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On Desire: Why We Want What We Want

William B. Irvine

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A married person falls deeply in love with someone else. A man of average income feels he cannot be truly happy unless he owns an expensive luxury car. A dieter has an irresistible craving for ice cream. Desires often come to us unbidden and unwanted, and they can have a dramatic impact, sometimes changing the course of our lives.
In On Desire, William B. Irvine takes us on a wide-ranging tour of our impulses, wants, and needs, showing us where these feelings come from and how we can try to rein them in. Spicing his account with engaging observations by writers like Seneca, Tolstoy, and Freud, Irvine considers the teachings of Buddhists, Hindus, the Amish, Shakers, and Catholic saints, as well as those of ancient Greek and Roman and modern European philosophers. Irvine also looks at what modern science can tell us about desire--what happens in the brain when we desire something and how animals evolved particular desires--and he advances a new theory about how desire itself evolved. Irvine also suggests that at the same time that we gained the ability to desire, we were "programmed" to find some things more desirable than others. Irvine concludes that the best way to attain lasting happiness is not to change the world around us or our place in it, but to change ourselves. If we can convince ourselves to want what we already have, we can dramatically enhance our happiness.
Brimming with wisdom and practical advice, On Desire offers a thoughtful approach to controlling unwanted passions and attaining a more meaningful life.

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