

UNITED WISDOM

Needs, Desires, and Ways of Meeting Them

The Person and the Inner World

Andrey Zarinsh & Maria Evilkut

I19 · EN

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

Needs, Desires, and Ways of Meeting Them

Epigraph

> *“Some natural only.”*

Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus, §127, a fragment distinguishing desires, in Robert Drew Hicks's English translation. The Russian version translates this fragment editorially. It names one category in Epicurean ethics, not a modern diagnostic term.

What this article is about

Imagine a hypothetical evening: you are tired and want to order an expensive dinner. A friend says you need care, not food. You feel hungry and irritated: why has someone decided they know your motive better than you do? Another day looks different. Food is already available, but what you want is an invitation from a particular person. The same words, “I want,” can describe a bodily need, a preference, a hope for connection, or a chosen way of addressing several things at once.

Distinguishing a need, a desire, and a means is useful while it helps us choose. It becomes harmful when it turns into a trial: needs are declared noble, desires suspicious, and every favored means replaceable without loss. Here we compare several approaches and offer working questions for one situation. We will not seek a final inventory of human needs. What matters is understanding what is required, what particular form you want, and how far your chosen means can provide it. The answer can remain incomplete and change after experience.

I. One word does not establish one theory of humanity

In everyday speech, “I need” can mean very different things. You need water to live, a document to gain access, quiet to finish work, or a response from someone close because the relationship is troubling you. The word does not turn these situations into identical processes. One concerns bodily conditions, another institutional rules, a third a suitable environment, a fourth the meaning of connection. Before seeking a common explanation, it helps to establish which question the statement addresses and what could support it in your situation.

Calling something a need does not yet prove that every means of meeting it is necessary. “I need rest” does not equal “Everyone must be quiet right now.” The first describes a condition and something important; the second makes a particular demand on others. That demand

@andrey.zarinsh @ilkutki

might be justified, but it needs separate discussion: is there another room, an agreed time, a way of distributing responsibilities? The distinction does not weaken a real need. It helps establish which part of the problem can be addressed through agreement and which cannot be removed simply by changing words or attitude.

The opposite mistake is to regard every desire as trivial until it is named a basic need. Someone may want to learn, see the sea, play music, or give a beautiful gift. They need not prove they would cease to exist without it before its significance can be acknowledged. Life contains interests, relationships, and preferences that cannot be reduced to minimum survival. Priorities must be set, but a priority does not equal a person's moral worth. You can postpone pleasure for an essential expense while retaining your right to want it. Refusal itself does not prove that the desire was false or imposed.

A working vocabulary therefore begins with clarification rather than a verdict of classification. What will happen without this? How long can the matter wait? Which consequences are observable and which still assumed? Whose assessment of necessity is this? “I do not know” is sometimes more accurate than an elegant explanation. If all you understand for now is that you want a particular conversation, that is a sufficient beginning. Later you can discover whether information, recognition, or closeness is required. You need not translate every human request into a universal model to gain permission to express it.

II. Desire gives a need a particular form

A need is often described more broadly than a desire. Hunger can be satisfied by different foods; wanting warm bread indicates a particular taste and way of experiencing an evening. Yet the broad description is not always truer. When food involves availability, cultural habits, health, or sharing a table with loved ones, its form matters too. It cannot simply be declared that any set of calories is equivalent for everyone. Medical restrictions require appropriate professional assessment; personal preferences require talking to the person rather than assuming hidden motives.

In a hypothetical scene after a difficult shift, you want home-cooked food in particular, not merely to eat enough. Perhaps a familiar taste matters, along with not having to choose yet again. Perhaps you have not eaten for a long time. Perhaps food offers a chance to be together. These explanations are compatible, but none becomes fact merely because it sounds psychologically convincing. You can eat first and then notice what changed. If hunger diminished while loneliness remained, that is new information. It does not make the original desire mistaken: one means may have addressed one task while leaving another.

Sometimes the form really does restrict choice. “I need support” gradually becomes “This person must call at this time and say these words.” The more precisely a single scenario is

specified, the more you depend on circumstances beyond your control. Yet a particular loved one cannot automatically be replaced by just anybody either. The history of a relationship may be part of what is wanted. A more accurate question is: what in this form is indispensable to me now, and what can be discussed or tried differently? The difference between the essential and the habitual usually appears in details, not a general order to be more flexible.

