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# Needs, need, needing \*

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## Editor's note

*It is a pervasive assumption that the proper basis for medical care is medical need. A further assumption that doctors and administrators frequently make is that medical resources ought to be distributed according to medical need. But what is need? In this paper it is argued that there are two concepts of need, often conflated. One is an elliptical and instrumental concept – that of need relative to some specified or specifiable desired end. The other concept is that of a need taken in a categorical or absolute sense. It is with this that the author begins, claiming that it can be defined in terms of the relative sense, and suggesting that in the context of justifying rights and imposing duties, including those relating to health care, it is the categorical concept and its various further determinations that are important.*

1. Need is often thought of as desire of a special kind, (for example, rational desire or strong desire, or whatever). But how can this be right? Certainly need will often find its characteristic *expression* in desire. But since this expression will sometimes be markedly inadequate to the need itself, it is hard to believe that needs as such are the same as desires, or that needing as such is the same as any sort of desiring.

It may be suggested that a need is some sort of a *corrected* desire: but to make this idea work would involve much elaboration of the requisite 'correction', while drawing relatively little upon the idea of desire. (Nor would the suggestion save the extravagant claims sometimes made on behalf of the economic theory of revealed preference that depends on so simple a conception of desire and the springs of action.) It may be better therefore to acknowledge the general distinctness of these notions of need and of desire, and to accord the full *prima facie* force to all the various differences.

For consider: I can desire something without needing it (or even thinking or subconsciously supposing that I do). And I can need something without desiring it (or without even having heard of it). Again, if I desire to have *x* and *x* is the same as *y*, I do

not necessarily desire to have *y*. Whereas with needs this implication *will* hold: I can only need to have *x* if whatever may be identical with *x* is something that I need. These points arise out of a more general one. What I need depends not on thought or the working of my mind (or not only on these), as wanting or desiring do, but depends on the way things really are. Another notable consequence of this is that, when one wants something because it is *F*, one has only to believe or suspect that it is *F*, whereas, when one needs something because it is *F*, it must *really* be *F*, whether or not one believes that it is (1). For instance, if it is true that the patient needs medication *M* because *M* will reduce the blood pressure, then *M* must really reduce the blood pressure, whether or not the patient or doctor knows or thinks it will.

2. Nevertheless, despite these differences, there are at least two similarities between need and desire. First, one may have no actual lack of that which one desires, and exactly similarly, one may have no actual lack of that which one needs (2). And secondly, there is a grammatical affinity in the sorts of language we use to speak of need and of desire. Just as 'desire' ('want') can either denote a thing desired (wanted) or denote a particular given state or condition of desire (want), or stand for that condition in general, so 'need' can either denote a thing needed or denote a particular given state or condition of needing or stand for that condition in general.

3. These similarities are insufficient to close the gap between needs and desires; but they are not for that reason any less important.

Consider the second similarity. In their accounts of need some writers have started out from things needed and others from the state or condition of need. This is potentially confusing. But, except where a theory of need is hopelessly muddled, it is usually possible to extrapolate from the account of the one to the corresponding account of the other. Aristotle, for instance, characterises a necessity or thing that is necessary, in the special sense of 'necessary' corresponding to our 'needed' or 'needful' to which he accords separate recognition, as a thing:

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## Key words

Need; necessity; needs and ethics; medical need; basic need.

'without which it is impossible to live (as one cannot

live without breathing and nourishment), or without which it is not possible for good to exist or come to be or for bad to be discarded or got rid of (as for example, drinking medicine is necessary so as not to be ill, or sailing to Aegina so as to get money)' (3).

But one may readily deduce that it would have been Aristotle's view that I need to have  $x$  if and only if my having  $x$  is a precondition, things being what they are, of my continuing to live and/or a precondition, things being what they are, of my enjoying good or ridding myself of evil (4). On this view, my needing  $x$  is a state or condition of dependency upon  $x$  with respect to some (in the situation) non-negotiable good of avoiding some independently specifiable harm. Needing  $x$  is a dependency upon having  $x$  in particular. For instance, a thirty-five-year-old woman's need for calcium is a state of dependency, with respect to the avoidance of independently specifiable harms such as osteoporosis or whatever, on the intake of calcium.

