

REPORT ON THE MISSISSIPPI PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION MEETING OF MARCH 19-20, 1999

The 49th annual meeting of the MPA was held at the University of Southern Mississippi. It began Friday with a discussion by Peter Klein (Rutgers U.) of "Evil Geniuses, Skepticism, and Other Problems for Knowledge" and a public lecture on "The Failures of Dogmatism." It continued Saturday with a full slate of presentations by Mississippi philosophers to an audience of nearly 40.

Leslie Frazier (USM) won the second prize in the student paper competition with "Schematism in the Internalist/Externalist Debate." Robert McMillin (USM) read his first-prize paper, "An Epistemologist's Pipe Dream." According to McMillin, defeasibility theories have responded to Gettier problems in a misleading way, raising the epistemic justification standard too high. Instead, contextual subjective justification should be the key. It was asserted in discussion that adding a fourth condition to justified true belief to guard against Gettier problems provides for something other than "justification."

Lynn Holt (MSU), in "Metaphor, History, Consciousness: From Locke to Dennett," argued that Dennett has actually not introduced a new metaphor of "text" ("multiple drafts") to oppose to the "Cartesian theater" metaphor for consciousness but rather has revived a way of figuring consciousness used by Locke and more pointedly by Locke's critics, who worried about the unreliability of a narratively self-unifying consciousness. Dennett has only partially recognized the role of metaphor in philosophy and the historical and literary dimensions of consciousness. But his emphasis on content is right--at least, a conception of consciousness without content is wrong.

With help from Calvin and Hobbes, Katarzyna Paprzycka (USM) exposed "The False Consciousness of Intentional Psychology" by reviewing cases in which the agent's own belief and desire are not (as "explanatory individualism" would hold) the relevant causes of an action. E.g., when I am asked to pass the salt I pass it due to a habit of compliance. But individualism is important normatively, when we call on people to act for reasons. Another example of false consciousness: a counselor tells an abused wife that "she must be getting something out of" her relationship with her husband.

David Holley (USM) argued in "Rational Choice and Self-Transformation" that, on the one hand, important moral choices are made with an eye toward living the best kind of life as a whole, but that, on the other hand, we sometimes can't tell how our criteria of self-assessment will change as a consequence of choices we make. Rita of *Educating Rita* was a main example. Although Rita talks of "discovering herself," Holley resisted the interpretation of her odyssey as a recovery of a preexisting or constant "real self."

We lunched and held our business meeting at the Crescent City Grill. Complaining of a low dues collection in the last year, Secretary-Treasurer Smith reported a balance of \$78.27. Officers elected for 1999-2000 were Steve Smith, Secretary-Treasurer; Yolanda Estes, Vice-President/Program Chair; and Paula Smithka, President. The idea is that we'd meet in 2000 at Mississippi

State. Bennie Crockett reported that he is on the verge of sending in the final set of papers for the HAPS MPA volume.

Our program resumed with "Transtrying and Transworth" by Steve Smith (Millsaps). Trying, a normal part of doing, is presupposed in crediting an agent's actions with worth. To be beyond the uncertainty and pain of trying, however, is a morally desirable, transworthy goal, a "blessing." Serenity and passion are two modes of transtrying, the former harmonizing individual effort with external occurrences, the latter embedding individual effort in a greater energy and urgency, an "inspiration." Questions were raised about how transworth can motivate agents and about heroes (as worth types) in relation to saints (as transworth types).

In "Kant's Apparent Argument for the Value of Humanity," Samuel Bruton (USM) discussed problems with a key premise of the "Treat humanity always as an end" formulation of the categorical imperative, namely that humans necessarily conceive their own existence as an end in itself. Ambitious interpretations of humanity as the condition of all goodness (Korsgard) or end-setting (Wood) were found unconvincing; a "thinner" approach, appealing just to the morally legislating will in humanity, was recommended.

Yolanda Estes (MSU) reviewed "Fichte's Attack on Dogmatism, Skepticism, and Agnosticism within the Context of the Atheismusstreit." Though he was viciously attacked for his supposed atheism, Fichte saw his transcendental idealism as the defense of genuine religious faith, ultimately warranted against materialist and theological dogmatism by a pre-philosophical recognition of the moral law, freedom and autonomy. Discussion probed the practical reasons that could be given for Fichte's position and the idealist despair of not being able to fulfill one's moral calling.

John Nau (USM) rose at this point to reflect on his long career of inviting people to examine their lives and encouraged us to maintain our dedication to philosophy.

Kristen Brown (Millsaps) gave the Presidential Address on "Logos, Contradiction, and First Principles: Aristotle's Expressions of Form in Politics and Metaphysics Z and I." Retrieving a less-noticed side of Aristotle's logic in Topics according to which the being of the form of humans is known differently as said in different circumstances of discourse, Brown argued that Aristotle's different expressions of the principle of form in Politics and Metaphysics needn't be contradictory. Does this interpretation of Aristotle make him as much of a contextual relativist as the later Wittgenstein? No, especially when we remember his commitment to nous.

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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.

This means you: _____

Also, please make sure your listing on the enclosed Directory is accurate, and help me weed out the listings that no longer belong.

Respectfully submitted, Steven G. Smith, Secretary-Treasurer

