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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Necessity of 'Need'*

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Abstract:

Many philosophers have suggested that claims of need play a special normative role in ethical thought and talk. But what do such claims mean? What does this special role amount to? Progress on these questions can be made by attending to a puzzle concerning some linguistic differences between two types of 'need' sentence: one where 'need' occurs as a verb, and where it occurs as a noun. I argue that the resources developed to solve the puzzle advance our understanding of the metaphysics of need, the meaning of 'need' sentences, and the function of claims of need in ethical discourse.

I. Introduction

Crusoe is dehydrated and will perish without a drink of water. We might describe Crusoe's condition by claiming that he *needs* to drink water. According to some philosophers, claims of need play a special normative role in ethical thought and talk.[1] A better understanding of this alleged special role is gained by facing some

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[1] For example, Gillian Brock and Soran Reader. "Needs-Centered Ethical Theory". *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 36 no.4 (2002): 425–34; Soran Reader and Gillian Brock, "Needs, Moral Demands and Moral Theory", *Utilitas* 16, no. 3 (2004): 251–66; and David Wiggins, "Claims of Need", in

difficult linguistic and metaphysical questions. What do such claims *mean*? What is it to need? What is the relationship between need and modality? What kinds of entities have needs?

I argue that progress on these questions can be made by attending to a puzzle concerning how to explain some linguistic differences between two types of 'need' sentence: one where 'need' occurs as a verb, and one where 'need' occurs as a noun. To solve the puzzle, two theses are proposed. First, I motivate a *syntactic* distinction between two forms of 'need' sentence that has gone unrecognized: a subject-relational form that directly predicates need of the subject of the sentence, and one that does not. Second, I motivate the semantic proposal that claims of need are a type of necessity claim; specifically, I argue that claims of need with subject-relational form express claims about what is necessary given ideals related to the welfare of the subject of the need attribution.

The resources developed to solve the puzzle advances our understanding of need and need ascription in at least two ways. First, concerning the metaphysical question about what kinds of entities have needs, I argue that the admissible subjects of need are more restricted than previously suggested in the literature. Second, I argue that the solution explains the intuitive force of need claims in

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Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 1-58.

discourse along lines initially suggested by David Wiggins.[2] I show that Wiggins' approach can be partially vindicated against a challenge that it is in tension with contemporary linguistic theory.[3]

The plan is as follows. Section II introduces the puzzle and discusses its broader philosophical implications. I argue that the standard account of need claims in the philosophical literature does not provide us with an explanation of the puzzle. Section III explains and motivates the claim that 'need' sentences can be subject-relational and non-subject-relational in form. Section IV argues that there are truth-conditional differences between these two forms and suggests how a semantics for 'need' should be formulated. The resources developed provide a solution to the puzzle and advances our understanding of the nature of need and need ascriptions, all while being consonant with contemporary linguistic theory.

II. Needing and Having a Need

This section introduces the central puzzle (Section II.A) and outlines its broader philosophical implications (Section II.B). I explain why neither existing

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[2] Wiggins, "Claims of Need".

[3] This challenge has been posed most recently in Guy Fletcher "Needing and Necessity", in *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics*, ed. Mark Timmons (Oxford University Press, 2018), 170–92.

discussions of the puzzle, nor the standard semantics for 'need', provide us with a solution to the puzzle (Section II.C-D).

A. The Puzzle of Non-Equivalence

There are two forms of sentence we most commonly use to talk about need, one where 'need' functions as a *verb* (e.g. 'A needs to V' where 'V' stands for a verb, and 'A needs NP' where 'NP' stands for a noun phrase) and one where it functions as a *noun* (e.g. 'A has a need to V'/'A has a need for NP').[4] I will refer to these interchangeably as ''need' sentences' or 'need claims'. It has been noted in the philosophical literature that these two forms of 'need' sentence are not equivalent, but an explanation is elusive. There are two ways in which they fail to be equivalent.

The first is *Truth-Conditional Non-Equivalence*: relative to a *fixed* context, it is possible for judgements about their truth-value to diverge. Intuitively, while (1a) is true, (1b) is false:

[4] 'Need' can occur as an auxiliary, although such uses are in decline, see Nicholas Smith, 'Changes in the Modals and Semi-Modals of Strong Obligation and Epistemic Necessity in Recent British English', in *Modality in Contemporary English*, ed. Roberta Facchinetti, Frank Palmer, and Manfred Krug (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2003), 241–66. Moreover, they are taken to be 'negative polarity items' i.e. their use is restricted to 'non-assertive' contexts. E.g. 'Tom need go to work' sounds unusual compared with 'Tom need not go to work' or 'Need Tom go to work?'. See Bengt Jacobsson, "The Auxiliary *Need*", *English Studies* 55, no. 1 (1 February 1974): 56–63; and Patrick J Duffley, "*Need* and *Dare*: The Black Sheep of the Modal Family", *Lingua* 94, no. 4 (1994): 213–43. An anonymous reviewer notes that the puzzle I raise can be replicated with auxiliary 'need'.

1. The evil king, ordering the execution of Tom, says:

   a) Tom needs to be executed.

   b) # Tom has a need to be executed.

   ('#' indicates semantic or pragmatic oddity.)

It is possible to invert this pattern of truth-value judgements. Intuitively, while (2a) is false, (2b) is true:

2. Tom, a heroin addict, is suffering from withdrawal. The doctor says:

   a) # Tom needs to shoot up.

   b) Tom has a need to shoot up.

The second is *Subject Non-Equivalence*: the type of subject that is an admissible substitution instance of the noun A in 'A needs to V' is *unconstrained*, whereas this is not so in 'A has a need to V'. Intuitively, (3b) is infelicitous because *inanimate* subjects cannot possess needs:

3.

   a) The noise needs to be kept below 80dB.

   b) # The noise has a need to be kept below 80dB.

The puzzle, then, is this: how do we explain these two forms of non-equivalence?

B. Situating the Puzzle

I wish to briefly situate the puzzle by considering its broader implications and existing discussion of it in the philosophical literature.

There are two immediate philosophical points of interest. The first concerns a metaphysical question about need, specifically, the neglected question of what kind of entity can possess needs. It has been pointed out that the subjects of need claims are expansive. For example:

> When it is necessary that one thing have another, the first is sometimes said to need the second. It is not just living beings that are said to have needs, or the devices that serve their needs. A fire needs oxygen…But fires are not alive.[5]

> Although inanimate beings do not have wants, they can often be said to need things…So, for example, the soil in a field, given the circumstance that it has been over-used, needs fertilizer to produce good crops next year.[6]

A correspondingly expansive *metaphysical* position about the subjects of need can be justified if we are entitled to take the surface form of claims like 'the soil needs

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[5] Dennis W. Stampe, "Need", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 66, no. 2 (1988), 129.

[6] P. M. S. Hacker, *Human Nature: The Categorial Framework* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 128-9.

fertilizer' at face value.[7] However, *Subject Non-Equivalence* indicates matters are not straightforward because not all constructions license inanimate objects as the subject of 'need' sentences. So, solving the puzzle will play a role in finding the metaphysical limits of need attribution.

The second concerns a well-known thesis in the literature that claims of need possess a 'special force' that is normative, as Wiggins puts it, or that they have a distinctive 'moral impact' that arouses a 'compelling sense of obligation', as Harry Frankfurt puts it.[8] One way to interpret this is as the idea they correspond to pro tanto *moral reasons* of varying strength to meet the relevant need.[9]

However, reflection on the flexibility of the word 'need' shows that such a claim requires qualification. For example, one can truly assert 'Tom needs a gun' in a context where a gun is necessary to satisfy Tom's murderous aims. Yet this attribution of an *instrumental* need to Tom (i.e., one grounded in some goal or aim) does not correspond to a moral reason to provide Tom with a gun. For this

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[7] Garrett Thomson is more circumspect in suggesting that inanimate objects need things, but cannot *have* needs, see Garrett Thomson, *Needs* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987). For a rare dissenter, see H. J. McCloskey, "Human Needs, Rights and Political Values", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (1976): 1–11.