Tidying up a little and making one or two further decisions of theory, it might then be said that I need at time  $t_i$  to have  $x$  at time  $t_j$  if and only if there is some serious harm that I can avoid, and it is necessary, things being as they actually are during the relevant period  $p$  in which  $t_i$  lies, that, if I am to avoid that harm, then I have  $x$  at  $t_j$  (5).

What has to be added here is that the idea of harm is correlative with ideas of human life and flourishing that each age and each culture has to make what it can of; and that, even within a culture at a time, these ideas are of their nature *essentially contestable*. That does not mean that in this area of discourse just anything goes, or that the process of determination of harm is simply a matter of counting ayes and noes. These ideas of life, harm, flourishing are the focus of reasoned argument, and of a rich variety of opposing analogies, which it can still be hoped will converge in agreement over essentials that is both principled and capable of justifying itself. (In this, as in almost everything else, we draw credit in the present upon the prospect of agreement. There is no rational alternative but to do so.) Nor are these ideas of life, flourishing and harm any the worse for being essentially contestable – that is the condition of all important ideas – or rendered inapplicable by virtue of being temporally and culturally conditioned. One might think that ideas that are conditioned by one's own time and culture are the ones that one ought to find it *easiest* both to criticise and, after refinement by criticism, to apply.

4. The elucidation proposed redeploys one of the earliest accounts of needs, need and needing in the history of philosophy. Even if it serves to single out a notion rather different from any that has figured within a principle of justice discussed in the main stream of current moral or political philosophy, this may yet be the reflection of a deficiency in current ways of doing these things (6). What seems certain is that the proposal explains very well the uses of the word 'need'

that stir our sense of importance or excite controversy. It explains admirably what we might mean by saying 'In spite of the development of *in vitro* methods of test and experiment and advances in tissue culture techniques, we still need to perform experiments on live animals'; or what G D H Cole meant in saying of the Beveridge Plan, 'The outstanding object [of the plan] is to provide as far as possible a unified system of income maintenance to cover needs arising from a variety of causes'; or what was meant in the often quoted nineteenth century socialist maxim, 'From each according to his ability, to each according to his need' (7).

Every adequate account of need will have to interpret such claims convincingly. Yet if we stopped here, the Aristotelian account would be seriously inadequate, and suspicion would gather around the very idea of seeing the thing needed, in the way that the account proposes, as the precondition of some in the circumstances non-negotiable or relatively non-negotiable goal of harm-avoidance. What if I say 'I need £20,000 to buy that Rolls Royce,' or what if, having several suits already but wanting another, I simply say 'I need to find £200', where £200 is the price of the new suit that I want? The Aristotelian account must take these claims as both portentous and false – as portentous because it seems that the need is being represented as in some way connected with survival or life, and as false because the suit is *not* in fact indispensable to me. But there is of course a perfectly ordinary way of taking them as unpretentious and true. And it is this possibility, which is clearly provided for in language, that has encouraged a rival idea (8), namely that needing is always by its nature needing for a purpose – any purpose at all that may be specified – and that statements of need which do not mention relevant purposes are somehow elliptical (according to some, dishonestly elliptical) for sentences that do mention them (9).

5. One thing seems right with the elliptical view and another seems wrong. Let us take the right thing first.

The sentence 'I need £200', as said under the circumstances described, and as understood in the weak way that seems to be available (understood, that is, either as an ellipse for 'I need £200 to buy a suit' or as meaning 'there is an end of mine for which £200 is necessary'), only requires for its truth something of the form:

It is necessary (relative to time  $t_i$  and relative to the  $t_j$  circumstances  $c$ , not excluding the norms that rule out, for example, stealing) that if (. . . at  $t_k$  suitably related to  $t_j$ ) then (--- at  $t_j$ ).

