



EDITED BY HANS FINK AND ROBERT STERN

WHAT IS  
ETHICALLY  
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K. E. LØGSTRUP'S PHILOSOPHY OF MORAL LIFE

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Edited by  
HANS FINK  
and  
ROBERT STERN

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## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for references to Løgstrup's books; if not listed here, article references are given in full in the relevant notes. Where references are made to the new editions of Løgstrup's works being published by Klim in the *Løgstrup Biblioteket*, dates of first publication are given in square brackets after the title.

### Books in Danish

- EBP     *Etiske begreber og problemer* (Ethical Concepts and Problems). Aarhus: Klim, 2014 [1971].
- EF     *Den etiske fordring* (*The Ethical Demand*). Aarhus: Klim, 2010 [1956].
- KE     *Kunst og etik* (Art and Ethics). Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1961.
- KER     *Kunst og erkendelse* (Art and Cognition). Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1983.
- KHE     *Kierkegaards og Heideggers existensanalyse og dens forhold til forkyndelsen* (Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's Analysis of Existence and Its Relation to Proclamation). Aarhus: Klim, 2013.

- NS     *Norm og spontaneitet* (Norm and Spontaneity). Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1972.
- OK     *Opgør med Kierkegaard* (Controverting Kierkegaard). Aarhus: Klim, 2013 [1968].
- OO     *Ophav og omgivelse: Betragtninger over historie og natur, Metafysik III* (Origin and Surrounding: Considerations on History and Nature, Metaphysics Volume III). Aarhus: Klim, 2013 [1984].
- SS     *System og symbol: Essays* (System and Symbol: Essays). Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962.
- ST     *Skabelse og tilintetgørelse: Religionsfilosofiske betragtninger, Metafysik IV* (Creation and Annihilation: Religio-Philosophical Considerations, Metaphysics Volume IV). Aarhus: Klim, 2015 [1978].
- VS     *Venskab og strid*, with Hal Koch (Friendship and Strife). Aarhus: Klim, 2010.

## Unpublished Manuscripts in Danish

- DRM    “Det religiøse motiv i den erkendelsesteoretiske problemstilling” (The Religious Theme in the Epistemological Problematic). 1934. In Universitetsbiblioteket, 1. Afdeling, København and The Løgstrup Archive in Aarhus.

## Books in English

- BED     *Beyond the Ethical Demand*. Edited with an introduction by Kees van Kooten Niekerk. Translated by Susan Dew and Heidi Flegel. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.
- ED     *The Ethical Demand*. Revised and edited with an introduction by Hans Fink and Alasdair MacIntyre. Translated by Theodor I. Jensen and Gary Puckering. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997.
- M     *Metaphysics*. Translated by Russell L. Dees. 2 vols. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1995.

## Publications in German

- AK     *Auseinandersetzung mit Kierkegaard: Kontroverse um Kierkegaard und Grundtvig*, vol. 2. Edited by K. E. Løgstrup and Götz Harbsmeier. Translated by Rosemarie Løgstrup. Munich: Ch. Kaiser Verlag, 1968.
- EO     “Ethik und Ontologie.” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 57 (1960): 357–91 (translated as an appendix to ED by Eric Watkins, pp. 265–93).
- KH     *Kierkegaards und Heideggers Existenzanalyse und ihr Verhältnis zur Verkündigung*. Berlin: Erich Blaschker Verlag, 1950.



# Introduction

*Hans Fink and Robert Stern*

Knud Ejler Løgstrup was born in 1905 and died in 1981. This makes him an almost exact contemporary of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–80), Hannah Arendt (1906–76), and Emmanuel Levinas (1906–95). They were all in their early teens by the end of World War I and deeply affected by their involvement in World War II during their late thirties. They were all “continental” philosophers who formed part of the phenomenological movement and were strongly influenced by the work of Martin Heidegger; but unlike the others, Løgstrup had the special background of being a Lutheran theologian much influenced by the idiosyncratic phenomenology of Hans Lipps and by strong currents in Danish culture to which he himself made important contributions, and unlike the others, Løgstrup has so far been famous in Scandinavia only.