[8] See Wiggins, "Claims of Need", 5–6; and Harry G. Frankfurt, 'Necessity and Desire', Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 45, no. 1 (1984), 1.

[9] It is important to emphasize that the strength of the relevant moral reason is a matter of *degree*. The degree of strength is determined by the character of the need, which can be more or less urgent, grave or entrenched, see Wiggins, "Claims of Need", 14–16). For example, there is a stronger reason to meet the need of someone facing imminent death than to meet the need of someone facing non-life-threatening injury.

reason, defenders of this claim distinguish between *instrumental* needs and a class of 'absolute' needs related to what is necessary for *survival* or *harm* avoidance, restricting normative significance to the latter.[10] In his seminal article "Claims of Need", Wiggins proposed that this distinction corresponds to a genuine *ambiguity* of the word 'need':

> We have then to assign at least two senses to 'need' [instrumental and absolute] if we are to assign the right significance to the sorts of thing people use the word to say and to understand the special argumentative force of needs claims…What distinguishes the [absolute] sense of 'need'…is that it is in virtue of what is carried along by this sense itself of the word 'need', not in virtue of context (whatever part context plays in determining that this is the sense intended), that appeal is made to the necessary conditions of harm's being avoided.
>
> [G]iven this account of the word's content, it becomes unsurprising that 'need' taken in the absolute sense should have the special point and force it appears to have…It is also to be expected that, so understood, 'need' should be normative or evaluative, and normative or evaluative in virtue of its content.[11]

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[10] For example, Wiggins, "Claims of Need"; and Thomson, *Needs*.

[11] Wiggins, "Claims of Need", 9–10.

Wiggins' thesis of semantic ambiguity is now unpopular given the availability of a univocal (i.e. unambiguous) semantics that explains such readings as made available by contextual input (to be shortly discussed). Janice Dowell expresses a widespread methodological sentiment writing that "linguists rightly prefer more to less unified semantic theories. Such theories are simpler and so allow for more plausible explanations for how speakers are able to learn expressions and to competently use and understand their uses in new contexts."[12] Against positing ambiguity for 'need' in particular, Guy Fletcher argues that such an approach "seems under-motivated by the relevant [linguistic] data" which instead favors a semantics where "nothing in the meaning of 'need' places a restriction on what the relevant standard is [e.g. those to do with harm-avoidance]."[13] What I will argue is that there is a closely related suggestion to Wiggins' that is borne out in solving the puzzle that is consistent with the independently attractive contextualist semantics (Section IV).

I am by no means the first to raise the puzzle. Several philosophical sources discuss this puzzle; none provide an adequate explanation. Alan White discusses *Truth-Conditional Non-Equivalence* but does not provide an explanation.[14] H. J.

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[12] Janice L. Dowell, "Flexible Contextualism about Deontic Modals: A Puzzle about Information-Sensitivity", *Inquiry* 56, no. 2–3 (2013), 154.

[13] Fletcher, "Needing and Necessity", 175.

[14] Alan R. White, Modal Thinking (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), 104.

McCloskey and Garett Thomson both note *Subject Non-Equivalence* and attribute it to a difference between verbal and nominal 'need':[15]

> Although statements of the formal 'A needs X' can have inanimate things as their logical subject, we cannot say that those things have needs. It is anthropomorphic to say of Jupiter that it has needs. Inanimate things can need, but cannot have needs, because they do not have aims and purposes, and because they cannot be harmed. Consequently, they have neither instrumental nor fundamental needs. So, the noun use of 'need', unlike the verb use, is restricted to living things that can have aims and purposes and can be harmed.[16]

Thomson's suggestion leaves something to be desired explanatorily: what is the cash value of the distinction between needing and having a need? Why can, as Thomson contends, the planet Jupiter need, but cannot *have* needs? A decisive reason why we should not be content merely registering that 'need' has a nominal and verbal form is that it is possible to replicate the same phenomenon where 'need' occurs as a verb:

4. # The noise needs it to be that it is kept below 80dB.

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[15] McCloskey, "Human Needs, Rights and Political Values", 2; and Thomson, *Needs*, 11.

[16] Thomson, *Needs*, 11.

In comparison, 'Tom needs it to be that he drinks water' is felicitous even if somewhat prolix. So, merely pointing out that 'need' comes in verbal and nominal form does not explain the difference. The puzzle remains.

C. 'Need' as Propositional Operator

I turn now to situate this puzzle more broadly within discussions of the meaning of need claims in philosophy and discuss how these ideas can be updated with contemporary work in linguistic semantics. As we will see, philosophical accounts of the meaning of need claims do not provide us with a solution to the puzzle of non-equivalence. As we will see, a closer look at work in linguistics suggests such a view to be inaccurate or, at least, incomplete.

There is a widespread intuition that the concept of need is connected with that of *necessity*.[17] The standard way to develop this idea identifies needing with something's being *necessary* (the object of need). As Dennis Stampe, an advocate of this approach, writes:

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[17] This idea is an ancient one originating from Aristotle. For contemporary discussion, see Thomson, *Needs*; Stampe, "Need"; Wiggins, "Claims of Need"; Hacker, *Human Nature*, p.128; Soran Reader, *Needs and Moral Necessity* (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2012); Stephen K. McLeod, 'Two Philosophies of Needs', *Polish Journal of Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (2015): 33–50; and Fletcher, "Needing and Necessity".

> Need is a kind of necessity: the necessity that something be the case…[I]t is clear that to understand need fully we should have to understand the relations between the categorical proposition
>
> > A needs N.
> >
> > It is necessary that A have N,
>
> and the hypothetical or disjunctive propositions
>
> > It is necessary either that A have N or else…
> >
> > It is necessary that if A does not have N, then something to the detriment of A will ensue.
>
> The latter evidently express the truth-conditions of the former propositions, if not their meanings.[18]

Stampe rightly notes that claims of need are not *unrestricted* necessity claims.[19] He notes that the concept of necessity expressed by 'need' yields truth-conditions as follows: for A to need to V is for it to be necessary that A V-s *if something else is to be the case*.[20] Call this 'something else' the *restriction*. For example, if A

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[18] Stampe, "Need", 129–30, labels altered.

[19] If *P* is metaphysically/logically necessary, then *P*, whereas a subject may need that *P*, even though not-*P*, see Stampe, "Need", 129-30; and Stephen K. McLeod, 'Knowledge of Need', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 19, no. 2 (2011), 221.

[20] Stampe, "Need", 129.

needs to receive the antidote, then it is necessary that A receive the antidote *if A is to avoid harm*.

Stampe is not explicit about two things: (i) the meaning of 'need' and the modal truth-conditions he provides, and (ii) how it is that the content of the restriction is fixed. Thankfully, Stampe's proposal can be augmented by the vast body of influential work on necessity modals like 'must.'[21] Suppose, as Fletcher recommends, we 'take the Kratzerian story for 'must' and apply it to 'needs' claims.'[22] Then, need claims have the underlying form 'need(P)', where 'need' functions as an operator on a proposition (the 'prejacent').[23]

Roughly, we can analyze 'need' as a universal quantifier over a domain of possibilities fixed (in part) by two contextually supplied parameters: a *modal base* and an *ordering source*. The modal base relative to a world w comprises the set of worlds accessible from w. 'Need' sentences can be evaluated relative to modal

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[21] See Angelika Kratzer, "What 'Must' and 'Can' Must and Can Mean", *Linguistics and Philosophy* 1 (1977): 337–55; and Angelika Kratzer, "The Notional Category of Modality", in *Words, Worlds, and Contexts: New Approaches in Word Semantics*, ed. H.-J Eikmeyer and H Rieser, vol. 6 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981), 289-323. For an accessible overview, see Paul Portner, Modality (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[22] Fletcher, "Needing and Necessity", 179.