(The antecedent '. . .' in our present case relates to my having the suit and the consequent '---' relates to my having £200 to spend.)

What seems wrong with the elliptical view is its concluding from the analytical success of the point just

made that no independent recognition ought to be given to the Aristotelian construal of 'need' that furnishes us with an essentially contestable content for a whole class of judgements of need and forces us in the case of each such judgement to find or determine the contextually appropriate norm of good or flourishing by reference to which some question of harm can be judged.

Suppose a critic reacts to the situation as described by saying 'All right: you do need £200 to buy that suit. But you don't need £200, because you don't *need* to have that suit'. What the ellipse theory and its associates are committed to claim is that I can still insist there is some end of mine for which the suit is necessary. Yet it seems plain that, in the circumstances as so far described, I cannot without deliberate misunderstanding of what they are now saying make this retort. I don't, in the distinct sense of 'need' that the critics of my need claim have insisted on introducing into the exchange, need the suit – not if I can, as we are supposing, get on without it, and my life will not (as judged by the standard created by the context and shared ideas of life and flourishing that help make up the background for that context) be blighted by the lack of it.

What seems to follow from all this is 1) that there is an instrumental sense of 'need', where we can ask for some purpose to be specified or indicated in a non-elliptical version of the 'needs' claim and there are *no limits* on what purpose there is (though this does not *have* to be a frivolous purpose – 'I need a private room for my happiness/comfort/sleep/privacy' – and can even, compatibly with the instrumental sense, be Aristotelian flourishing itself or whatever): and 2) that there is another, non-instrumental sense of 'need' by which the particular sort of contestable end or purpose that Aristotle gestures towards is already fixed – though not named, because it is already conveyed in virtue of this particular meaning of the word. ('The patient needs a private room'. 'Why?' 'He is in a state of nervous collapse'/'He is a busy Cabinet Minister'/'His company will collapse unless he can read papers and make telephone calls within twenty four hours of his admission to hospital'.)

6. The connexion between the purely instrumental sense of 'need' and the sense that is not purely instrumental, or the sense we may call (simply for the sake of a name, not to suggest some transcendent power of trumping all other considerations) the *absolute* (or *categorical*) sense of 'need' may be set out then in two equivalences:

- (I) I need [categorically] to have  $x$   
if and only if  
I need [instrumentally] to have  $x$  if I am to avoid harm
- (II) I need [instrumentally] to have  $x$  if I am to avoid harm  
if and only if

It is necessary, things being what they actually are,  
that if I am to avoid harm then I have  $x$ .

If what distinguishes the categorical sense of 'need', so defined by reference to the purely instrumental, is that the appeal is made to harm-avoidance simply by virtue of what is carried along by this sense of the word itself, and not in virtue of context (whatever part context plays in determining that this is the sense intended), then obviously there is no question here of ellipse. One does not have to supply again what, for this sense, is already semantically present.

7. If we are drawn to this view of the matter, then we need not shift our favour towards the reductive approach to categorical needs, seen as 'rationally corrected strong desires' or whatever, in order to explain or accommodate the fact that need finds its characteristic expression in desire. After all, harm being what it is, harm is something we all desire to avoid. (Need, not itself being desire, makes its rational appeal to desire.) And nor, on our Aristotelian account, do we have to despair entirely (if not of approving – one can scarcely *approve* of a definition that fails even to make a space for the thing needed!) at least of *seeing the point* of certain common, therapeutically inspired accounts that seek to characterise the condition of need as (say) 'any behaviour tendency whose continued denial or frustration leads to pathological responses' (10). These accounts are ill-considered, and much too specialised. But when we have attempted our next task, which is a general classification of needs, we shall at least be in a position to isolate the class of needs to which, in their rough and ready way, they apply the best.