The book that established his fame there was *Den etiske fordring* (The Ethical Demand), which was published in Copenhagen in 1956 during one of the coldest phases of the cold war. Løgstrup was then the professor of ethics and philosophy of religion at the University of Aarhus, and his book is by no means an easy read; nevertheless it had an immediate and remarkably broad reception with extensive reviews in the major national newspapers of Denmark and critical discussions in the periodicals most

central to cultural life in the country. The argument of the book was, or was generally taken to be, that the ethical demand for neighborly love so central to Christianity is in fact integral to human life as such, and that it can be understood to be so quite independent of a belief in the Christian God or the divine status of Jesus. In the mind of the public Løgstrup's position was often associated with that of one of the other Aarhus theologians, P. G. Lindhardt, who caused a great national stir by denying the idea of an afterlife and preaching that "heaven and hell is here and now." Such views were unacceptable to more traditional Christians, who saw religion as the ultimate guarantee of morality, but Løgstrup's views on ethics were also unacceptable to positivistic philosophers and to the many academics that had been influenced by the philosophy taught at the University of Copenhagen by Jørgen Jørgensen and Alf Ross, according to whom there was a logical gap between facts and norms and therefore no ethical demands integral to human life itself.

There is no doubt about Løgstrup's own Christian commitments. He was a Lutheran theologian, and everything he wrote he wrote as a Lutheran theologian; but he insisted that precisely as a Lutheran theologian he should be able to make the ethical message of the Gospels accessible to himself and the public in completely secular, philosophical terms. In his own words his book is an "attempt to give a definition in strictly human terms of the relationship to the other person which is contained within the religious proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth" (EF p. 9/ED p. 1). It is an attempt (et forsøg). It is not certain from the outset that the attempt will succeed or succeed completely. It is a theological thought experiment. What is it that Jesus is saying if he is regarded as no more and no less than a great moral reformer who did not write books but whose words and example inspired others to write about him in a way that undoubtedly has had enormous influence on the lives of billions of people?

Theologically this thought experiment is of great importance. Especially for Christians who are completely convinced that Jesus is Christ and the son of God, the demands contained in the Gospels should be understandable and answer to something in human existence which we may have been unaware of but which is in principle open for everyone to see. Theologically this is important because "faith without understanding is not faith but coercion." "Only if we understand the proclamation can we accept it for the sake of its content. To accept it without understanding is

to accept it for other reasons, out of illegitimate motives; that is to say, we force it upon ourselves. In fact, if a proclamation is not intelligible, the difference between obscurantism and proclamation disappears" (EF p. 10/ED p. 2). Theologically the thought experiment is also important because it can help to clarify the specifically religious aspect of the proclamation over and above its disclosure of those features of our life about which we may have been unaware hitherto. Løgstrup drew a rather sharp dividing line between what is universal in Christianity and what is specifically Christian in Christianity. The universal part is a metaphysics or an understanding of life on a par with other metaphysical positions with a claim to universal validity but, like them, open to ordinary philosophical and scientific scrutiny, and whatever truth they contain is not something in which Christians can or should claim to have a monopoly.

This makes his thought experiment interesting even for secular philosophers, who neither can nor will understand Jesus as other and more than a human being, but who remain open to the possibility that his life and teaching may contain deep insights about human existence and coexistence—insights that could in principle have been expressed by anyone, anywhere, and at any time, and insights that risk being forgotten during secularization though they are in fact fully compatible with it. Løgstrup himself was convinced that the ethical demand is ultimately best made sense of if given a religious interpretation in terms of life being a divine gift, but the overall argument of the book must be that it is possible for secular philosophers both to understand and to give their own secular interpretation of the demand for neighborly love that is at the center of the proclamation of Jesus of Nazareth.

One might perhaps expect that a book about the philosophical content of this proclamation would be a close reading of some of the parables and episodes of the Gospels, but this is far from being the case. Løgstrup claims, without further ado and based on a single reference to the German theologian Friedrich Gogarten (1887–1967), that the content of the proclamation is that an individual's relation to God is determined wholly and solely at the point of his or her relation to the neighbor (EF p. 12/ED p. 4). If this is so, something of absolute importance is in principle at stake in any relationship between two persons. How is this to be understood in strictly human terms and on completely secular conditions? Does it make sense today to talk of absolute ethical demands?