A desire can therefore be read as a statement containing several components: a needed change, a preferred form, and an expected outcome. “I want to go away for the weekend” may mean fewer responsibilities, new experiences, and the hope of feeling alive again. A trip can provide the first two conditions without signing a guarantee for the third. This analysis does not destroy the dream. It helps make planning more realistic: what kind of rest is needed, what is available, and which effect cannot be promised in advance? A person retains the right to keep the whole image of the trip; breaking it down is useful only within the scope of their task.

III. A means should be assessed through what it does

A means of meeting a need is an action or condition through which someone hopes to obtain what matters. A purchase, conversation, sleep, education, walk, or job change can serve different purposes. Here a useful distinction arises between intention and result. You may have chosen something for peace of mind and acquired more responsibilities instead. Or taken a small step without grand expectations and discovered that it fits. Assessing a means relies on observable consequences and limitations, not only on how noble the initial goal was. A good intention does not make every path effective or acceptable to others.

Consider a hypothetical scene: someone buys another course to feel professionally confident. A course can provide knowledge, practice, and feedback. But if its program does not involve the relevant tasks, purchasing a certificate will not necessarily improve the ability to perform them. The question about the means is specific: what will be learned, how is the skill checked, how much time is required? No general conclusion that education is compensation is needed here. The stated task must match the course's structure. If the course is interesting in itself, that is another sufficient motive.

The cost of the means matters too. Someone can gain attention through constant urgency while exhausting loved ones and increasing their own dependence on crises. They can buy convenience at the price of debt that later narrows their freedom. These hypothetical examples show why satisfaction cannot be assessed through a single moment of relief. They do not authorize declaring every loan or request for help wrong. Scale, conditions, alternatives, mutual consent, and consequences matter. Actions that look similar from outside may perform different functions and have different costs for particular people.

Examining a means does not require abandoning it after the first mismatch. Sometimes conditions must be changed: add practice to education, agree on a time to talk, reduce the scale of commitments. Sometimes another path is better. Sometimes no suitable alternative is available, and a limitation must be acknowledged. “You can always choose differently” is especially inaccurate when resources are scarce. Being able to name several imagined means does not mean being able to use them. Honest assessment distinguishes theoretical replaceability from actual access: money, time, safety, documents, help, and the right to control one's own schedule.

IV. Psychological maps answer different questions

In their 2000 article, Edward Deci and Richard Ryan treat autonomy, competence, and relatedness as basic psychological needs within self-determination theory. Their concept of a need differs from just any strong motive: it concerns conditions for development and well-being. The abstract and opening theoretical sections were read here. This is a particular research model, not a complete inventory of the bodily, legal, and cultural conditions of human life.

The difference between a model and life matters practically. If someone needs transport to work, that question cannot be closed by saying transport is absent from the list of three needs. A theory chooses a level of explanation; a particular situation contains means, institutions, and constraints. Transport may support earning and social participation, but its availability does not follow automatically from a psychological formulation. A useful map helps reveal an aspect of experience; it does not replace a bus timetable, working conditions, or negotiations over accessibility. Using it does not privilege an observer to know a person's everyday life better than they do.

Sometimes a model really does clarify a question. In a hypothetical example, someone has mastered their work and is paid but increasingly objects to a manager deciding every step. One could consider whether participation in decisions matters to them. This is a hypothesis about a particular situation, not a diagnosis of thwarted autonomy based on one complaint. The next question concerns conditions: which decisions can be discussed, what is established by contract, how is responsibility organized? The distinction's usefulness is tested by whether it produces a more accurate conversation, not by how confidently a need is named.

Other models may identify different levels or use “need” differently. It does not follow that all maps are equally good or incompatible in every respect. A more modest rule follows: before comparing them, clarify their subject, grounds, and limitations. You cannot take a list from one approach and a moral hierarchy from another to produce a supposedly scientific universal test. Such mixtures often look understandable because all their words are familiar. Familiarity does

not prove a unified explanation. For a personal decision, a bounded question with a clear role is better than a complete portrait assembled from several mismatched schemes.