[23] Here I am assuming that 'need' sentences with nominal object arguments contain further clausal material to yield a proposition. For example, the sentence 'Tom needs a drink' can often be analysed as 'Tom needs to have a drink' where the relevant propositional complement is the proposition that Tom have a drink. See Florian Schwarz, 'On "Needing" Propositions and "Looking for" Properties', in *Proceedings of SALT XVI*, ed. Masayuki Gibson and Jonathan Howell, vol. 16 (Ithaca, New York, 2006), 259–76.

bases consisting of worlds sharing the same circumstances (such as histories, laws of nature, etc.) as the context up until the time of context.[24] The ordering source corresponds to propositions that represent some ideals at w. For example, a set of laws, desires, goals and so on. With both of these contextual parameters, we can define a class of 'best' worlds: roughly, the worlds that conform to those ideals at least as well as any other world in the modal base. Informally, a sentence with the underlying form 'need(P)' is true relative to a context c and world w iff P is true at all the contextually best accessible worlds.[25]

A central advantage of this semantics is that it allows 'need' sentences to express a wide variety of modal claims in varying 'modal flavors' while retaining a univocal semantics for 'need'. Consider:

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[24] Wiggins, "Claims of Need", 12. It should be noted also that 'need' may take an infrequent *epistemic* interpretation, e.g. 'if the map is correct, then there needs to be a bus stop around the corner'. See Nicholas Smith, "Changes in the Modals and Semi-Modals of Strong Obligation and Epistemic Necessity in Recent British English", in *Modality in Contemporary English*, ed. Roberta Facchinetti, Frank Palmer, and Manfred Krug, vol. 44, Topics in English Linguistics (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2003), 241–66; and Aynat Rubinstein, "Roots of Modality" (PhD, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2012). In such cases, epistemic modal bases will be relevant.

[25] This semantics is typically formalized as follows. A modal base f and ordering source g are both functions from worlds to sets of propositions. The intersection of the modal base $\bigcap f(w)$ constitutes the set of *accessible* worlds from w. The set of 'best' or 'ideal' worlds are determined by a partial order $\preccurlyeq_{g(w)}$ defined relative to the ordering source $g(w)$: $w'' \preccurlyeq_{g(w)} w'$ iff $\{p: p \in g(w) \wedge p(w')\} \subset \{q: q \in g(w) \wedge q(w'')\}$. The set of best worlds relative to modal base f, ordering source g and world w is $\textsc{best}(f, g, w) = \{w': w \in \bigcap f(w) \wedge \neg\exists w''(w'' \preccurlyeq_{g(w)} w')\}$. Then, $[\![need\ P]\!]^{c,w} = 1$ iff $\forall w' \in \textsc{best}_{f,g,w}$: $[\![\mathrm{P}]\!]^{c,w'} = 1$.

5.

a) The plant needs some nutrients.

b) The barista needs to grind the coffee finer.

c) Tom needs to catch the 9:15 train.

d) Everyone needs to lock down from midnight.

e) Oh no, I need to sneeze.[26]

In their natural contexts, (5a) is concerned with the plant *avoiding death*, (5b) and (5c) are concerned with salient *goals*, (5d) is concerned with salient *laws* and (5e) is concerned with the normal course of events. By varying the operative ordering source, it is possible to account for these different truth-conditions. For example, to generate teleological flavors, the ordering source contributes propositions corresponding to the salient *goals* at the context, e.g. that the barista serve good coffee in the case of (5b), or that Tom arrives to work on time in the case of (5c). This flexibility is possible as this semantics for 'need' does not impose constraints on the ordering source parameter, which is contextually determined.

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[26] Kai von Fintel, 'Modality and Language', in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. D. Borchert (Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2006), 20.

E. The Puzzle Remains Unsolved

This type of semantics is developed typically with a focus on sentences of the form 'A needs to V'. But can we extend them to those of the form 'A has a need to V'? The puzzle discussed in 1.1 raises a *prima facie* problem for a straightforward extension.

First, consider *Truth-Conditional Non-Equivalence*. If 'need' expresses the concept of necessity which *always* functions as a propositional operator, then it is unclear why the pairs (1a)/(1b) and (2a)/(2b) diverge. Both (1a) and (1b) are evaluated at the same context. So, each is evaluated relative to the same modal base and ordering source parameter. So, the rough truth-conditions for need claims given above cannot explain how (1a) and (1b) diverge in truth-conditions. *Mutatis mutandis* for (2a) and (2b).

Second, consider *Subject Non-Equivalence*. Here it was observed that (3a) ("the noise needs to be kept below 80dB") is felicitous while (3b) ("the noise has a need to be kept below 80dB") is not. Moreover, it was observed with (4) ("The noise needs it to be that it is kept below 80dB") that a similar infelicity occurs even for verbal 'need' when it embeds a fully saturated complementizer phrase. But if all these disparate forms are crudely analyzed as having the underlying form 'Need (the noise is kept below 80db)', then it is not possible to explain why (3b) or (4) are not acceptable while (3a) is.

Where does this leave the standard semantics? Rejecting the standard semantics is clearly an overreaction at this stage, though the puzzle suggests a gap in our understanding of 'need' sentences. Ultimately, the resolution to the puzzle I provide is *consistent* with retaining the univocal contextualist account of the meaning of 'need'. Though, as will become apparent by the end of Section III, it is unclear whether the linguistic data does supports univocity over ambiguity.

III. The Syntax of Need Claims

A solution to the puzzle is obscured by the fact that 'need' sentences come in two forms: subject-relational or non-subject-relational. A 'need' sentence has a subject-relational form when it involves the predication of a need to the subject of the sentence. Whether a need claim is subject-relational or not corresponds to underlying syntactic differences in the relevant 'need' sentence.[27]

Section III.A begins with some background about the distinction between two types of syntactic configurations: raising and control. Section II.B will focus on establishing that 'A needs to V' sentences can receive a non-subject-relational

[27] A similar point about 'ought' is defended in Mark Schroeder, "*Ought*, Agents, and Actions", *The Philosophical Review* 120, no. 1 (2011): 1–41. As we will see, some problems raised against Schroeder's view by Matthew Chrisman, '"Ought" and Control', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 90, no. 3 (2012): 433–51, and; Junhyo Lee, ""Ought" and Intensionality", *Synthese*, 2021, 1–23 do not apply to my proposal. On the contrary, some lend direct support (e.g. Chrisman's '-er nominalization' test.)

reading in which ‘need’ does not relate the surface subject ‘A’ to a property/proposition expressed by ‘to V’. In contrast, other ‘need’ sentences have subject-relational form, in particular, ‘A has a need to V’. Section III.C argues that this finding allows one to explain half of the puzzle concerning *subject* non-equivalence. I explain its broader philosophical significance with respect to a question about the metaphysics of need.

A. The Syntax of Raising and Control

While (6a) and (6b) look similar, they are syntactically different:

6.

a) Tom seems to be sleeping.

b) Tom wants to sleep.

Roughly, the logical forms of (6a) and (6b) respectively are:

7.

a) Seems [Tom is sleeping].

b) Tom$_i$ wants [PRO$_i$ to sleep].

Sentence (6a) has what linguists call *raising* syntax. The semantic value of ‘seems’ is not a relation between a subject and a property/proposition, but a *propositional operator* as illustrated by (7a), where 'seems' operates on the proposition expressed by 'Tom is sleeping'. To get from (7a) to a grammatical sentence, 'Tom', which is base-generated as the subject of 'sleep', is *raised* to the position of the surface subject in sentence (6a). In contrast, sentence (6b) does not have raising syntax. Instead, (6b) has *control* syntax: the semantic value of 'want' is a relation between a subject and a property/proposition. As illustrated in (7b), 'Tom' is the subject argument of 'want' (or 'external argument') rather than 'sleep', the subject of which is the phonologically null pronoun PRO which is referentially dependent on, or 'controlled' by, the subject of the superordinate verb, i.e. 'Tom.'[28]

B. The Evidence

In this section, I consider several linguistic tests we can use to diagnose the underlying syntactic structure of certain target 'need' sentences.[29] In particular, I present evidence that 'A needs to V' can be parsed as possessing an underlying *raising* syntax, and so can receive a non-subject-relational reading where a need is

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[28] Here I set aside a complication if we pursue the approach on which external arguments are no longer part of the meaning of the verb but a different projection as discussed in Angelika Kratzer, "Severing the External Argument from Its Verb", in *Phrase Structure and the Lexicon*, ed. Johan Rooryck and Laurie Zaring (Dordrecht: Springer, 1996): 109–37.

