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Desire, Preference, Choice: Toward a Theory of Reason and Value

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“Desire, Preference, Choice: Toward a Theory of Reason and Value”

A Conversation with

Loren Lomasky

Philosophy Dept. and Current Scholar in Residence
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What does it mean to say that a person acts (and thinks) “rationally”? Ancient philosophical thinkers responded that we must identify and pursue what is perceived to be “Truly Good” for all of humanity, as opposed to what is preferable to our individual desires. In the seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes suggested that reason exists simply to satisfy our desires. Similarly, David Hume has declared that reason must be “the slave to the passions.” Modern theorists most often identify Hume as the point of departure for their own investigations into “reason” and “rationality.” In general, these theorists argue that reason means we act to get what we desire, and when not all of our desires can be satisfied, then we act to satisfy the most intense ones. In this presentation, Lomasky will investigate the limitations of these modern re-thinkings of Hume in regard to 1) their exclusively forward-looking vision of practical reason (i.e. reason is only determined by that which we want and desire in the present for our future) and 2) the foundational assumption that desire is the sole basis of reason.

Tuesday, April 22

2:30 pm

Classroom 2

College Park Office Bldg.

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