

Phil. 609. Handout 16. A discussion about ends, written by Francis Slade. For the published text see Slade, "Ends and Purposes," in *Final Causality in Nature and Human Affairs*, ed. Richard Hassing, 83-85 (Washington DC: CUA Press, 1997).

"End" as a translation of *telos* means what a thing will be that has become fully determined in its being; the defined; the complete; a condition of perfection, completion, fulfillment. "End" as a translation of *telos* does not mean "termination," as when a road ends in a "dead end"; it does not signify that something no longer exists, as when we say that "death is the end of life." End, as *telos*, signifies a continuing state of perfectedness; it is akin to the meaning of "finish," where we are speaking about what the cabinet maker does last in making a piece of furniture: he puts the finish on it, i.e., brings it to perfection in completion.

End, as *telos*, is not synonymous with "purpose," although the words are commonly understood to be, and are used as, synonyms. But *telos* does not mean purpose. Agents and actors have "purposes" by which they determine themselves to certain actions. Purposes are motives, "motors" propelling us toward destinations. Ends (*telos*), on the other hand, are characteristic of all kinds of things; the end of the axe is "cutting," but the axe executes no purpose in its cutting. Those who use axes, the agents, have many purposes: to clear land, to obtain firewood, to blaze trails, to attack someone, etc. Ends are not executed by agents. Purposes require agents. Purposes belong to agents as they determine themselves to actions.

The end of the art of medicine, a body of knowledge and skills, is the restoration and maintenance of the condition called health. A man's purpose in practicing medicine can be various, from the making of money to the relief of suffering humanity out of a love of mankind, just as long as the purpose is congruent with the end for which medicine exists. The art of medicine does not exist in order to provide the people who practice it with money; nor does it exist in order to allow those who practice it to demonstrate their sympathy with and benevolence towards their fellow human beings. One may, of course, execute such purposes in the practice of the art of medicine. But suppose that the money-making physician finds that he can make enormously more money using his medical skills to kill people rather than to cure them; or, suppose again, that the philanthropic physician's sympathy for the suffering leads him to kill his patients "mercifully." These purposes, i.e., making money and demonstrating one's love for fellow men, are no longer congruent with the end of the art of medicine. For if such purposes were systematically executed by most physicians, they would lead to the destruction of the art itself, since, if physicians acquired a reputation for killing rather than for curing, no one would wish to consult them. Since everyone would do everything possible to avoid them, there would soon be no physicians, for without patients the art cannot be practiced, and so could not be learned.

*Ends exist independently of our willing them; they do not originate in our willing them to be.*

*Purposes take their origin from our willing them; purposes would not be if agents did not give them being.*

The Hippocratic Oath taken by physicians forbids the use of the art of medicine to kill people. This prohibition is for the sake of the art rather than for what are known as "moral reasons." Killing those upon whom they attend is forbidden to physicians by the Hippocratic Oath, not because it is morally wrong to murder people – the wrongness of murder is something that applies to all men and it is forbidden by whatever laws they acknowledge themselves to be subject to – but because to use the art of medicine to kill people destroys the art. The Oath, then, is for the sake of the art. The Hippocratic Oath does not forbid murder by medicine to physicians on account of the patients, but on account of the art of medicine. Nor would a physician violate the Oath by murdering someone in a manner that did not depend upon the art of medicine. Should a physician shoot someone with a shotgun and kill him, he does not thereby violate his Hippocratic Oath. The physician who murders someone with a shotgun may be indicted and tried for murder, convicted, and incur the legal punishment for the act, but he is not for that reason excluded from the practice of medicine.

Purpose is synonymous with "intention." I define it (following Oakeshott [*On Human Conduct*, p. 39]) as "an imagined and wished-for satisfaction." Aristotle's term *proairesis* is "purpose" in this sense. Man has an end (*telos*); individual human beings have "intentions" or "purposes" in executing their acts. Purpose – *proairesis* –, the efficient cause of action, is what we *propose* to ourselves to do.

"The idea is that you start out with certain ends – things that you favor or want." (Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality*, p. 31) This is precisely *what ends are not*, but certainly what they are frequently, and mistakenly, taken to be. What we "favor," or what we "want," describes purposes, not ends. "Favoring" and "wanting" are words indicating what can be loosely described as some kind of "mental activity." While purposes presuppose such activity, ends do not. They do not originate out of "mental activity"; their reality does not derive from being constituted by such activities, activities which have their being in "consciousness." An end is "out there" beyond favoring and wanting. Ends do not come to be out of what I favor, or what I want.