

REPORT ON THE MISSISSIPPI PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION MEETING OF MARCH 29, 1997

Our 47th annual meeting was hosted by Mississippi College. 18 attended.

Nathan Segars (UM) presented the first-prize student paper, "How Bipartisan is Foundherentism?," a critique of Susan Haack's attempt to balance the strengths of foundationalism and coherentism. According to Segars, Haack tilts toward foundationalism in granting experiential evidence a privileged justifying role under some circumstances. Although she does not reach her goal, she performs a valuable service in keeping epistemology going. Questioning circled around the problem case of determining the meaning of a term that appears only once in a text.

David Holley (USM) reviewed possible justifications of "Breaking the Rules When Others Do" on grounds of self-defense, avoiding disproportionate sacrifice of self-interest, and acknowledging that a stated rule is not actually in force. The measurement and interpretation demands made by such arguments are difficult to satisfy. Still, the real meaning of moral policies is always specified by concrete expectations people have of each other. We discussed how moral trust is gained and lost and how moral rules are distinguished from non-moral customs.

Coming to parry Kuhn, not to raze him, and giving no quarter for a paradigms, Dennis Rohatyn (U. of San Diego) addressed "The Revolution in Revolutions." Ironies: in reviewing the history of scientific worldviews, Kuhn translated between them, which he claimed couldn't be done ("incommensurability"); in applying scientific method to the understanding of science itself, he was a conservative; the Kuhnian revolution "transcends transcendence," puncturing the overinflated ideal of a "revolution." Agreeing with Kuhn, Rohatyn appealed to firm criteria like simplicity, consistency, and heuristic power in answering a challenge to science's validity.

In "Subject Formation, Taste and the Other: Opening Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morals to Feminine Body," Kristen Brown (Millsaps) used the metaphor of curry (the somewhat indeterminately relation-al cooking agent) to suggest how within Nietzsche's dynamic monism we might find our way toward a less abstract, less woman-estranged corporeality than Nietzsche's text explicitly allows. Various questions about Nietzsche's relation to feminism ensued; perhaps the deepest issue had to do with the risk of gender-essentializing that is run by a more concretely bodily account of the subject.

We repaired for lunch to Penn's Fish House and shrewdly held our business meeting while things were frying. Secretary-Treasurer S. Smith reported a balance of \$115.26 after a high dues collection and deceptively low expenses for the year. Officers elected for 1997-1998 were Steve Smith, Secretary-Treasurer; Kristen Brown, Vice-President/Program Chair; and John Meadors, President. Next year's meeting will be at Millsaps College on a weekend, preferably not that of Easter, to be determined by the officers.

Our program continued with Paula Smithka's paper, "Integration Therapy for Patients with Multiple Personality Disorder: Does This Therapy Kill Persons?" Yes, the elimination of "personalities" does kill a "person," on a Cartesian or Lockean understanding of "person,"

inasmuch as the survival of the bodily "individual" is neither necessary nor sufficient for personal survival. Only materialists can accept integration therapy on the grounds that organisms naturally strive for integration. The problem of multiple personalities hampering an individual's functioning can be addressed by a scheme of cooperation among the personalities (as in the Trudy Chase case). Questioners wondered whether Buddhist meditation wherein "selfhood" is undone constitutes a "killing" similar to the elimination of personalities, and whether some personalities might be justified in trying to eliminate others in self-defense.

Bennie Crockett (William Carey) discussed "Some Epistemological Problems with Historical Claims." A Cartesian positivist approach to historical truth founders on uncertainty about historical sources. In any case, a historical assertion is always relative to a certain perspective of interest. "What happened in 1776?" is answerable only on the basis of a certain selection of things to consider. Are all perspectives equal? No, there are constraints in the data. How are disputes over historical truth resolved? Only by additional perspectives.

Bill Yount's Presidential address concerned "The Literary-Political Philosophy of Leo Strauss: A Review and Critique." Strauss argued that key philosophers realized that truth cannot be directly presented to the public without harming society; therefore, they wrote esoterically, indicating their true beliefs to fellow philosophers by planting contradictions, ambiguities, and misdirections in their texts. Philosophy, oriented to the "natural," is bound to conflict with religion, "conventional." Strauss agrees with the Genesis story of opposition between human curiosity and divine authority and sees Eve as the first philosopher. Is there any safeguard against obscurantism in the Straussian reading between the philosophers' lines? Perhaps yes, if all these readings converge on a perennial wisdom regarding the natural superiority of the rationally strong. But perhaps Straussian reading can establish different messages case by case.

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Full-time employed philosophers (those who didn't pay at the meeting) are urged to send in their annual dues of \$10.

Respectfully submitted, Steven G. Smith, Secretary-Treasurer