

Drunken Racism

Four college friends are hanging out one night and decide to have a few drinks. None of them has much experience with alcohol. They're all having a good time until one member of the group, Molly, starts endorsing some stereotypes about a racial minority group. Her friends all tell her to stop, but this only fuels her rant; she goes on and on, her rhetoric becoming more hateful and violent. Finally, to everyone's relief, Molly passes out. The next morning, when the others confront Molly about her behavior, she says she doesn't remember any of it and assures them that her statements are not reflective of her true self. "You know me!" she says, "Of course, I don't really feel that way!"

When Molly's friends discuss her behavior amongst themselves, some differences of opinion emerge. Some of Molly's friends are angry, arguing that Molly is fully blameworthy for her drunken behavior. They want, at the very least, a heartfelt apology and show of contrition. Others, however, are not so sure, noting that usually we are only blameworthy for voluntary actions under our rational control. Still others wonder whether her real crime was simply having rather than expressing racist thoughts.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. To what extent is Molly blameworthy for her rant? Explain.
2. Does Molly owe the group an apology? How is the situation different if one of the friends present that night is a member of the group Molly attacked?
3. How should Molly's friends react to her claim that her drunken words do not reflect her "true self?"
4. Can we be blameworthy for bad thoughts that are unexpressed?