V. A hierarchy need not be a staircase with closed floors

In A Theory of Human Motivation, published in 1943, Abraham Maslow explicitly qualifies the rigidity of his proposed hierarchy and discusses needs being partially satisfied simultaneously. His historical theoretical work does not justify requiring one level to be completely finished before another is permitted. The relevant qualifications are used here, not the whole article as current medical guidance.

Someone living in a cramped apartment can still want to learn, love, create, and participate in common activities. Material conditions may severely restrict those possibilities; the right to an interest does not disappear with the restriction. It would be strange to say that wanting to read becomes real only after sufficient income is secured. It would be equally wrong to romanticize deprivation, as though enthusiasm canceled the lack of housing or food. Several tasks can be present simultaneously, even when a particular day requires prioritizing. The practical order of actions depends on the consequences of delay and available resources, not a prohibition against having more than one desire.

A hypothetical scene makes this visible without an elegant slogan. A student needs to pay for a room and wants to take part in a theater project. Rehearsals conflict with paid work. They might seek another shift, a smaller role, financial support, or a later project. None is guaranteed. If earning remains the choice, the creative desire is not erased. If a safe opportunity to participate emerges, perfect conditions everywhere else need not first be demonstrated. Actual consequences and commitments matter in both cases. The decision concerns a particular period, not a person's place in overall development.

A priority map is useful when it identifies the urgent. Delay that threatens health or safety differs from postponing a nonessential purchase. Yet urgency and value are different things. The week's most urgent task need not become life's central meaning. Conversely, something of great value does not always require action today. This distinction protects against two mistakes: spending necessary resources to prove fidelity to a dream, and treating the dream as unworthy because there is no room for it in the schedule yet. You can acknowledge its importance while choosing the actual next step.

VI. An ancient distinction between desires differs from modern classification

In the Letter to Menoeceus, Epicurus distinguishes natural, necessary, and other desires within an ethics of a tranquil life. This is a normative guide to choice, connected to his account of pleasure. It does not match an inventory of psychological needs or prove that every complex modern interest is unnatural.

The distinction can raise a useful question about a desire's limit. If you want a more comfortable chair, you can determine which features address the task. If you want an armchair that permanently proves your success, the boundary of satisfaction becomes less clear. But this is our comparison, not a quotation from an ancient doctrine about furniture. Someone may value design, craftsmanship, or memories of home. Not every expensive object symbolizes anxiety. Inquiry begins where the chosen form ceases to provide what was expected, not with a general accusation against pleasure or the complexity of cultural life.

“Enough for this task” differs especially from “I will never want again.” You can eat enough today while remaining a being who will need food again. You can receive support in one conversation without eliminating the importance of relationships forever. Satisfaction need not destroy the ability to need. If every need is expected to close permanently, a returning desire will look like failure. It is more practical to assess a particular period and task. This does not reject lasting changes; it declines to assign infinite service life to one action. An agreement sometimes needs revision too, because conditions change.

An ancient text may invite moderation without requiring a modern reader to adopt its entire ideal. Some desires concern expanding rights, complex creative work, or participation in society. Their cost cannot be assessed solely through the comfort of a private life. Philosophical reading becomes substantial when it reveals both proximity and disagreement. We can use the question of measure while retaining other values. Comparing traditions then does not become an order to live simply at any price. It offers a way to examine a choice, while the final answer requires context, responsibility, and personal participation.

VII. Several tasks can stand behind one means

Someone can want a shared dinner for food, rest, conversation, and preserving a family custom simultaneously. One means combines several meanings. If dissatisfaction remains afterwards, that does not yet prove the dinner was pointless. Perhaps food and rest were provided while the important conversation did not happen. You can clarify which task remained unresolved instead of canceling the whole experience. This precision reduces the burden on the next action: it no longer has to satisfy everything collected in the original desire without being named separately.

The reverse also happens. One object can become the single point on which every hope is placed. A new phone must provide convenience, colleagues' respect, a sense of being contemporary, and evidence that life is moving forward. Some functions can be checked; some depend on other people; some remain unclear. Untangling them requires neither buying nor refusing. It helps assess the cost and see which outcome actually belongs to the seller's offer. The device is not sold with guaranteed attitudes from others. If the purchase remains desirable after clarification, it can be considered without the extra promise.