8. Once one settles for a redeployment of Aristotle and says that a person needs [categorically or absolutely] at time  $t_i$  to enjoy  $x$  at  $t_j$  if and only if, whatever morally and socially acceptable variation it is (economically, technologically, politically, historically) possible (relative to the circumstances of the time span appropriate for  $t_i$ ) realistically to envisage as actually occurring, that person will suffer harm (as judged by the standards appropriate for that time span) unless  $x$  is available to him or her at  $t_j$ , one will see that any statement of need is bound to provoke many further questions. (More in fact than we can even mention here.)

There is the question of the *badness* or *gravity* of the need. How much harm or suffering would be occasioned by going without the thing in question? And there is a consequential question of *urgency*: given that some not inconsiderable harm or suffering would be occasioned by going without the thing in question, how soon must this thing be supplied? And then there are the further questions of the *basicness*, the *entrenchment*, and the *substitutability* of needs (11). These are all intended as technical terms, however, requiring deliberate introduction. Their meaning is

not something intended to be determined by reference to existing usage.

When we attempt to survey the class of alternative possible futures and then, restricting this to envisageable acceptable futures, we ask whether every future in which a person is not harmed is one in which he or she has *x*, we shall often discover that it is a matter of degree how difficult it is to identify and envisage realistically some alternative in which they escape harm without having *x*, or a matter of degree how morally acceptable it would be to propose or to acquiesce in the idea of that alternative's being deliberately brought about. Often we shall have to resolve such difficulties by imposing a threshold on what departures from the familiar we are to regard as realistically envisageable, as morally acceptable, and as practical politics. The lower the threshold of envisageability and social possibility is placed the more futures then count as real alternatives and the harder it will then become *pro tanto* for a need statement to count as true. Seeing the effects of the lower placement of the threshold, yet being reluctant to deny that the person really needs *x* at all, we shall often have to choose between (i) raising the threshold of practical envisageability and social possibility again; (ii) quite differently, lowering (relaxing) the standard by which *the harm to the person* is judged, allowing more things to count as harm (here, as with option (i), owing reasons for this decision to anyone who asks for them); and (iii) retaining the ordinary standard of harm and the lower threshold of moral and political possibility, together with the exigent truth-condition they jointly import, but disjoining having *x* with having some potential slightly inferior substitute for *x*. ('She will be harmed unless she gets *x* or *x'* or *x''* . . .')

In the light of all this, it will be a useful stipulation to say that *y*'s need for *x* is *entrenched* if the question of whether *y* can remain unharmed without having *x* is rather insensitive to the placing of the aforementioned threshold of realistic envisageability-cum-political and moral acceptability of alternative futures. When we are concerned with the problem of arbitration between general needs claims or arbitration between general needs claims and other claims, it will then be useful to distinguish between entrenchment with respect to the shorter term (where extant arrangements create definite requirements that cannot be escaped immediately but may be in due course escaped) and their entrenchment with respect to the longer term. Although some disruptions of the established order that would enable people to escape all harm without having *x* cannot be envisaged happening as it were overnight, however desirable they may be, yet in many cases they are readily described, and can be realistically envisaged as taking place gradually and by stages.

Developing one special case of entrenchment, one might then stipulate that a person's need for *x* is *basic* just if what excludes futures in which he or she remains unharmed despite his/her not having *x* are laws of nature, unalterable and invariable environmental

facts, or facts about human constitution. And within the basic, one might try to discriminate between that which is owed to unchangeable tendencies of things to turn out in one rather than another specifiable kind of way (either in general, or in this particular place, time, or culture) and that which is owed to something non-negotiable in various ideas about human harm and flourishing that condition our sense of the socially possible (as well as our sense of what this or that person must have).

Finally, we may find it useful to be able to say that a person's need for *x* is *substitutable with respect to x* if some slight lowering of the standard by which his or her particular harm is judged would permit us to weaken the claim of need by disjoining the person's having *x* with his or her having *x'* or *x''* or whatever.