[29] Some of the tests considered here are standard ones found in syntax textbooks, e.g. Andrew Radford, *An Introduction to English Sentence Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Andrew Carnie, *Syntax (Introducing Linguistics)* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001). Others are less discussed but have their defenders. My aim is not to defend them, but to adduce a picture of the complex syntactic behaviour of 'need'.

not predicated of ‘A’. This contrasts with other ‘need’ sentences like ‘A has a need to V’. I argue that this motivates a solution to the puzzle of subject non-equivalence.

Test 1 (Expletive Subject): sentences with raising syntax allow one to replace the subject of the sentence with non-referring ‘it’ or expletive ‘there’ and relocate, so to speak, the surface subject back to the lower clause; in contrast, the subject of control verbs (i.e. ones with subject argument-place) cannot be replaced in this way:

8.

a) Tom seems to be sleeping. → It seems to be that Tom is sleeping.

b) Tom wants to sleep. → # It wants Tom to sleep.

This test works because the subject-place of a raising verb like ‘seems’ is *semantically null*, whereas, the subject-place of ‘want’ is a semantically significant argument position.[30] To apply Test 1, we consider:

9.

a) Tom needs to sleep. → It needs to be that Tom sleeps.

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[30] Radford, “An Introduction to English Sentence Structure”, 226.

b) The noise needs to be kept below 80dB. → It needs to be that the noise is kept below 80dB.

Here we see that non-referring ‘it’ can replace ‘Tom’ as the subject of ‘need’ in the ‘A needs to V’ configuration, thereby patterning with ‘seem’ rather than ‘want’.[31] This provides evidence that there is a raised reading of constructions of the form ‘A needs to V’.

Test 2 (Thematic Role): Some syntacticians posit that arguments of verbs are marked with thematic roles that impose restrictions (‘selectional restrictions’) on what kind of entity can felicitously constitute an argument, e.g. whether it has to be an experiencer, agent, animate, etc.:

10.

a) The noise seems to be getting louder.

b) # The noise wants to get louder.

Here we see that the raising verb ‘seem’ does not impose any restrictions, whereas the control verb ‘want’ does. This is because, whereas the subject of a raising verb

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[31] This is also noted in Stephanie Harves, “Intensional Transitives and Silent HAVE: Distinguishing between WANT and NEED,” in *Proceedings 27th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics*, ed. Natasha Abner and Jason Bishop (Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press, 2008), 211–19.

is semantically null, this is not so with a control verb: in (10b), ‘the noise’ is a subject argument of ‘want’. When this is the case, ‘the noise’ is said to be *thematically related* to the verb ‘want’.

We have already considered data relevant for Test 2: (3a), that is, “[t]he noise needs to be kept below 80dB” and (3b), that is, “[#] The noise has a need to be kept below 80dB.” The infelicity of (3b) is strong evidence that the main verb in the ‘have a need’ construction marks its subject argument-place with a thematic role which ‘the noise’ violates.[32] In contrast, the felicity of (3a) indicates that there is a reading of ‘needs to V’ constructions where the surface subject (here ‘the noise’) is not a subject argument of the verb ‘need’, and so is *not* thematically related to the verb.

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[32] For present purposes, we can be neutral about some finer questions concerning the role of the light verb ‘have’ and its object in determining the relevant thematic relations in (3b). Nevertheless, it is plausible that ‘have’ plays an important role. In a survey of ‘have a V’ constructions, Anna Wierzbicka, ‘Why Can You Have a Drink When You Can’t *Have an Eat?’, Language 58, no. 4 (1982): 753–99. notes that ‘have’ plays a central role across the board in making the subject salient as the object of predication, writing “*have* works as a detransitivizer: the object is de-emphasized, the predication concerning the object is backgrounded, and at the same time emphasis on the agent is increased” (*Ibid.,* 791). Moreover, if, as an anonymous reviewer suggests, light verbs play a role in assigning theta roles (cf. Kratzer, “Severing the External Argument”), then we have an explanation for how the ‘have a need’ construction establishes the relevant thematic relations. Thanks to the Associate Editor for pressing me to clarify this point.

Test 3 (Passivisation of Embedded Object): A test discussed by Suzi Wurmbrand involves the passivisation of an embedded object.[33] Consider:

11.

a) Tom seems to eat the cake.

b) The cake seems to be eaten by Tom.

c) Tom wants to eat the cake.

d) # The cake wants to be eaten by Tom.

e) Tom needs to eat the cake.

f) The cake needs to be eaten by Tom.

In (11b), we see that passivisation of the lower predicate involves raising the embedded object 'the cake' into subject position. In contrast, (11d) is infelicitous because 'the cake' is the subject argument for 'want', violating the selectional restrictions discussed in *Test 2*. We see here that the same transformation in (11f)

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[33] Susi Wurmbrand, "Modal Verbs Must Be Raising Verbs", in *Proceedings of the 18th West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics* (Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press, 1999), sec. 2.3.

provides evidence for a possible raising structure for (11e) in which 'the cake' starts out as the embedded object and is raised to the position of the subject.[34]

An interim summary is in order. What *Tests 1-3* indicate is that there is a parse of 'A needs to V' sentences with raising syntax, where the verb 'need' does not relate the surface subject 'A' with a property/proposition. In this configuration, 'A needs to V' has a *non-subject-relational* form. In contrast, we have observed that 'A has a need to V' sentences do not admit of this raising parse, and so such sentences have subject-relational form.

I wish to emphasize that not all sentences with verbal 'need' have raising syntax. Take 'Tom needs Lucy to sleep', where verbal 'need' embeds a *saturated* complementizer phrase (CP). Given the subject of 'to sleep' is 'Lucy', it is not the case that the surface subject 'Tom' was raised from the lower clause. Here 'Tom' is the genuine subject argument for 'need' and so such configurations are *subject-relational*.[35] In what follows, we will consider three tests to provide additional evidence that, despite being able to enter into raising structures, at least one sense of verbal 'need' possesses a genuine subject argument-place, unlike 'seems'.

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[34] This is also noted in Harves, "Intensional Transitives and Silent HAVE".

[35] The tests discussed support this. First, it is not even possible to construct a grammatical sentence with non-referring 'it'/expletive 'there' (e.g. "Tom needs Lucy to sleep." → * "It[/there] needs…"). Second, the sentence "[#] the noise needs Tom to keep the noise below 80dB" is infelicitous".

Test 4 (Passivisation of Modal): Wurmbrand argues that raising verbs do not allow for passivisation as they do not project external subject arguments, in contrast with control verbs, as evidenced below:[36]

12.

a) Tom seemed to eat cake.

b) # To eat cake was seemed by Tom.

c) Tom wanted to eat cake.

d) To eat cake was wanted by Tom.

e) Tom needed to eat cake.

f) To eat cake was needed by Tom.

While it is unusual to hear sentences with infinitive fronting in English, there is a clear contrast between (12b) and (12d).[37] Interestingly, we see that the passivisation of 'need' patterns in its acceptability with 'want' in contrast with 'seem'. So this gives us some evidence that verbal 'need' has a subject argument-place.

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[36] Wurmbrand, "Modal Verbs Must Be Raising Verbs", sec. 2.3.

[37] Similar judgements are attested to in Chrisman, ""Ought" and Control".

