

Thomas Jack Lynch Lecture

Department of Philosophy



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“One Thought Too Many”: Love, Morality and the Ordering of Commitment

At the end of “Persons, Character, and Morality,” Bernard Williams discusses the case of a man who, faced with a situation in which he can save only one of two people in equal peril, chooses to save his wife. Williams famously observes that a moral justification defending the man against the charge that he ought to have been impartial provides the rescuer with “one thought too many.” Most of Williams’ commentators agree, interpreting his remarks as a reminder that a morally good person need not, and perhaps should not, be thinking about what is morally justifiable all the time. This paper draws and defends a more radical interpretation of Williams’ remarks. One attractive ideal of love would prohibit the lover not only from thinking about morality all the time, but also from being unconditionally committed to acting according to morality all the time. This does not imply that a person is positively permitted or justified in disregarding moral requirements. It rather supports Williams’s thought that “some situations lie beyond justification.”

Thursday February 2, 2012

5:00pm

B316 Tribble Hall

For special assistance please call 336-758-5359 so reasonable accommodations can be made.