9. It should be obvious that these labels correspond to overlapping but independent categorisations. For instance, a need for *x* can be not very grave but basic, (12); or it can be grave and also urgent yet substitutable with respect to *x* (13); or grave in the extreme and highly entrenched insofar as it is urgent, but, insofar as it is not urgent, relatively superficially entrenched in the mid-term and not entrenched at all in the long term (14). It should be equally obvious how important it is to be clear whether the need we are talking about stems from a judgement about a particular person, or about all people in specified kinds of circumstances, or (making the truth-condition the strictest of all) all people under all actual variations of circumstance. It seems that the better we can arrange our affairs to avoid the necessity to generalise recklessly about people's needs (and there surely is some room for manoeuvre here – perhaps we can still survive if we try to determine fewer matters by a general standard), the more awful mistakes we shall avoid (15). But this is not to say that the attempt to arrive at such generalisations is always gratuitous (16). Nobody who supposed this could have tried to think seriously about the problems of national health schemes, for instance, or subsidised and non-subsidised medical insurance schemes (17).

10. And now, as promised, we may briefly return to the therapeutically inspired accounts of need. One point of such accounts relates not to need's being less 'subjective' than mere desire (18), but to the role of need in bringing out what is *vital* to human beings in questions of the distribution of benefits and burdens (or even pointing to a *sine qua non* of their being party to political consensus). The plausibility and point of such accounts is obvious so soon as their scope is restricted (as may always have been intended) to needs for *x* that are grave, scarcely substitutable with respect to *x*, entrenched, basic, and basic at least partly in virtue of fundamental physiological or psychological facts. It is hard to see how there could be needs that were much more important – more vital – to us than these are. If our attempts to satisfy such needs as these are frustrated, then the response to that frustration may

indeed be pathological. Even here, however, it is important to see that the idea of harm remains essentially contestable. We have said our piece against the ellipse view of 'need', at least as a semantical proposal. But the misconceptions that it rests upon may well go deeper than we have so far said.

One of the adherents of the ellipse view claims, as if in confirmation of that view, that the 'reason why a doctor is generally able to prescribe for the needs of his patients is that he can . . . take it for granted . . . that they have come to him . . . because they believe he can and will help them to get better' (Flew (9)). This is not straightforwardly false. But not only is it an oversimple account of the doctor-patient relationship, lending no support to the ellipse view of needing: it can also suggest something else that the end of §3 has already suggested is definitely false – namely that there is simply no problem over and above a scientific problem about the relevant, appropriate and in the circumstances attainable norm of good or flourishing by reference to which harm can be judged. Nothing could appear further from the truth, even within the province of the most uncontroversially physical medicine (19).

11. Finally, needs and rights – an area where clarity is impossible unless all political and historical associations that lack a conceptual basis are put firmly out of mind. It is by no means uncommon among writers with a political purpose – whether of right or left, whether to diminish or to extend the reach of the idea – to characterise a need as 'a legitimate or morally sanctioned demand', or as something that has 'by definition a right to satisfaction' (20). But as against this, one must surely concur in E D Watt's objection: 'What it is important to insist . . . is that it can make good sense to speak of needs without implying an active obligation on the part of any person to meet these needs' (21).

Watt's point is only reinforced if we consider the view he is questioning in the light of the so-called 'beneficiary' conception of rights (which is surely the conception most hospitable to it) (22). A careful adherent of such a position may certainly hold that to say that a person has a right is to say that some interest of that person's is a sufficient reason for holding another person or body to be subject to some duty that serves the interest (23). But not just any old interest will count, or just any old ground. Everything depends on what kind of interest, with what provenance, and (if the interest passes that test) what protection, if any, is not only stably and foreseeably beneficial to the right holder in society, but also nearly invariably indispensable to the protection of that interest (24). What the Aristotelian account explains is how needs can be important enough in certain classes of case to be indispensable to the justification for imposing such duties, and how they can generate all sorts of other non rights-based duties and prohibitions, not how needs automatically generate rights.