To answer these questions Løgstrup uses philosophical methods developed in the phenomenological tradition. He is not, however, very explicit about what they consist in. He says merely that it is a matter of drawing the distinctions necessary for understanding the very special character of the demand for neighborly love. He immediately adds that the special character of this demand is that it is silent, radical, one sided, and unfulfillable (EF p. 14/ED p. 5). The rest of the book is an attempt to elucidate and argue for this claim with the help of phenomenological analyses that are phenomenological in the very broad sense that they appeal to concrete, ordinary experiences expressed in ordinary language with as few theoretical presuppositions as possible, be they scientific, philosophical, or theological. Quite consistently with this, he often uses metaphors and illustrations taken from literature, thereby making the argument closer to life but also more heterogeneous.

The book itself opens with a short analysis of a quite elementary form of trust that is shown to be presupposed in all encounters between persons. In later writings he has more to say about trust seen as what he calls a “sovereign expression of life,” but in *The Ethical Demand* the analysis of trust has the main function of leading to an emphasis on the mutual dependency and the mutual power relations present in all encounters. If I am someone who engages with another person, then the dependency of the other inevitably gives me a responsibility for what my actions mean in the life of the other. The ethical demand is simply that I live up to this responsibility and that I do what is best for the other for the sake of the other. This demand is taken to be defining of the ethical dimension in human life, and it is Løgstrup’s claim that it cannot be assimilated to any of the many other demands, including moral demands, that we can be said to be under and that have been intensely discussed by philosophers. It is unlike the demands by the other person; it is unlike the rule-based or right-based demands by the others in society; it is unlike the demands of social or divine authorities; it is unlike the demands of practical rationality; rather, it is the anonymous demand of the very situation in which you hold something of another person’s life in your hands, to use one of the striking metaphors of the book (EF p. 26/ED p. 18). This demand is said to be in force whether you feel it or not, and if you feel a demand and act in order to fulfill it, you will thereby have failed to fulfill it, because the demand is that you act for the sake of the other, and not for the sake of any moral demand, not even the ethical demand itself.

In all the later chapters of the book the status of this peculiar demand is explored from many different angles, contrasting it with some of the other personal, social, legal, and rational demands that you can likewise be said to be under. Underlying the argument is an often implicit critique of traditional forms of moral philosophy that make concepts such as duty, right, justice, utility, or virtue central to ethics. When one reads the book more than fifty years after its original publication, it is striking how Løgstrup could be said to have anticipated some of the developments in moral philosophy since the 1980s. His thought thus has clear resonances with the work of philosophers as diverse as Iris Murdoch, Bernard Williams, Alasdair MacIntyre, John McDowell, Jonathan Dancy, Robert Adams, Annette Baier, Carol Gilligan, Harry Frankfurt, and others, and he presents elements of an interesting alternative to the broadly Kantian, utilitarian, and Aristotelian schools of moral thinking that still dominate the field. His book thus raises and answers the question “What is ethically demanded?” in an unusual and challenging way that deserves to be taken seriously and discussed in depth by moral philosophers. Or that is at least the claim advanced by this collection of essays that is based on contributions to two conferences on Løgstrup, one held in Sheffield (December 2010) and one in Aarhus (November 2011).

The collection itself is divided into four main sections. The first deals predominantly with Løgstrup’s relation to Kant, and through Kant to the system of morality in general. The second focuses on how Løgstrup stands in connection with Kierkegaard, with Heidegger, and with Levinas. The third considers issues in the development of Løgstrup’s ethics, and how it relates to other aspects of his thought. The final section covers certain central themes in Løgstrup’s position, particularly his claims about trust and about the unfulfillability of the ethical demand. In what follows, we will offer a brief outline of the main claims of these papers.

