

## Desire Exercises

### 2. Mapping Our Desires: Means and Ends (and other connections)

#### Introduction

Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle have noted that, among the things we desire and seek, there are some that we desire for their own sake, and others that we desire as the means to some other end. For example, someone who is sick might very much want to have a surgery performed to cure her, but no one would desire to have it performed just to undergo surgery. Here are some source quotes from Plato and Aristotle, though the idea that some things are done or desired as means to something else is probably familiar enough even before you read them.

From Plato's *Republic*:

Glaucou: Tell me, do you think there is a kind of good we welcome, not because we desire what comes from it, but because we welcome it for its own sake — joy, for example, and all the harmless pleasures that have no results beyond the joy of having them?

Socrates: Certainly, I think there are such things.

Glaucou: And is there a kind of good we like for its own sake and also for the sake of what comes from it — knowing, for example, and seeing and being healthy? We welcome such things, I suppose, on both counts.

Socrates: Yes.

Glaucou: And do you also see a third kind of good, such as physical training, medical treatment when sick, medicine itself, and the other ways of making money? We'd say that these are onerous but beneficial to us, and we wouldn't choose them for their own sakes, but for the sake of the rewards and other things that come from them.

Socrates: There is also this third kind. But what of it?

— Plato, *Republic* 357b-d

From Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*

If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? If so, we must try, in outline at least, to determine what it is — Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapter 2

### **Assignment:**

Take the list of desires you produced over the past days and pick out items that seem to be related as means and ends. For example, if you included “become a doctor” and “get into a good medical school”, the latter might be desired because it is the necessary means to becoming a doctor. You might, in turn, want to become a doctor because you desire to do good for others, or to make a good living, or some other reason(s). **(In class, we will discuss what you produce for this exercise, so only include things from your list that you feel comfortable sharing.)**

Take a new sheet and draw out a diagram of the means-ends relationships you find between your desires by drawing arrows from the means to the ends. You do not have to do this with *everything* on your original list. These may simply be pairs of two, or it may turn out that there is a long chain of connections. (You want to get lots of rest to be in good shape for your biology test in order to get a good grade in order to have a good chance of getting into medical school in order to become a doctor in order to ....)

Go to medical school → become a doctor

As you do this, you may find that there are things that you also desire that you did not think of before. For example, you may never have thought about why you want to be a doctor, and now realize that you believe it is a good means to (fill in the blank as befits your own situation!). If this happens, feel free to add items that were not on your original list.

### **In class**

We will begin this exercise in the second class session.

### **After class**

1. Continue to map out the means-ends connections between your desires.
2. Go over the desires in your map one by one and consider whether each is desired for its own sake or only for the sake of something else. Underline those that you find you desire in its own right.
3. Look to see if there are desires that are in tension with one another – perhaps a pair of things that you can do either of, but not both, or items that make other items harder to achieve. Draw a different kind of link between these (say, an arrow pointing both ways in a different color.)
4. Send an image of your desire map to your section instructor by 10am the morning of the second Monday class.