12. A theoretical interest in the idea of need has often seemed to certain sorts of philosophers to be somehow sinister or suspect – as if our discovering what exactly we mean by what we say when we speak of needs (and the Aristotelian account shows very well the difficulty of our dispensing with the idea) would either foment revolution or (as in another familiar charge) put us at the mercy of dreaded experts (appointed, self-appointed, or elected) or of other ministers to the totalitarian state. But in sober fact the connexion of needs with moral rights is subtle and indirect, and norms of harm and flourishing are not, as we have stressed, the intellectual property of experts.

If what someone fears is that expert opinion and/or some wide public consensus about what is a good or a wretched life may license massive interference in the freedom of those not party to the consensus, then there are two further points to make: first, that, in operation within a non-authoritarian, critical society in which discussion was both free and effective, any principle of the priority of need that was found worthy to be recognised might well *restore* freedom or choice or independence to classes whose freedom was intolerably restricted and narrow, or had been very substantially diminished (25): and second, that, at least according to our account, freedom, choice, and autonomy can be argued to be vital human needs, and that this will make them candidates for any protection that is accorded *qua* needs to other real needs. It is within the power of the idea of need to suggest limitations upon the power of the State, as well as to suggest the desirability, in certain well understood cases that can be carefully determined, of the State's raising taxes, for example for the purpose of giving education, health or self-sufficiency to its citizens, or the desirability of the State's limiting the freedom that some enjoy to diminish the freedom and autonomy of others (26).

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## References and notes

\* This article draws on materials of joint authorship already drawn upon in other ways in David Wiggins's 'Claims of Need', which appeared first in *Morality and objectivity*, Ed. T Honderich (London: Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1985) and then in a slightly different version in *Needs, values, truth* (Oxford: Aristotelian Society and Blackwell, 1986). The task of revising and extending these materials for the present article was undertaken while David Wiggins was a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, California. Acknowledgement is due to the Andrew W Mellon Foundation for financial support of his fellowship there. Some of this material was presented in the 1982 John Locke Lecture at the Society of Apothecaries.

(1) See A R White *Modal thinking* (Oxford: Blackwell 1971): 114.

(2) See again White page 107. For the other view see S I Benn and R S Peters *Social principles and the democratic*

state (London: Allen, and Unwin, 1959): 143; and for vestiges of the same, see an article to which we are in other ways indebted, R A Wollheim, 'Needs, Desires, and Moral Turpitude', in G Vesey and S Brown eds, *Nature & Conduct* (London: Macmillan, 1975): 174.

- (3) *Metaphysics* 1015<sup>a20</sup>. For the similar standard English use of the word 'necessity', see for instance, a passage of Adam Smith *Wealth of Nations* [v 2 2] that could almost stand as a gloss or comment on Aristotle:

'By necessities I understand not only the commodities that are indispensably necessary for the support of life, but whatever the custom of the country renders it indecent or intolerable for creditable people even of the lowest rank to be without.'

- (4) Compare 1) G E M Anscombe 'Modern moral philosophy', *Philosophy*, 1958: 'To say that [an organism] needs that environment is not to say, for example, that you want it to have that environment, but that it won't flourish unless it has it. Certainly, it all depends whether you *want* it to flourish! as Hume would say. But what "all depends" on whether you want it to flourish is whether the fact that it needs that environment, or won't flourish without it, has the slightest influence on your actions'; 2) Joel Feinberg in *Social philosophy*, N J: Prentice Hall, Englewood cliffs, 1973: 111: 'In a general sense to say that X needs X is to say simply that if he doesn't have X he will be harmed'. (Cp David Miller, *Social justice*, Oxford: OUP, 1976: 130; David Richards, *A theory of reasons for action*, Oxford: OUP, 1970: 37–38.)

The main difference between most of these analyses or elucidations and the one we modify from Aristotle consists in the fact that we see *need* as an explicitly modal notion, which leads us to insist that Anscombe's conditional be governed by 'necessarily'. For other works also presumably under the direct or indirect influence of Aristotle's and/or Anscombe's formulation, see David Wiggins, *Sameness & substance*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980: 183; and J Finnis, *Natural law and natural rights*, Oxford: 1980, *passim*.