Test 5 ('-er' Nominalization): David Perlmutter and Matthew Chrisman note that control verbs typically allow for 'er'-nominalization, i.e., we can turn the target verb V into the noun V-er because '-er' picks out V's subject argument.[38] Consider:

13.

a) # Tom seems to be sleeping, so Tom is a seemer.

b) Tom wants to sleep, so Tom is a wanter.

To apply this test, let us consider:

14. Tom needs to sleep, so Tom is a needer.

The felicity of forming an '-er' nominalization from verbal 'need' provides evidence that it possesses a subject argument-place.[39]

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[38] See David M Perlmutter, 'The Two Verbs Begin', in *Readings in English Transformational Grammar* (Washington, D.C: Georgetown Univ School of Language, 1970); and Chrisman, "“Ought” and Control". I recommend taking Test 5 with a pinch of salt owing to some objections discussed in Kai von Fintel and Sabine Iatridou, 'How to Say *Ought* in Foreign: The Composition of Weak Necessity Modals', in Time and Modality, ed. Jacqueline Guéron and Jacqueline Lecarme (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 115–41; Stephen Finlay and Justin Snedegar, 'One Ought Too Many', Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 89, no. 1 (2014): 102–24; and Lee " "Ought and Intensionality".

[39] Chrisman suggests that this test is hard to adjudicate in some cases. He considers the verbs 'begin' and 'continue' which may evoke control and raising structure and suggests the possibility

Test 6 (Intensionality Test): Junhyo Lee argues that since control verbs have external subject arguments which are expected to be extensional, they carry the existential commitment of proper name/pronouns.[40] So, showing that infelicity results when a non-existent is set as the value of the subject provides evidence for a subject argument-place. Consider Lee's example. Let 'Newman' be the name of the first Chinese baby born in the year 2050 and consider a context where it is mandated by the UN that this future baby, Obama and Putin meet because doing so would prevent a mutually devastating world war:

15.

a) Obama wants to meet Newman.

b) # Newman wants to meet Obama.[41]

To apply this test, let us consider:

16.

a) Newman needs to meet Obama.

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that in some cases "these verbs are used but no one fills the role denoted by the correlative -er nominalization" (Chrisman, ""Ought" and Control", 444). This suggests the possibility that 'need' in these cases may retain an external argument, but that there are uses where it remains unfilled. A related suggestion is discussed at the end of Section III.D.

[40] See Lee, ""Ought" and Intensionality".

[41] Lee, ""Ought" and Intensionality", 7.

b) # Newman needs Putin to meet Obama.

Given that a raising parse of (16a) is available where 'Newman' is not the subject argument for 'need', no violation of the relevant existential commitments is predicted. In contrast, for non-raising constructions like (16b) where verbal 'need' embeds a fully saturated CP, the surface subject 'Newman' is a genuine subject argument for 'need'. Given Newman does not yet exist, a violation of the relevant existential commitment is predicted. These predictions are confirmed: (16a) is felicitous, whereas (16b) is not. This is evidence that verbal 'need' has a subject argument-place.

A final summary of the key findings: I provided evidence that 'A needs to V' allows for a *raising* parse on which it is *not* subject-relational i.e. where need is not predicated of subject A (Tests 1-3). In contrast, sentences of the form 'A has a need to V', as well as 'A needs B to V', are obligatorily subject-relational in form.[42] However, there is evidence that there is a sense of verbal 'need' that has a subject argument-place, unlike 'seem' (Tests 4-6). This suggests the possibility that 'A needs to V' can receive a non-raising parse—more specifically, a *control*

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[42] This can be easily confirmed by the application of Tests 1-3, though for space constraints, I will not review the tests here. See fn. 28 for discussion of how this thematic dependency may be established.

parse—where ‘A’ is interpreted as the genuine subject-argument for ‘need.’[43] If so, then ‘A needs to V’ is structurally *ambiguous* between a subject-relational *and* non-subject relational reading.

C. The Puzzle and a Broader Philosophical Implication

How is this relevant to the puzzle? Recall the relevant data:

3a. The noise needs to be kept below 80dB.

3b. # The noise has a need to be kept below 80dB.

I propose that (3a) is felicitous in virtue of a raising interpretation. Constructions with raising syntax are *not* subject-relational: despite appearances, such constructions do not predicate a need of the item in subject-position, so no selectional restrictions are violated. In contrast, ‘A has a need to V’ is obligatorily subject-relational. We have observed here that (3b) is unacceptable indicating that verbal ‘need’ introduces selectional restrictions on its subject argument-place, plausibly requiring its subject be animate.

Recall the earlier claim that solving the puzzle has implications for the metaphysical question about what kinds of entities are bearers of needs. We are

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[43] See Maayan Abenina-Adar and Nikos Angelopoulos, ‘On Root Modality and Thematic Relations in Tagalog and English’, vol. 26, 2016, 775–94. Abenina-Adar and Angelopoulos suggest that a claim like ‘John needs to leave’ can be parsed as having raising syntax (“John needs [$_{TP}$ ~~John~~ to leave].”) or control syntax (“John$_i$ needs [$_{CP}$ PRO$_i$ to leave].”).

now in a position to see why we cannot take ‘need’ sentences with inanimate objects in subject position at face value. The evidence suggests that a need claim can only take inanimate subjects in a *raising* construction where the relevant need is not being predicated of the subject of the sentence. At the very least, the facts about linguistic usage are *neutral* concerning whether inanimate entities are metaphysically suitable as subjects of need.

While we now have a key piece of the puzzle, there is still work to be done: we have not yet solved *Truth-Conditional Non-Equivalence*, that is, the truth-conditional differences between attributions of need with ‘need to V’ versus ‘has a need’ constructions. I take up this issue in Section IV.

D. Is ‘Need’ Ambiguous?

I wish to end Section III by briefly discussing an issue about the semantic type of verbal ‘need’ given the findings of Section III.B. As we have seen, there is strong evidence that verbal ‘need’ can enter into raising constructions. However, unlike propositional operator ‘seems’, there is evidence that verbal ‘need’ involves an external subject argument in some sentences. How can this be accounted for?

One simple option is to posit a corresponding *semantic* ambiguity in the form of *two* semantic values for verbal ‘need’. For raising constructions, this will be a propositional operator, $need_1$. For constructions where subject-relational ‘need’ is required, this will be a function that takes an individual as an argument, $need_2$.

Given the evidence presented here, this proposal is a theoretically live option to be evaluated on further linguistic grounds. The evidence marshalled here would constitute a novel linguistically informed argument for Wiggins' ambiguity claim.

However, there is another plausible approach that avoids semantic ambiguity. Maayan Abenina-Adar and Nikos Angelopoulos posit a single entry for 'need' ($need_2$) in the Kratzerian style.[44] Abenina-Adar and Angelopoulos appeal to additional elements in the logical form of sentences where the surface subject is not a semantic argument for 'need' to allow truth-conditions to be computed in the absence of a subject argument.[45] While these additional elements posited in the logical form are not uncontroversial, they are not *ad hoc* as they are motivated on independent grounds to account for a range of other linguistic phenomena.[46]

To conclude, the proposed explanation of *Subject Non-Equivalence* is that there is a reading of (3a) that is non-subject-relational on account of a reading with raising

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[44] Ibid., 786.

[45] For example, (1a), (3a), as well as those involving expletive-*there* and non-referring *it* like "there needs to be a fence built here" or "it needs to be that a fence is built here". Abenina-Adar and Angelopoulos (Ibid., 775) call these 'impersonal' constructions. They posit a variable in the position of the subject argument of 'need' that is bound by an abstraction index in the left periphery of the clause, i.e. turning it into a function of type $\langle e, \langle st \rangle \rangle$. Second, a speech act operator ASSERT in the logical form that takes a world w to a function that takes this property to true iff the speaker at context c has the property at w; see Manfred Krifka, 'Quantifying into Question Acts', Natural Language Semantics 9, no. 1 (2001): 1–40. For further details, see Abenina-Adar and Angelopoulos, "On Root Modality and Thematic Relations in Tagalog and English", 788–89.

