

REPORT ON THE MISSISSIPPI PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION MEETING OF MARCH 31, 1998

We held our 48th annual meeting at Millsaps College, with ca. 30 persons attending at least in part. Robert Solomon (U. of Texas-Austin) delivered the 1998 Dunbar Lecture at Millsaps on Monday evening, March 30, on "Nietzsche and the Passionate Life."

First thing Tuesday morning, Laura Angstadt (USM alumnus) presented the first-prize student paper, "Impure vs. Pure Philosophy of Language: A Comparison of Verificationism and Constructivism," in which she argued that Rorty's linguistic constructivism lands him in unacceptable relativism and thus is no better, or perhaps is worse, than Ayer's principle of verifiability which mixes metaphysical epistemology with a theory of how language works.

Then Thomas Gardner (Purdue U.) examined "Frege's Apparently Inconsistent Triad" of three doctrines: (1) Every sense is an object. (2) Some senses are "unsaturated"--e.g. in a function like " $() + ()$ ". (3) No object is unsaturated. The recommended solution is to distinguish functions (unsaturated senses) from objects, thus dropping (1)--which isn't strongly supported in Frege's writings anyway--and to be careful not to speak of "the sense of 'A'" when "A" is a function.

"Widgets and Bugs: Positivism Vindicated" by Jay Keehley (MSU) turned out to be about Y2K, that is, the year-date 2000 as a computer programming problem, and the applicability of Richard Posner's "wealth maximization" theory of tort liability to the impending wave of claims that computerized enterprises haven't done enough to avert loss. In what sense is positivism vindicated? In these humiliating Y2K discussions the logic of a formal system has got the "human element," the knowing subject, utterly in its power.

In "Can There Be a Naturalistic Epistemology?," Mark Bross (SUNY-Buffalo) argued as a "weak naturalist" that valid patterns of inference must be considered together with reliable causal histories of belief formation in justifying knowledge claims. A clair-voyant might have a reliable belief formation process yet lack epistemic justification for lack of valid inferring. Questions raised: How does the internalism/externalism debate (about the need for a higher-level criterion) relate to the naturalism debate (about normative meaning supervening on non-normative fact)? Why not be a strong naturalist and shrug off counterintuitive results in non-central cases?

We lunched densely at two tables at Kiefer's and had a very fast business meeting. Bennie Crockett reported that the MPA history volume is on track to be delivered by the publisher's deadline this summer. Secretary-Treasurer Smith reported a balance of \$129.36. Officers elected for 1998-1999 were Steve Smith, Secretary-Treasurer; Paula Smithka, Vice-President/Program Chair; and Kristen Brown, President. Our USM colleagues volunteered to host next year's meeting, presumably around the same time of spring we've been meeting of late.

Ted Ammon being laid waste by sickness, our only paper after lunch was the Presidential address by John Meadors (Mississippi College) on "The Cultivation of Virtue." In a "nesting bowls" model of three contexts of virtue, Meadors drew on Plato's Protagoras to consider political factors, Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* for socially sustained "practices," and Charles Taylor's account of personal moral authenticity as articulated through "strong evaluations,"

emphasizing nevertheless that the actuality of virtue is somewhat mysterious. This came out more strongly in dealing with questions about a person who might be expert in a practice (e.g. an ace surgeon) but utterly misanthropic, hypocrites, and persons who have been morally indoctrinated.

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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.

Please make sure your listing on the enclosed Directory is accurate.

Respectfully submitted, Steven G. Smith, Secretary-Treasurer