The first paper is a translation of a work by Løgstrup himself, entitled “The Anthropology of Kant’s Ethics.” It is a relatively early piece, written in 1947, nine years before the publication of *The Ethical Demand*, in a festschrift for one of his colleagues at Copenhagen. In this article Løgstrup starts by observing that Kant does not deal with situations of ethical conflict but only of temptation, whereas Løgstrup traces the roots of such conflicts to the fact that our lives are always lived with certain given “ordinances” (*ordninger*),

thus systems of rules and obligations for specific relations between people, for example husbands and wives, adults and children, employers and employees; and these can clash with one another. (The more precise theological meaning of ordinances and Løgstrup's changing relations to them are made clear in the translator's introduction by Kees van Kooten Niekerk that accompanies the piece.) Løgstrup argues that Kant could not find ethical relations within our lives in this way, as his epistemology separated such empirical and material factors from more purely formal and a priori ones, where he located morality. This also makes temptation the central ethical phenomenon for Kant, stemming from the clash between desire and reason. For Løgstrup, what this fails to recognize is that our ethical lives arise out of our relations to one another and the ordinances governing those relations, which are thus "material" and not purely formal in this sense; and the complexity of those relations is what can lead to real conflict.

Løgstrup contrasts Kant's position here with Luther's, which adopts a natural law approach, according to which ethical laws hold as part of a divinely ordered natural realm in which we live, rather than as constructions of pure reason. We thus find ourselves with responsibilities to others, and the role of reason is not to impose those responsibilities on ourselves, as ultimately this imposition comes from God. In contrast to Kant's position, therefore, on this Lutheran approach which Løgstrup endorses here, reason becomes a "mere tool," that aims to identify what our responsibilities are in the situation and how best to help the other, but not to construct those responsibilities for itself in an a priori manner. This paper by Løgstrup therefore raises a number of significant issues, and also both foreshadows some of his later themes (such as his critique of the individualism of Kant's moral thinking) and equally shows how his later position evolves from this earlier starting point (where, in *The Ethical Demand*, God-given specific ordinances are explicitly denied in the argument and greater emphasis is placed on the completely general demand to do what is best for the other for the other's sake).

In the paper that follows, "Løgstrup on Morals and 'the Sovereign Expressions of Life,'" Stephen Darwall contrasts Løgstrup's position in *The Ethical Demand* and later writings with his own account of ethics, which is based on the claim that morality involves the authority we each of us have over one another as members of the moral community, in a second-personal manner. With reference to *The Ethical Demand*, Darwall

criticizes Løgstrup for ultimately making God rather than us the source of moral authority, whereas Darwall claims here and elsewhere that this theistic position is ultimately unstable and must give way to his second-personal view.<sup>1</sup> However, he argues that Løgstrup's position shifted in his later writings, where authority does not now lie in God, but rather in the "sovereign expressions of life," and where that sovereignty is thus placed "*within* human life" itself, rather than being traced back to God as its creator. Darwall then suggests that this shift can be understood as a move towards the second-person standpoint, as essentially involving an openness to the other, while acknowledging that this standpoint may not only concern mutual respect, which is how Darwall himself has generally characterized it up until now. Darwall thus allows that Løgstrup can offer a valuable additional perspective to the second-personal approach.

In his contribution, "Løgstrup's Point: The Complementarity between the Ethical Demand and All Other Moral Demands," Hans Fink also focuses on the relation between Darwall's position and Løgstrup's, but from a more critical perspective, which makes *The Ethical Demand* itself central, rather than the later writings. Fink argues that Darwall's position (along with that of Jürgen Habermas) is still too wedded to a fundamentally Kantian outlook, which Løgstrup sets out to challenge through his characterization of the ethical demand as silent, radical, one sided, and unfulfillable, in contrast to those moral demands that we make on ourselves and each other, which must be explicit, conditional, reciprocal, and fulfillable. Fink argues, however, that while drawing this important distinction between the ethical and the moral, Løgstrup did not simply want to *reject* the latter in favor of the former; on the contrary, Løgstrup recognized that on its own, the ethical demand would make the lives of agents unbearable, so that the moral level is also required. Of course, this then raises the question of how these two levels—the ethical and the moral—are to be related to one another, and how to handle potential conflicts. To illuminate this relation, Fink turns to the concept of "complementarity" that was developed by Løgstrup's fellow Dane and near contemporary, the physicist Niels Bohr.