- (5) We make a stab here at the difficult and intricate question of tense. We depart from Anscombe's use of 'flourish' (see the quotation in note (4)), and slightly thereby reduce the reach of needing. But norms of flourishing will return in another capacity, so soon as we address the problem of what harm is. (Suffering as such we take as neither necessary nor sufficient for harm.)

We insist upon *avoidable* harm (ie harm that is avoidable in the circumstances), lest some circumstantially impossible antecedent of the conditional 'if I avoid ----, then I have . . . ' should be taken to verify the whole formula vacuously and to show that I *do* need to have . . . This point transcends the technical. Without it we could not say – what seems to be true – that when I am terminally ill, and doomed to die however the future is realistically envisaged, then I may begin to lose my ordinary needs, even as I acquire other, highly particular and special needs. The idea of harm has to shape itself to fit the case.

- (6) For the claim that it is not, see James Griffin 'Modern utilitarianism'. *Revue internationale de philosophie*, No 141, 1982: 340–343.
- (7) See for instance Karl Marx, *Critique of Gotha Programme* (towards the end of Marx's third comment on the

document). Cp Shakespeare *Lea* 'So distribution should undo excess/and each man have enough', 4.1.66. (Cp also *Lea* 3.4.28.) According to Gregory Vlastos 'Justice and Equality' in Brandt, ed. *Social justice*, Prentice Hall, 1962; "To each according to his need" . . . is in fact the most perfect form of equal distribution' (page 40).

For nineteenth century pre-Marxian formulations of the abilities/needs principle, Louis Blanc's and others see pp: 147–148, note 3, of Del Vecchio *Justice: an historical and philosophical essay*, Edinburgh, ed, A H Campbell, 1952. For criticisms, see, for example, V Pareto *Les systemes socialistes* (Paris 1901), Vol II: 167–168.

- (8) An idea especially prevalent among those who fear that otherwise philosophy will aid and abet the illicit transition from a statement of what is to a statement of what must be. (A fear that seems needless. Nothing follows *automatically* from the fact that someone needs something. Cp also below section 11.)
- (9) This is the common point in the otherwise very different accounts of Flew, White, Barry and Frankfurt. See Anthony Flew, *The politics of Procrustes*, London: Temple Smith, 1981: 120: ('If I say that I need something, it is never inept to ask what for . . . There is always something hypothetically imperative about any need'); White, *op cit*, ('To say that A needs to V is elliptical for saying that A needs to V in order to F [where to F is the end state] (page 105), . . . A failure to notice the elliptical nature of statements about what A needs leads to arguments at cross purposes . . . "Does A need X?" is an elliptical not a normative question' (page 106)); Brian Barry, *Political argument*, London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1965, chapter III, §5a; Harry Frankfurt 'Necessity and desire'. *Philosophy and phenomenological research*, Vol XLV, No 1, September 1984: 1.
- (10) The definition is taken from C Bay 'Human needs and political education', page 2, in R Fitzgerald, ed. *Human needs and politics* (Sydney: Pergamon, 1977), with which compare the more deliberately considered account offered in A H Maslow, *Motivation and personality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1954), Ch 5, and page 107.
- (11) It cannot be emphasised too strongly here that there is no received terminology for the classification of needs, and that, especially with the term 'basic', different writers who may seem to use it similarly define it quite differently. Our own use of 'basic' is not a wanton variation from some standard terminology. The rationale for our use is part and parcel with the whole approach to need that we have preferred. More particularly, we must remark that our category of *basic* is not the same in definition or point as the category of *survival needs*, or of *biological needs* as Benn and Peters determine these. (*Op cit* pages 144–146, on which see Frederick Rosen's criticisms in 'Basic needs and justice', *Mind*, 1977: 88.) Nor is it the same in definition or point as Benn and Peters's own category of *basic needs*, which simply relate to a decent standard of living; or the same as the modern Marxist category of *really human needs*, or *one's needs as a human being*, usually introduced to make a contrast with *false needs*. (A contrast we hope to have partially absorbed and to some extent superseded by bringing out the full exigency of the truth-conditions of statements of need.)
- (12) Consider the need for a local anaesthetic for certain painful dental procedures (most of them in fact done

