

Background

Among the founding principles of the National Health Service were that it would 'meet the needs of everyone', and that it would do so 'based on clinical need, not ability to pay' (NHS, 2018). The 'Prudent Healthcare Principles' of the Bevan Commission (2019) allocate priority to treating those with the greatest clinical need; they also see meeting clinical need as the sole basis for, and as setting a limit to, medical intervention.

Despite the common-sense appeal of such principles, the philosophical presuppositions that underlie them are sometimes disputed in needs theory. Clarifying these presuppositions, and scrutinizing them, can, depending on the outcome and the extent of its influence, either help establish an improved basis for rational consensus about needs-based principles, or undermine their credibility.

One such presupposition is that needs are, of themselves, relevant to the justification of actions. This presupposition relates needs to *practical reasons*. Practical reasons that justify actions (rather than merely explaining them) are called 'normative reasons'.

Are human needs, or facts about them, sufficient to be normative reasons? This is our main research question. The debate on it has been sporadic (Barry 1965, Thomson 1987, Ramsay 1992, Brock 1998, Crisp 2002, Lowe 2005, Reader 2005, 2007). There is no deep and sustained work that uses up-to-date developments in the burgeoning area of the philosophy of practical reasons to help advance the philosophy of needs. This is despite the relevance of these developments to our main question.

A common reason for answering our main research question negatively is the view that our needs depend upon our desires or intentions, and that it is really these that are of fundamental normative significance (e.g., Barry 1965, Frankfurt 1984; for critical discussion, McLeod 2015). By contrast, the aforementioned healthcare principles presuppose that needs have fundamental, and independent, normative significance.

Our new work will integrate the philosophy of needs and the philosophy of practical reasons. This will build on our previous work on needs (McLeod 2011, 2014, 2015, Schramme 2016, 2018), practical reasons (Tanyi 2009, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2013, 2017a, 2017b, Tanyi & Morganti 2017, forthcoming) and their connections (McLeod 2014, 2015). We will help invigorate, advance and refine the debate about the practical significance of needs.

What *are* needs? This question, which is distinct from that of what *satisfies* our needs (McLeod 2011), is the fundamental ontological question about needs. In the literature, it is addressed only in passing. Since Lowe (2005) *identifies* needs and normative reasons, answering it is logically prior to answering our main question. Without presuming the correctness of Lowe's view, we will therefore relate the ontology of reasons (Tanyi & Morganti 2017, forthcoming) to the ontology of needs (McLeod 2011, 2015, Human *et al.* 2017). Thereby, we will make headway in a fundamental area of the philosophy of needs that is very under-developed.