "City of David" exhibit in the Cobb Institute of Archaeology. Our attendance hit a maximum of 22 persons just before lunch.

1. Jay Keehley (MSU) attacked "Bubba justice" in "A Reconsideration of the Need for Mississippi Justice Court Reform." The underprepared Justice Court justices of Mississippi are often not interpreting cases according to the rules that constitute the legal sphere, and so the Justice Courts are highly abusable. Keehley recommended that the judges be required to have law degrees. --In discussion we dwelt tragically on a perceived cultural gap between PhDs and Bubbas. Challenging the interpreter-based theory of meaning employed by Keehley, Lawhead asked how he could defend himself against a libel charge if not by appealing to the discoverable meaning of the "text" of the allegedly libelous statement. Keehley said that the right way to go about this would be to dispute the accuser's way of reading texts rather than to try to make the text settle the matter.

2. Paul Sharkey (USM) examined the "Economic and Ethical Implications of Physician Income." Models of health care range from the fee-for-services model that best fits the traditional ethos of physician-patient relationship to economically advantageous prepayment schemes (like Health Maintenance Organizations) to third-party payment schemes that have major drawbacks both ethically and economically. A coercive "your money or your life" leverage keeps physician income high and other components of our health care system expensive. It would be appropriate to set physician compensation with noblesse oblige in mind, keeping physicians in line with comparably educated professionals like jurists, scientists, and professors. --In discussion, it appeared that the only real justification for the high income of physicians is that their lives are so unpleasurably that other people who are smart enough to be doctors (like philosophers) would not trade places with them.

3. In "Moral Philosophy as a Subversive Activity," James Rachels (University of Alabama-Birmingham) criticized the insulation of common-sense beliefs from the products of philosophical reflection (à la G. E. Moore). The popular strategy of refuting ethical theories by common-sensical counterexamples cannot be considered decisive. If, for example, a principled ethical surmise calls into question the disparity between what one does for one's own relatively advantaged children and what one does for needy orphans, one ought to be disturbed by this rather than assume complacently that any valid ethics will support special obligations in family relationships. Construction and maintenance of our web of belief must involve criticism of beliefs. --Discussion brought out the limitless and dynamic character of web-building.

4. Edward Shirley (Louisiana State University) presented "Taking a Clue from Santayana: A Refutation of the Dream Argument." The clue from Santayana is the argument that skeptics must rely on empirical beliefs to use concepts meaningfully even when they use them hypothetically--as, in the Cartesian dream hypothesis ("I suppose I might be dreaming"), the concept of dreaming assumes veridical experience of the difference between dreaming and waking. So skepticism cannot be total. --The question was posed whether skeptics can assume that life might be a dream even though they themselves can't be the ones to know whether it is. But the Santayanan argument says no, the assumption is self-cancelling--rather like the assumption that I came into existence a second ago endowed with all my memories (which in that case wouldn't really be memories).

5. Bennie Crockett (William Carey College), repeating from 1991 in his Presidential role, spoke on Mortimer Adler's quest for truth in religion in "Mortimer J. Adler: Purveyor of Absolute Truth." Adler has consistently argued for the transpersonal, transcultural, and transhistorical objectivity and unity of some truth. Although he has recently said that faith in God properly transcends what rational argument can establish, he still rejects the Averroist view that religious and objectively demonstrable truths may be incompatible. He sees this as a great flaw in Eastern religions, most provocatively in Zen Buddhism's use of contradiction to transcend reason; psychological comfort can perhaps be gained in this way, but not truth. --In discussion, Crockett agreed with Adler to the extent of saying that our handling of the Western religions' truth-claims should move away from "special pleading" toward "disputation." Sharkey and Smith protested that Adler's treatment of Zen was warped by his insistence upon the ground rules for thinking that Zen calls into question.

Business meeting

Bennie Crockett, Tom Flynn, Rita Hinton, Bill Lawhead, Tim Lytle, Wallace Murphree, Novia and Paul Sharkey, Ned Shirley, Steve Smith, Forrest Wood, and Bill Yount were present. Secretary-Treasurer Steve Smith reported a bank balance of \$25.99, down from last year's \$72.78 primarily because of decreased dues collection. The officers elected for 1992-93 were:

Secretary-Treasurer: Steve Smith

Vice President and Program Chair: Bill Lawhead

President: Forrest Wood

We decided to meet at Ole Miss next spring, tentatively April 3. Lawhead told us about "common market" rules for out-of-state tuition waver exchanges among many Southern universities. Smith noted that the MPA newsletter languishes for lack of data (see last year's report for rationale). Some members have paid their dues for 1992-93; others are reminded by a check on this page. PLEASE NOTE THAT WITHOUT YOUR DUES PAYMENTS WE CANNOT MAINTAIN OUR PROGRAM OF STUDENT PRIZES.

Respectfully submitted, Steven G. Smith, Secretary-Treasurer

_____ Your dues of \$10 for 1992-93 are respectfully solicited!