The next section of papers begins with an essay, "Løgstrup on Death, Guilt, and Existence in Kierkegaard and Heidegger" by George Pattison, that considers Løgstrup's relation to Kierkegaard and Heidegger, with a

particular focus on a relatively short text of Løgstrup's written in German and published in 1950, based on lectures he gave at the Freie Universität in Berlin under the title *Kierkegaards und Heideggers Existenzanalyse und ihr Verhältnis zur Verkündigung* (Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's Analysis of Existence and Its Relation to Proclamation; KH/KHE). Tracing the way in which Løgstrup goes about presenting the views of Kierkegaard and Heidegger, and also comparing and contrasting them, Pattison draws out some of the background assumptions operative in Løgstrup's treatment and discusses how that treatment fits into Løgstrup's own agenda. As we have already seen, the question of the relation between ethics and theology is a central issue here, particularly in the context of Løgstrup's attempt to read Kierkegaard as an ethicist and not a theologian, who nonetheless recognized the "infinite demand" in a way that (Løgstrup claims) Heidegger did not, but who could do so only in religious terms. Pattison argues that notwithstanding the interest and subtlety of Løgstrup's engagement with these thinkers, and the significance of this text for understanding Løgstrup's subsequent writings (including also the 1968 *Opgør med Kierkegaard* [Controverting Kierkegaard]), in the end his treatment can be said to be limited and one sided.

In the next paper, "The Configuration of the Ethical Demand in Løgstrup and Levinas," Peter Dews brings Levinas into the debate, and traces out the way in which these two thinkers can be compared. While common themes between the two have often been noted, and while they shared important background influences, they in fact worked independently of one another, so differences are also to be expected. Dews argues that while Løgstrup wanted to *disclose* the structure of our ethical lives in a way that avoids the many distortions we place upon that structure through misleading forms of thinking and analysis, Levinas's project is more radical in wanting to *excavate* that ethical life from under the rubble that human history has dumped on top of it. This difference of outlook reflects a greater optimism underlying Løgstrup's project, and a greater sense of hope, where Dews suggests that in the end Levinas's pessimism (however justified by his historical circumstances) may lead to a self-undermining and stultifying despair which Løgstrup manages to avoid.

Levinas is also a focus for the paper "The Ethical Demand: Kierkegaard, Løgstrup, and Levinas" by Arne Grøn, which also contains a discussion of Kierkegaard. Grøn is concerned to explicate the idea of normativity

that the ethical involves, and contrasts these three thinkers as offering an account based on the notions of duty (Kierkegaard), demand (Løgstrup), and appeal/call (Levinas); at the same time, Grøn considers how these three ways of expressing the normativity of the ethical are related. In particular, Grøn explores how for all three, the ethical relates to the subjectivity and “singularity” of the individual on whom the ethical requirement is placed, and what this means for the individual’s relation to the other. He also addresses the important issue of how far it is possible to retain the bindingness of morality, on the one hand, in any account that, on the other hand, sees that bindingness as self-imposed, suggesting that all three thinkers saw the need to avoid overstating the second idea in order not to lose a grip on the first.

The next section of papers considers the development of Løgstrup’s views. In his paper “Kierkegaard’s Demand, Transformed by Løgstrup,” Svend Andersen discusses the 1950 lectures at the Freie Universität in Berlin, like George Pattison. However, he focuses primarily on what this tells us just about Løgstrup’s view of Kierkegaard, and how his discussion of Kierkegaard in this period shaped his later understanding of the ethical demand. In particular, he brings out the way in which this 1950 work differs from Løgstrup’s writings from the 1940s, including “The Anthropology of Kant’s Ethics,” the paper with which our collection begins. Andersen argues that the 1950 text shows both how Kierkegaard led Løgstrup to change some of his earlier views and also how he brought Løgstrup to his conception of the infinite demand which was so vital to *The Ethical Demand*; but also that certain fundamental dissatisfactions with Kierkegaard caused Løgstrup to develop his own view of the nature of that demand.