- without any anaesthetic thirty years ago).
- (13) Consider the need for a drug for which cheaper, inferior, but not ineffective substitutes are available.
- (14) Consider the general need for a certain remedy to be made available within hospitals for an acute illness whose frequency can and will be mitigated in the medium term, and which could be eliminated altogether in the longer term by preventive medicine.
- A different sort of example might be the need for personal transport (for example, automobile) in a dispersed city region with widely dispersed, very large-scale facilities and poor public transport – a situation that could be changed in the longer term (if society willed this) by policies encouraging the multiplication of smaller-scale facilities (not excluding the case of medical facilities), and the provision of public transport along settled lines of communication defining opportunities to locate dwelling, everyday facilities, and workplace on a single line.
- (15) We have in mind particularly the environmental and social damage that has been done by the mindless application in city planning of general standards of acceptable minima to circumstances surely never envisaged by those who devised the standards. Among the earliest perceptions of this problem was that of Jane Jacobs in *The life and death of great American cities*. (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962).
- (16) For some wise words on the importance of devising general norms of safety in relation to such things as industrial accidents, see Trevor A Kletz, 'Benefits and risks: their assessment in relation to human needs'. *Endeavour*, New Series Vol 4, No 2, 1980: 46.
- (17) For a general discussion of such issues from the 'marginalist' point of view, see Steven E Rhoads, *The economist's view of the world*. (Cambridge: C U P 1985). For a somewhat unsympathetic discussion of application to health care, surely underestimating the intuitive grasp of the whole issue that can be brought to bear nowadays by all the medical professions, see Michael Cooper, 'Economics of need: the experience of the British health service', in Mark Perlman, ed, *The economics of health and medical care*, Proceedings of a Conference of the International Economic Association. (New York: Wiley, 1973): 89–99, 105.
- (18) For the claim that 'subjective' ought not in any case to be defined as a contrary of 'objective', see David Wiggins *Needs, values, truth* (*op cit*): 201.
- (19) There is the question of the patients' autonomy. And apart from that there are the questions the patient himself must decide about: how he is to live or spend the time that is left to him (her), what (s)he is prepared to endure in exchange for what real or supposed benefit, etc.
- (20) Cp K R Minogue, *The liberal mind*. (London: Methuen 1963): 46 and 103.
- (21) E D Watt. Human needs, human wants, and political consequences'. *Political studies*, Vol 30, 1982: 541.
- (22) The rights that Minogue has brought into consideration are of course 'claim-rights'. For this terminology see Michael Lockwood's 'Rights'. *Journal of medical ethics* 1981; 7: 150–152.
- (23) For this version of the beneficiary account see J Raz 'On the nature of rights'. *Mind* (1984), Vol XCIII: 192–214.
- (24) These crucial stipulations ought to suffice to put to rest the unease expressed in different ways by Alan Ryan 'Overriding interests', *Times literary supplement*, 1983 Apr 22: 411, and Charles Fried, *Right and wrong*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard 1978): 122.
- 'The major objection to a theory of rights based on needs [is that] though needs and their satisfaction have an objective quality, the fact is that any commitment, via the recognition of positive rights, to meet need also makes us hostages to vastly varied and voracious needs . . . How to contain this voraciousness? If needs create rights to their satisfaction, how are we to prevent them from claiming so much that there is no energy left to pursue other goals?'
- (25) For an exploration of the idea of the priority of needs and the political and practical impact of such principles, see David Wiggins 'Claims of need', *op cit*, \*
- (26) Professor G Perloff made valuable comments on the penultimate draft of this article.
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