

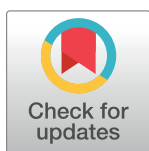
## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Winter is coming: How laypeople think about different kinds of needs

Alexander Max Bauer<sup>1</sup>\*, Jan Romann<sup>2</sup>, Mark Siebel<sup>1</sup>, Stefan Traub<sup>3</sup>

**1** Department of Philosophy, University of Oldenburg, Oldenburg, Germany, **2** Faculty of Technology, University of Applied Sciences Emden/Leer, Emden, Germany, **3** Department of Economics, Helmut-Schmidt-University, Hamburg, Germany

\* These authors contributed equally to this work.

\* [alexander.max.bauer@uni-oldenburg.de](mailto:alexander.max.bauer@uni-oldenburg.de)

## Abstract

Needs play a key role in many fields of social sciences and humanities, ranging from normative theories of distributive justice to conceptions of the welfare state. Over time, different conceptions of what counts as a need (i. e., what is considered a normatively relevant need) have been proposed. Many of them include (in one way or the other) needs for survival, decency, belonging, and autonomy. Little work has been done on how these kinds of needs are evaluated in terms of their significance for distributive justice. To begin closing this gap, we investigate the role of the four aforementioned kinds of needs for impartial observers. We do so in two empirical studies. The first study asks participants to evaluate the importance of each of the four kinds of needs separately. We find that different levels of importance are attributed to the kinds of needs, which places them in a hierarchy. The second study asks participants to make distributive decisions. Results further support the hierarchy found in the first study and, additionally, reveal that participants tend to make coherent allocation decisions.

## OPEN ACCESS

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## Introduction

Imagine you were living in a cottage heated exclusively with firewood. Spring has given way to summer, summer has given way to autumn—and temperatures are starting to fall. Winter is coming, and, unfortunately, you are short on firewood. Now imagine that without additional firewood it would get so cold in your hut that you would probably become life-threateningly ill.

In this case, your physical integrity—something that pretty much all authors can agree counts as a basic need—is seriously threatened. Such needs have played a role in philosophy since antiquity (see, e. g., [1], who interprets Aristotle's reflections on ἀναγκαῖον in his *Metaphysics* as related to basic needs; [2, 1015a20–1015b15]), they feature in the *Acts of Luke*, when the Christian community is described (see [3, p. 141f.] and [4, p. 302f.]), and they have repeatedly been emphasized in the history of thought (famously, e. g., by [5]). In the last century, psychology (see, e. g., [6, 7]) and philosophy (see, e. g., [8–10]; for overviews see [1, 11–13]), among some other fields, found new interest in the topic (for perspectives from philosophy,