

REPORT ON THE MISSISSIPPI PHILOSOPHICAL ASSOCIATION MEETING OF APRIL 3, 1993

Ole Miss hosted the 43rd annual meeting of the MPA, featuring six papers. The meeting began with an extraordinary promotional message from Bill Lawhead for the CD-ROM edition of the *Patrologia Latinae*.

1. Chad Holley of MSU read the first-prize student essay, "Two Omnipotent Beings: Coexistence and Competition," revisiting a problem taken up in a recent article by Mill and Smith in *Faith and Philosophy*. It had been argued that two omnipotent beings with contrary wills might coexist, since the limiting of each by the other is a logically necessary constraint (like the impossibility of squaring the circle, often acknowledged as a limit on a nevertheless genuinely omnipotent being). Holley argued that omnipotent beings with dissonant wills cannot coexist, however, because their resolutions of hypothetical action preclude each other. --Discussion revolved around whether the concept of omnipotence allows the question of two omnipotencies to arise, and how the plural-omnipotencies idea might take on genuine religious meaning (e.g. in Zoroastrian dualism or Christian trinitarianism).

2. Lou Pojman (UM) delivered "A Critique of Paul Taylor's Biocentric Egalitarianism." The argument of Taylor's *Respect for Nature* was found wanting due to its arbitrary premise about inherent value. Why should all and only living beings be morally considerate, and why equally? "Having a good" (the criterion that picks out living things) isn't being good. And egalitarianism becomes nihilism in its inability to make the interest of certain beings a priority. --Discussion suggested that moral holism and moral hierarchy need not be incompatible. We ought to let some widely shared intuitions ground our hierarchy of concerns. Taylor's concession of a right to self-defense could be expanded to accommodate human interests more plausibly, but that would blunt the edge of his egalitarianism.

3. In "Resembling Intentions and Human Kinds," Steve Smith (Millsaps) analyzed resemblance as intrasubjective ease of imaginative variation and resemblances of intentional realities as taking certain ways together with fellow subjects. Applying this model to gender and comparable sorts of human resemblance, the problem of stereotyping was held not to be fatal to judgments of real likeness among persons (although there are certainly contingent subjective grounds of such judgments). --Discussion of the "melting pot" vs. "mosaic" models for a pluralistic society disclosed various reasons for respecting the identity of human-kind groups, assuming that the overridingly important resemblances constituting humanity as such are given due attention.

We went for lunch to Victor's on the then-festive Square.

4. Speaking for "Welfare Reform in a Just Society," Ronald Bishop (Jones County Jr. College) argued that persons who bring welfare-dependent children into the world ought to be sterilized as a condition of further public assistance. The cost of irresponsibly borne children is unfair to taxpayers, and excessive population growth is unhealthy in any case. --It was objected that fundamental liberties (of reproduction, and possibly of religious conscience) ought not to be overridden by a claim of property rights, and that the paternalist-coercive principle of the proposal would be applicable to a dangerously broad range of cases (e.g. to forbid all behavior

that raises the risk of incurring medical costs). Bishop answered that the proposal satisfies Rawlsian as well as Lockean justice and that its rationale is clear and definite enough to keep us off slippery slopes of coercion.

5. Michael Clifford (MSU) analyzed "The Political Spectrum" of the modern world as an increasingly polarized opposition between conservative and liberal modes of political subjectivity. The positions differ in what they tolerate and how they are disposed to interfere: both want to protect the individual, but liberals want to lay hands on social structure, leaving individuals ethically free, while conservatives want to govern individuals by ideals of virtue while leaving social structure alone. --The main problem in discussion was the "moderate" position on the spectrum: is it a synthesis of the stronger points of liberals and conservatives, or just a mongrel assortment of liberal and conservative views?

6. Forrest Wood's (USM) Presidential address dealt with "Thoreau [originally pronounced "thurrow," we learned] on Hunting and Fishing." In his Walden essay "On the Higher Laws," Thoreau appears to be caught between contradictory intuitions: on the one hand, he celebrates "the wild" ("I love the wild as well as the good") and the personal development associated with hunting and fishing, but on the other hand he feels guilty about the "murder" of a moose and proclaims that Nature must be transcended. Thus after overcoming the spirit-nature dualism of Emerson, he lapses back into it. --In discussion, Wood noted a "natural" conflict in humans between the satisfaction of participating in natural process as a predator and revulsion from butchering. The question arose whether transcendentalist philosophy led Thoreau into the woods in search of truth in the first place. The ideal of simplicity had something to do with this, suggested Wood, but not dualism. [A longer version of this paper will appear in the Summer 1993 issue of Southwest Philosophical Studies.]

Business meeting

Ted Ammon, Robert Bell, Ron Bishop, Bennie Crockett, Bill Lawhead, Wallace Murphree, Lou Pojman, Steve Smith, and Forrest Wood were present. Secretary-Treasurer Smith reported a bank balance of \$70.66, up from last year's \$25.99 (mainly because only one student essay prize was given). The officers elected for 1993-94 were: Secretary-Treasurer, Steve Smith; Vice President and Program Chair, Ron Bishop; and President, Bill Lawhead.

Millsaps invited the MPA for the 1994 meeting, again on the first Saturday in April. It was announced that MSU got a grant to bring a visiting philosopher in the fall.

Some members have paid their dues for 1993-94; 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 1993-94 are respectfully solicited!