This work should not become an endless search for a secret motive. Sometimes someone wants an object because they like it. Sometimes ordinary rest is needed. Demanding a deep need beneath every preference can take away simplicity and the right to pleasure. It helps to stop when the distinction no longer changes the decision. If you know you can afford the purchase, it performs its function, and it violates no important commitments, a complete explanation of your personality is unnecessary. The lack of a deep story does not make the choice shallow in a condemnatory sense; it may mean the question is clear enough for action.

VIII. Another person's need does not make you an obligatory means

When someone close says they need support, the request deserves attention. It does not automatically determine how much time you must provide or which role you must occupy. Different people's needs meet in relationships where consent, capabilities, and agreements matter. You can understand a request's significance yet decline its proposed form. Refusing one means does not equal denying the person. Refusal becomes more responsible when clearly stated without humiliation: what you can and cannot offer, and whether there is a suitable alternative you are actually prepared to provide.

In a hypothetical scene, a friend wants to talk every night because they are struggling. You are willing to meet several times a week, but constant nighttime conversations disrupt your work and rest. A discussion about timing, other support, and the limits of your role is possible. This

example is not intended for an immediate threat to life, which requires appropriate emergency help. It shows an ordinary limit to an arrangement between friends. Their difficulty is real; your limits are real too. Support does not require concealing one fact for the sake of the other or promising help that cannot be provided sustainably.

Your own request can follow the same principle. “Talking matters to me; do you have time?” leaves the other person room to respond. “If you love me, you must do this now” links a need to a test of the relationship. Such words may arise in a difficult moment, but their consequences deserve attention. They supply no further information about the task; they increase the cost of refusal. A more precise request names what matters while leaving room for agreement. Agreement is not guaranteed. Yet its uncertainty does not oblige turning desire into a demand or relationships into a constant way of confirming one's right to need.

IX. Not every dissatisfaction is resolved through inner work

Sometimes a means fails because external conditions prevent it from working. Rest is interrupted by an obligatory second shift; food is restricted by money; distance complicates closeness; the environment excludes participation. Naming a need matters, but the name is insufficient. Discussing motives can clarify personal actions without creating an absent resource. If accessible infrastructure or protection of rights is needed, individual flexibility does not replace the relevant changes. Particular circumstances and available collective, social, or professional support must be assessed, rather than blaming someone for an insufficiently conscious choice.

It helps to distinguish three situations: the means does not match the task; it matches but is unavailable; the task remains unclear. The first calls for examining alternatives, the second conditions of access, the third clarifying the question itself. These actions are not interchangeable. Someone who knows they need sleep but must care for a relative without help does not necessarily need another analysis of a deep desire. Perhaps care responsibilities need discussion. Analysis sometimes reveals precisely its own limits. That is a substantial result: a problem does not become personal merely because it is described in the first person.

Limited choice still leaves questions, but they must match what is possible. What is really available this week? Which part of the workload can be negotiated? Who has authority to change conditions? What do you not yet know about support? An answer can be small and leave much unresolved. It must not become evidence that every constraint is controllable. If an external change fails, that is not yet a failure of personal maturity. You can acknowledge difficulty, retain your right to need, and seek the next suitable source of support without first having to repair your attitude toward an absent resource.

X. A good distinction keeps the person involved in the decision

Need, desire, and means are useful words if they restore precision and the ability to choose. They become power over a person when an observer declares, “I know your real need; your desire does not matter.” Even a valid general model grants no such right. Someone can refine their own account, challenge an interpretation, and refuse a proposed practice. In conversation, proposing a hypothesis and checking whether it is recognizable in experience is enough. Disagreement should not be explained as resistance that supposedly proves the interpreter correct.

At the beginning, the friend said care was needed rather than food. A more accurate conversation might be: “Have you not eaten for a while? Would you like us to have dinner together?” Those questions do not demand a single explanation. They allow hunger, closeness, and a particular taste simultaneously. The available form can then be discussed: cook, order, meet later. Understanding develops from the response instead of replacing it. If someone says they simply want to eat alone, that information matters more than a theory about how they should meet their need for connection.

