

Desire Exercises

1. An Inventory of Desires

As we will see over the course of the semester, many philosophers pay a good deal of attention to the things we desire. Our desires are among the forces that motivate us to act, and how we act shapes the course of our lives. We will find that different philosophers say very different things about our desires: what the basic human desires are, whether they are a good guide for how to live, how they should be treated, and what other sources of motivation there might be. Almost all of them, however, recommend a *reflective* life.

Rather than starting by reading philosophical texts, we will begin with some reflective exercises in which we try to come to know ourselves better and more explicitly on our own. This is the first of these exercises, and others will build upon it. We will begin it in class, and then discuss your first experience with it, but it is something you will probably continue to add to over the next several days.

Instructions

In-class, working individually

On a sheet of paper (probably better) or on your electronic device, begin to list the things that you desire. This can include anything from fleeting desires (wanting to sit in the sun or have coffee) to short-term desires (wanting to get into a particular class you are not yet in, wanting to make friends at Wesleyan) to big life goals (wanting to be a successful doctor, wanting to have a loving family with children of your own, wanting to see a day when there is world peace), or anything in between. For the moment, don't worry if the list is a mixed bag of different types of things – just jot them down as they occur to you. *This full list will not be turned in or shared with classmates, so that you can feel free to be completely candid.*

However, you will be asked to email your section instructor an abbreviated list, omitting anything you do not wish to share. A few of these will be used, anonymously, in the next class session for purposes of comparison and discussion.

After class

You will probably find, now that you have started noting your desires, that you will begin to realize that you have other desires that you did not think of when you made your initial list. Keep your paper with you, and jot down additional things that come to mind over the coming days. *Again, this list is for your eyes only – you will not be asked to share it or turn it in.* (This may be important, as some desires may be of a deeply sensitive and personal nature that you would not feel comfortable sharing. Keeping the list private allows you to acknowledge or affirm such things to yourself without worrying about how others would react to them. You can even destroy the list after we are done!)

For Next Class

Continue to set down desires as they occur to you, enlarging your list.

Send an abbreviated version of this list (omitting anything you do not feel comfortable sharing) to your section instructor by 10am on the first Wednesday. A few of these will be used, sanonymously, in the next class session for purposes of comparison and discussion.