[46] Ibid., 788.

syntax. While positing semantic ambiguity for ‘need’ is a live theoretical option on the basis of the evidence provided, there is a plausible alternative that is consistent with a univocal semantics for ‘need’. An evaluation of the two approaches requires further linguistic investigation that is beyond the scope of this paper.

IV. The Semantics of ‘Need’

This section considers the semantics of ‘need’. I argue that subject-relational constructions like ‘A has a need to V/for NP’ express claims of necessity that are to be evaluated with respect to *subject-oriented* ideals (i.e. ordering sources). In contrast, on the raising interpretation of ‘A needs to V’, it is possible for the relevant ideals to be oriented, not on *A*, but on the *speaker*. This, I argue, explains *Truth-Conditional Non-Equivalence*. I argue against a recent proposal that analyses subject-orientation in terms of a presupposition that such constructions are evaluated with respect to a *desire*-based ordering source (Section IV.A). I motivate a conceptually ‘leaner’ proposal that neither *mandates* a desire-based nor welfare-based ordering source. Instead, I argue that *interpretive priority* is given to welfare-based ordering sources, though this is *defeasible* (Sections IV.B and IV.C). I explain how this partially vindicates Wiggins’ explanation of the moral significance of need claims (i.e. that ‘need’ is semantically ambiguous between two senses, one of which concerns harm-avoidance).

A. Desire-based Semantics for 'Need'

Recall the relevant data supporting *Truth-Conditional Non-Equivalence*:

[The evil king, ordering the execution of Tom, says:]

1a. Tom needs to be executed.

1b. # Tom has a need to be executed.

[Tom, a heroin addict, is suffering withdrawal. The doctor says:]

2a. # Tom needs to shoot up.

2b. Tom has a need to shoot up.

Abenina-Adar and Angelopoulos provide a formal semantics for 'need' that purports to explain this. The main idea is that 'need' carries the presupposition that there is some *desire* of the subject *A* (which may be a proper subset of *A*'s total desire set) of whom the need is predicated, and that the modal expression is obligatorily evaluated with respect to an ordering source based on that desire. Where the subject lacks any such desire, presupposition failure results.

Let us work through the examples to illustrate. (1b) is a subject-relational construction where 'Tom' is the subject argument for the main verb. This semantics for 'need' requires that the ordering source operative at a context be revised to consist of a salient desire of *Tom's*. However, for (1a), which receives a raising interpretation, they suggest that ‘need’ forces the ordering source operative at a context to be revised to contain a desire of the *speaker*.[47] Thus, (1b) is judged unacceptable if it is presupposed, quite naturally, that Tom lacks a desire to be executed, whereas (1a) is judged true because the salient ordering source adverts to some desire of the king. This situation is reversed for (2a)/(2b), where (2a) is unacceptable because the doctor is understood to lack a desire for his patient Tom to use heroin, whereas (2b) is true because Tom has a desire to use heroin.

The central problem with Abenina-Adar and Angelopoulos’ proposal is that the requirement that ‘need’ sentences are evaluated with respect to desire-based ordering sources both over-generates and under-generates, that is, predicts that some ‘need’ sentences are acceptable when they are not, or unacceptable when they are. For a case of over-generation, suppose Tom dislikes the way his nose looks and is contemplating a risky cosmetic procedure:

17.

a) Tom wants plastic surgery to be performed on his nose.

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[47] Ibid., 788.

b) # Tom has a need for plastic surgery to be performed on his nose.[48]

Abenina-Adar and Angelopoulos' semantics incorrectly predicts that (17b) is felicitous. On their semantics, the presupposed ordering source consists of some subset of Tom's desires. So, the contextually best worlds are those in the modal base where some desire of Tom's is satisfied, which includes his desire for plastic surgery. Since this set is a subset of worlds where he receives plastic surgery, Abenina-Adar and Angelopoulos' semantics predicts that (17b) is true given the subset of Tom's desires that makes (17a) true. Intuitively, the reason why (17b) is not acceptable in this context is that thematic need claims are also sensitive to ordering sources that concern factors beyond just desires.

For the problem of *under*-generation, consider:

18. Plants have a need for water and sunlight.

As subjects that lack the capacity to form desires or preferences, Abenina-Adar and Angelopoulos' semantics incorrectly predicts that (18) is supposed to generate presupposition failure in the same way that (3b) ("the noise has a need to be kept below 80dB") does. However, I submit that (18) is perfectly felicitous.

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[48] Similar data is discussed in Johan Rooryck, "Between Desire and Necessity: The Complementarity of Want and Need", in *Crossroads Semantics* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2017), 263–79.

From a philosophical perspective, these problems are unsurprising. A significant part of the literature on need concerns conceptual work on the distinction between absolute and instrumental need.[49] A need is instrumental just in case it obtains in virtue of some desire, goal or end; whereas an absolute need can obtain independently of any such desire, goal or end. Absolute needs include those to do with the continued survival, welfare, or flourishing of the organism in question.[50] So, if there are absolute needs, not all sentences that attribute needs express claims of what is necessary in light of a subject's *desires*.

B. A Semantics for 'Need' based on Welfare?

There is something correct about the idea that 'have a need' constructions centralize, in some sense, what is necessary *for the subject*. However, it is a mistake to capture this subject-orientation of such constructions in terms of desires.

One reaction would be to consider what kind of alternative non-mentalistic concept more accurately explains our intuitions of the truth-conditions of

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[49] See G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy", Philosophy 33, no. 124 (1958): 1–19; White, "Modal Thinking"; Thomson, *Needs*; Wiggins "Claims of Need"; and McLeod, "Two Philosophies of Needs".

[50] There are some variation in how the class of absolute need is defined. Some centralize harm avoidance, e.g. Wiggins, "Claims of Need"; and Thomson, *Needs*. Others centralize the concept of flourishing, e.g. Anscombe "Modern Moral Philosophy," 7. For a more neutral characterization that draws a tripartite distinction between absolute needs based on survival, harm avoidance and flourishing without assuming that survival can be analyzed in terms of harm avoidance, see Stephen K. McLeod, "Absolute Biological Needs", *Bioethics* 28, no. 6 (2014): 293–301.

sentences like (18) and to revise our semantics accordingly.[51] Such a concept would have to admit entities like plants as suitable subjects of need ascription. Intuitively, whether (18) is true turns on whether the worlds where the 'welfare' of plants are safeguarded are worlds where they receive sunlight and water. The notion of 'welfare' I employ here (and throughout) expresses the ordinary folk concept that assessors employ in constructing the relevant ordering source needed to interpret sentences like (18).[52] To put more flesh on this concept, positive welfare typically includes goods like flourishing and health, as well as the avoidance of harm or death. This generic folk notion applies to any kind of subject for which these concepts can be sensibly applied (i.e. living things).

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[51] Compare analyses of claims of 'absolute' need in terms of 'interests' as in Thomson *Needs;* or the use of *prudential* ordering sources for need claims as in Fletcher, "Needing and Necessity".

[52] We can think of this folk concept as *enumerative*, that is, consisting of an unanalyzed list of goods like food, water, shelter, physical health, mental health, avoiding harm, and so on. For this reason, my use of the term 'welfare' should not be understood as presupposing some substantive *theory* of welfare e.g. hedonistic, objective list, desire-fulfilment. There are, however, obvious connections to be drawn with neo-Aristotelian approaches to well-being. See Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Richard Kraut, *What Is Good and Why: The Ethics of Well-Being* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2007). Given this concept's purely 'enumerative' nature, the concept does not prejudge substantive philosophical questions about the extension of welfare subjects. For discussion, see Eden Lin, "Welfare Invariabilism", *Ethics* 128, no. 2 (2018): 320–45; and Kraut, "What is Good and Why". If it turns out that all and only *sentient* creatures are welfare subjects, then this just means that the folk notion of 'welfare' is a more expansive concept; compare the notion of what is 'good for' living things in Connie S Rosati, "Relational Good and the Multiplicity Problem", *Philosophical Issues* 19 (2009): 205–34. Further, while this folk notion of welfare identifies many of the same goods that fall under what some theorists call 'basic' or 'fundamental' needs, it is silent on what *unifies* this class. See D. Braybrooke, *Meeting Needs*, Princeton Legacy Library (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987); Len Doyal and Ian Gough, *A Theory of Human Need* (Hampshire, UK: Macmillan Press, 1991); and Wiggins, "Claims of Need". For a survey, see Thomas Pölzler, "Basic Needs in Normative Contexts", *Philosophy Compass* 16, no. 5 (2021): 1–14.