The result of a good distinction is usually more modest than complete self-explanation. You may learn that one means fits, another is too expensive, a third task requires a different person, and part of the question remains open. That is enough to act more precisely. No final inventory of personal needs or purification of desires from every social influence is required. Life continues, conditions change, and new preferences emerge. Stability here lies not in lacking needs but in being able to notice them, assess means, and revise decisions without humiliation. A map remains a conversational tool while someone retains the right to describe their life in their own words.

What this means in practice

Choose one desire that currently calls for a decision, if examining it is useful. Write the initial sentence without correcting it: for example, “I want to go away for the weekend.” Beside it, describe the change you expect and the means you have already imagined. Do not immediately supply a deep explanation. Perhaps fewer responsibilities, new experiences, or time together are needed. You can list several possibilities and leave unknowns open. The note does not establish a true motive; it makes assumptions visible and available to examine.

Next ask which parts of what is wanted the chosen means can provide. A trip changes location but does not necessarily reduce work messages or redistribute childcare. Which conditions must be agreed? What is included in the price? Is there an available alternative for one part of the task? An alternative need not equal the whole desire. If a walk provides movement without

replacing a week's rest, the question should not be declared resolved. Compare particular functions while preserving differences in scale and quality.

Name the constraints and other participants separately. Whose consent is required, what amount is affordable, what cannot be postponed, what does safety depend on? Naming a need does not cancel others' rights. Naming constraints does not prohibit wanting. You can then select one manageable step: request conditions, discuss timing, try a small version, or defer the decision. Establish in advance what information it will provide. Do not promise complete satisfaction where only one part can be examined.

After the experience, return to the original statement. What changed? Which task was addressed and which remained? A lack of clarity is an acceptable result. The practice can be stopped when it increases self-blame or costs more energy than it contributes to the decision. It does not replace medical, legal, or social support where those are relevant. Its limit is simple: distinguish one need, its desired form, and an available means, leaving you the right to retain the desire, change the means, and disagree with someone else's interpretation.

Key quotation

> *“Not nearly as rigid.”*

Abraham Maslow, A Theory of Human Motivation, 1943, section III, “The degree of fixity of the hierarchy of basic needs.” The Russian version translates this fragment editorially. Its context qualifies the ordering of the proposed hierarchy; it does not say that priorities are absent.

Connections between traditions

Comparison	Similarity and actual difference
Self-determination theory ↔ everyday need	The model clarifies psychological conditions; everyday necessity extends beyond its subject.
Maslow ↔ several tasks simultaneously	The historical hierarchy includes qualifications. This does not authorize ignoring an urgent bodily need.
Epicurus ↔ assessing a desire's measure	Ethics asks about choice and tranquility; modern psychological theory poses a different research question.
Need ↔ particular request	An important need does not establish a single form as obligatory or cancel others' consent.

This map is an authored comparison, not a unified scientific classification or evidence that traditions are identical.

Sources

1. Deci E. L., Ryan R. M. The “What” and “Why” of Goal Pursuits, 2000. Psychological Inquiry 11(4), 227–268. The abstract and opening sections on the concept of need, pp. 227–230, were read; the entire review is not claimed as read.

2. Maslow A. H. A Theory of Human Motivation, 1943. Psychological Review 50, 370–396; electronic edition, Classics in the History of Psychology. Relevant sections on needs and hierarchy qualifications were read; historical diagnostic assertions are not used.

3. Epicurus. Letter to Menoeceus, translated by Robert Drew Hicks. The letter was read; the distinction concerning desires, §§127–132, is used here. Ancient ethics, not modern empirical classification.

Tags

needs, desires, means, satisfaction, choice, motives, necessity, preferences, autonomy, competence, relatedness, self-determination theory, Maslow, Epicurus, moderation, priorities, resources, requests, consent, relationships, constraints, cost, accessibility, comparison of traditions, voluntary practice.

About the authors

Andrey Zarinsh is the author and founder of United Wisdom. He explores inner transformation, the unity of traditions, intercultural dialogue, and contemporary spiritual discipline. Instagram: @andrey.zarinsh.

Maria Evilkut is a co-author of United Wisdom. Alongside her research, she seeks to test these ideas in practice and observe how principles of unity and mutual understanding work in real life between people and cultures. Instagram: @ilkutki.