Importantly for our purposes, having welfare in this sense does not depend on the capacity to form desires, or more generally, any 'pro-attitudes'. Given its broad applicability, I wish to emphasize that 'welfare' is *not* an essentially moralized notion, that is, does not entail the possession of moral status. As I will explain at the end of Section IV.D, a further premise is required to account for when welfare-based need claims are morally significant.[53]

A temptingly straightforward proposal, then, would be to simply replace all references to desire with welfare in the formulation of a semantics for 'need'. However, I think this would be a mistake for some of the reasons it is a mistake to hardwire the concept of desire into the semantics of 'need'. The concept of need is more *general* than just the concept of welfare: not all needs are to do with harm avoidance, etc. To support this, consider the following case

19. Context: Tom intensely dislikes studying. In view of an important final exam coming up, his teacher says:

    a) Tom needs to study.

    b) ? Tom has a need to study.

[53] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to clarify this.

(19b) seems less natural compared to (19a) relative to a context where it is salient that Tom is strongly averse to studying, despite what his teacher holds to be in Tom's long-term welfare. This example seems to suggest two things. First, even though passing the exam would promote Tom's welfare (at least as far as his teacher is concerned), it is not natural to describe this with (19b). Second, reflecting on *why* suggests that, unlike (19a), there is an intuition that (19b) attributes some necessity to study based on something 'internal' to Tom. If this is right, then while 'have a need' constructions can be used to attribute some welfare-based needs, the relevant welfare goods have to be those centered on the *subject* of the need ascription. The following section aims to further substantiate this intuition.

C. Subject-Orientation

We have seen that it is possible for 'need' sentences to be sensitive to a variety of contextually salient factors, e.g. those to do with strong desires, goals and welfare. I have argued that the subject-oriented necessity that thematic constructions like 'A has a need to V' express cannot be captured with the identification of any one *type* of ordering source. This motivates a conceptually 'leaner' semantics that does not *require* 'need' sentences to be evaluated with respect to any one type of ordering source. Instead, what matters is the *subject-orientation* of these ordering sources, that is, the explanatory role the *subject* plays in determining what factors are relevant in evaluating whether a need claim is true or false. Nevertheless, full consideration of the linguistic data—in particular, the contrast between (17a)/(17b)—suggests that 'need' sentences *prioritize* certain 'welfare' based ordering sources, even if they do not mandate them.

Recall:

[The evil king, ordering the execution of Tom, says:]

1a. Tom needs to be executed.

1b. # Tom has a need to be executed.

[Tom, a heroin addict, is suffering withdrawal. The doctor says:]

2a. # Tom needs to shoot up.

2b. Tom has a need to shoot up.

Here's an intuitive explanation of what is going on. (1a) expresses a (true) claim about what is necessary in view of the king's decree, whereas (1b) has a form that requires we interpret it as involving what is necessary in view of considerations *centered on Tom*. Similarly, (2a) expresses a (false) claim about what is necessary in view of medical advice, whereas (2b) involves what is necessary in view of considerations, in some sense, *centered on Tom*. I have been calling this the *subject-orientation* of such constructions, but how should we analyze it?

Here is a way of understanding what 'subject-orientation' consists of. Context can provide a *plurality* of ordering sources. The availability of a plurality of ordering sources captures the idea that there are many ways of determining what is 'best' at a context. Next, we need the idea that the context contains additional information distinguishing whether a particular ordering source is explained by factors *originating with the subject, or those external to the subject*. At the very least, this will draw on common knowledge about the nature of the subject, e.g. what kind of entity the subject is, but is not restricted solely to her intrinsic features.[54] As we will see, what factors assessors deem to be oriented on the subject is flexible. The proposal, then, is that subject-relational need constructions are limited in their interpretation, not to any one kind of modal flavor *contra* Abenina-Adar and Angelopoulos, but to an interpretation based on ordering sources that originate with the subject of the need ascription.[55] Subject-oriented orderings can *cut across*

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[54] Fruitful connections can be drawn here between work on need and attributive goodness, see Judith Jarvis Thomson, *Normativity* (Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2008).

[55] These suggestions are not alien to existing theorizing in this domain. The idea of drawing finer-grained distinctions among available ordering sources is discussed, for example, in von Fintel and Iatridou, "How to Say Ought in Foreign"; and Rubinstein, "Roots of Modality". Moreover, a long-standing idea has been that syntax features can limit what kinds of modal flavor a modal sentence can express, see Virginia Mary Brennan, "Root and Epistemic Modal Auxiliary Verbs" (PhD, Amherst, MA, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1993); Guglielmo Cinque, *Adverbs and Functional Heads: A Cross-Linguistic Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Valentine Hacquard, 'On the Event Relativity of Modal Auxiliaries', *Natural Language Semantics* 18, no. 1 (2010): 79–114. Indeed, the proposal in Abenina-Adar and Angelopoulos, "On Root Modality and Thematic Relations in Tagalog and English" is that thematic constructions are limited in their modal flavor to bouletic ordering sources (which I objected to). In this vein, an anonymous reviewer also observes that teleological interpretations of 'have a need' constructions seem infelicitous (e.g. [To make my work meeting] # 'I have a need to catch the 9:15 train'

typical categories of ordering source (e.g. bouletic, teleological etc.). For example, some welfare-based ordering sources to do with avoiding harm are reliably deemed subject-oriented. In contrast, we observe in (19) that the kinds of consideration taken by the teacher to be in Tom's long-term welfare are not deemed subject-oriented in the same way. I propose, then, that 'need' carries a presupposition that there is some such contextually salient subject-oriented ordering source.[56]

To illustrate, recall the case of the evil king in the context for (1a-1b). Intuitively, there are at least two ordering sources at play in this context: $g(w)$ which consists of the set of accessible worlds where Tom is executed, and $g'(w)$ which consists of the set of accessible worlds where Tom is spared death. We can intuitively distinguish $g(w)$ as explained by factors external to the subject (i.e. laws instituted by decree of the *king* at w), in contrast with $g'(w)$ that originates with the subject (in this case, in virtue of what is relevant to the subject's survival at w). The thematic construction (1b) requires interpretation with respect to the relevant ordering source, i.e. $g'(w)$.

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compared to (5c) ('[To make my work meeting] I need to catch the 9:15 train'.) My view offers a partial explanation for cases where the relevant goals are not subject-oriented. This is worth further investigation.

[56] As with Abenina-Adar and Angelopoulos (Ibid.), this can be implemented via a definedness condition requiring that the semantic value of 'need' is defined at a context only if there is some subject-oriented ordering source.

This constraint gets the right verdict about why presupposition failure results when ascribing needs to inanimate objects or events like planets or noise because there is no sensible way of determining a *subject-oriented* ordering source for such entities. There is no clear way in which we can make sense of certain possibilities being *better* or *worse* than other possibilities for an entity like the planet Jupiter *qua* Jupiter or *qua* planet. But it does not rule out certain organisms like plants as admissible subjects of need ascriptions since there is some subject-oriented ordering source---*viz*. a welfare-based one---against which it makes sense to think of certain possibilities as better than others for a plant *qua* plant.

So far, I have only proposed an alternative presupposition introduced by ‘need’. The task of formulating a semantic value for subject-relational ‘need’ is trickier. This is because it is possible for there to be more than one ordering source judged to be explained by factors originating with the subject. We have considered numerous examples with this structure. How is a subject-relational need claim interpreted when the context makes available more than one subject-oriented ordering source?

In the plastic surgery case, there are at least two ordering sources with equal claim to being grounded in the subject: a desire-based one, and a welfare-based one. Notice that (17b) (“Tom has a need for plastic surgery to be performed on his nose”) is judged false. So the mere fact that there exists some subject-grounded desire-based ordering source does not suffice for a true interpretation of (17b). This suggests that, other things being equal, welfare-based ordering sources take priority over desire-based ones.

Things are different in the heroin and studying cases. Given the prominence of strong desires in the description of these cases, salient desire-based ordering sources have a *better* claim to being grounded in the subject than the salient welfare-based ones. In the heroin case, Tom's strong addictive desire is the salient subject-oriented ordering source and so (2b) ("Tom has a need to shoot up") has a true reading, despite heroin being detrimental to Tom's well-being. Similarly, in the studying case, the stipulation that Tom hates studying plays a role in foregrounding Tom's desire not to study as the relevant subject-oriented ordering source.

To further support this point, return to the plastic surgery case where the salient desire-based ordering source and welfare-based ordering source are roughly on a par. My proposal predicts that we should expect a shift in felicity if we alter the context to increase the desire-based ordering source's claim to be the salient subject-oriented one. Suppose Tom has been obsessed with plastic surgery because the appearance of his nose has been a longstanding object of dislike which sustains a persistent and strong felt desire to change it. I submit that (17b) ("Tom has a need for plastic surgery") begins to sound more appropriate. For this reason, I maintain that need attributions *prioritize* evaluation with respect to welfare-based ordering sources, as opposed to *mandating* such ordering sources.[57]

D. Wiggins' Claim and the Discourse Function of 'Need'

I wish to return to the intuition discussed in Section II that need claims carry morally significant 'weight' in light of my central theses. We discussed a well-known explanation due to Wiggins who claims that 'need' is ambiguous between two senses, instrumental and absolute, where the latter is connected with harm-avoidance. Critics argue that ambiguity of this kind is theoretically unattractive, especially given advances made in contemporary linguistics on the semantics of modal expressions.

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[57] The differences between constructions exhibiting subject-orientation ("A has a need to V") and those that do not (e.g. "there is a need to V") mirror those observed between sentences of the forms "A has a reason to V" and "there is a reason for A to V". Mark Schroeder considers failures of "A has a reason to V" to entail "there is a reason to V" in arguing against 'factoring' account of having reasons, see Mark Schroeder, 'Having Reasons', *Philosophical Studies* 139, no. 1 (2008). For example, if A falsely believes his glass to contain beer when it actually contains gasoline, then A has a reason to take a drink from his glass (in the sense that makes it rational to do so) even though there is no reason for A to do so.

The heroin case illustrates an analogous failure of entailment: while the doctor might grant that Tom has a need to take heroin, it would be marked for the doctor to say "there is a need for Tom to take heroin". Stephen Finlay defending an account of reasons as explanations why, proposes an explanation of the failure of "A has a reason to V" to entail 'there is a reason to V'' that draws on similar observations, see Stephen Finlay, Confusion of Tongues: A Theory of Normative Language (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Finlay notes that "the use of the possessive…unambiguously connects [agent] s directly to the reason or explanans" and that this "shift[s] the salient background from the (default) perspective of the speaker or audience to the perspective of the agent s" (Ibid., 105). This mirrors the claim concerning the subject-orientation of the 'A has a need to V' construction in contrast with the speaker-orientation of 'there is a need to V' sentences. It is highly plausible that 'have' is the common linguistic mechanism for introducing subject-orientation in both cases (*supra* fn. 28). Thanks to the Associate Editor for drawing my attention to this.

I have motivated two theses that constitute a defense of a view closely related to Wiggins':

i. I motivated on linguistic grounds that sentences of the form 'A needs to V' admit of a reading that has raising syntax and so has *non-subject-relational* form. I also provided evidence that there is a sense of verbal 'need' that possesses an external subject argument, which makes possible an alternative *control* parse, and so would have *subject-relational* form. If so, then sentences of the form 'A needs to V' are syntactically ambiguous between these two forms (Section III).

ii. I provided evidence that 'need' sentences with subject-relational form (e.g. 'A has a need to V') presuppose some possible *subject-oriented* ordering source and defeasibly prioritize an interpretation based on subject-oriented welfare (Section IV).§

If theses (i) and (ii) are true, then there is a reading of sentences of the form 'A needs to V' that prioritizes an interpretation centered on ideals derived from the welfare of the subject, i.e. what is necessary to avoid harm, injury, etc. It is independently plausible that when we are dealing with subjects with moral status, true attributions of need based on welfare provide moral reasons for meeting the need. For example, the fact that person *A* needs something in view of pressing physical injury provides some moral reason to provide *A* with what she needs. A key advantage of this view is that it is motivated by close study of linguistic considerations and is consistent with a univocal Kratzer-style semantics, though I leave it open if a univocal semantics is ultimately correct.[58]

I wish to close this section by elaborating on the relationship between need claims interpreted against what I have called 'welfare'-based ordering sources and moral reasons. One natural question concerns the moral significance of this notion given its broad scope. Simple organisms like plants have welfare in this sense. Yet, it is, at the very least, controversial to think of the welfare of such organisms as providing even *pro tanto* moral reasons: I do not *wrong* my house plant by neglecting its need for water. As I have already emphasized, the operative notion of welfare is not a *moralized* one, i.e. does not entail the possession of moral status. Nevertheless, there will be moral reasons corresponding to the welfare-based needs of subjects *with* moral status if, as is plausible, there is some *pro tanto* moral reason to promote welfare goods like health and harm-avoidance for subjects *with* moral status. If true, then we can hold that there are *pro tanto* reasons to meet welfare-based needs for subjects with moral status without being

[58] To be clear, I am not defending what Fletcher calls the 'ambitious' claim that need is a fundamental and irreducible ethical concept; see Fletcher, "Needing and Necessity". My claim is the modest one that need claims have a default tendency to convey content that is normatively significant in contrast with other modal expressions like 'must'. This is consonant with other discussions of the normative role of need claims, e.g. in Thomson, *Needs*.

committed to there being reasons to meet such needs in subjects without moral status (e.g. plants).[59]

Conclusion

I have argued that accounting for an unsolved puzzle about claims of need motivates recognizing an important division across the linguistic forms that need claims come in (Section II-III). This division is a structural one between (i) subject-relational need claims expressed by constructions of the form 'A has a need to V', and (ii) non-subject-relational need claims.

I have outlined two implications for the philosophy of need that the solution to this puzzle has. First, it sharpens our understanding of the metaphysical limits of need attribution. Second, it clarifies the 'special force' of 'need' sentences in ways that reinforces a suggestion due to Wiggins.

The implication of my solution to the puzzle also informs semantic theorizing where I have provided reasons for reconsidering a recent semantics for 'need' in

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[59] Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on this. While I have been explicit here in separating the 'enumerative' notion of 'welfare' relied on in folk linguistic judgements from a philosophical theory of welfare (*supra* fn.46), it is highly plausible that there is substantial overlap in the goods identified, e.g. physical and mental health, avoidance of harm, etc. Many take it as a pre-theoretical datum that such goods are components of welfare. See Jeff McMahan, "Causing Disabled People to Exist and Causing People to Be Disabled", *Ethics* 116, no. 1 (2005): 77–99.; Kraut, *What is Good and Why*, 131-3; Daniel M. Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); and Jason Raibley, "Health and Well-Being", *Philosophical Studies* 165, no. 2 (2013): 469–89.

the literature. Section IV argued that this semantics encodes a conceptual error that some philosophers have warned against and I made some tentative recommendations about how a correct semantics for ‘need’ should be formulated in light of tricky data.