In the following paper, “The Ethical Demand and Its Ontological Presuppositions,” Svein Aage Christoffersen addresses a central issue in Løgstrup interpretation by also bringing to bear an analysis of his intellectual development. The issue concerns the relation between Løgstrup’s view of ethics and what he calls “ontology,” where the ethical demand is said to presuppose the claim that “life is a gift” as an ontological basis. This raises two fundamental questions: first, what kind of basis might this ontology provide, and second, does it collapse into a theology or somehow remain distinct in its own right? To address these issues, Christoffersen goes back

to Løgstrup's engagement with phenomenology from the 1930s, and in particular to his move from Husserl and Scheler to Lipps and Heidegger, whereby Løgstrup arrives at the insight that "man is unavoidably interwoven in and entangled with the world." Christoffersen shows how this nonetheless led Løgstrup to adopt a more ontological approach than Heidegger, precisely because of Løgstrup's concern with the moral dimension of existence. Christoffersen also traces the way in which these ontological issues are developed in Løgstrup's later metaphysical writings, and shows the relevance of these to Løgstrup's overall position, and the place of ontology and theology within it.

In his contribution, "Løgstrup's Conception of the Sovereign Expressions of Life," Kees van Kooten Niekerk also draws out important developments in Løgstrup's thinking, this time from *The Ethical Demand* to his later ethical writings, where the introduction of the idea of "sovereign expressions of life" is particularly crucial. Niekerk closely analyzes what is meant by this idea and how it opens up a new element in Løgstrup's approach. Niekerk also uses Harry Frankfurt's more recent discussion of the "volitional necessity" involved when we are "moved by reason or by love" to help shed light on Løgstrup's thinking here. His paper concludes with a discussion of the later reception of Løgstrup's views by Johannes Sløk, and how that led Løgstrup to some fresh thinking on the concept of sovereign expressions of life towards the very end of his career, while Niekerk provides his own critical assessment of the concept.

David Bugge, in his paper "The Out-Side In-Sight: Løgstrup and Fictional Writing," also broadens his focus beyond *The Ethical Demand*, in order to shed light on the way Løgstrup uses examples from literature in that text, particularly his discussion of D. H. Lawrence's treatments of love in chapter 2. Bugge shows how Løgstrup turned to literature at many points throughout his oeuvre, and examines his reasons for doing so, showing that these partly relate to his dissatisfaction with the abstract discussions of ethical matters common amongst analytic philosophers at the time. Also significant for Bugge is Løgstrup's early claim that "we constitute one another's world. Literature has always known that, philosophy and theology, however, remarkably seldom"; fundamentally, he argues, it is this that gives literature a special place in Løgstrup's thinking. Putting these two thoughts together, we can therefore see why Løgstrup claims that "if you want to work philosophically, your thinking can only be close to reality,

and you can only avoid thinking schematically, by recurring to literature. This is my experience which I will never abandon.”

The final section of papers concentrates on specific themes that characterize Løgstrup’s position and potential objections to it. Paul Faulkner in “Trust and the Radical Ethical Demand” focuses on Løgstrup’s treatment of trust, which is central to the argument of *The Ethical Demand*. On the one hand, he argues, Løgstrup’s conception of the moral psychology of trust is to be applauded, particularly Løgstrup’s emphasis on the role of our vulnerability to others in the trusting relation, as those who trust depend upon the trusted party and expect that dependence to play a role in the latter’s thinking about the situation. On the other hand, Faulkner argues, there is perhaps some tension between this conception of trust and Løgstrup’s emphasis on the nature of the radical ethical demand as silent and as isolating. For, Faulkner suggests, as based on this vulnerability, trust would seem to render the ethical demand articulate by providing it with content, namely to act in a way that this vulnerability requires; and given this content, the demand also cannot be wholly isolating in the sense that the person on whom the demand falls cannot be sure she has acted in accordance with it, because by responding to the vulnerability of the truster it seems that she indeed will have acted correctly. Faulkner argues, however, that while this tension holds if we think Løgstrup’s focus is on trusting someone to act a certain way, in fact his focus is instead on the more fundamental relation of laying oneself open to the other, where this does not involve any concrete expectation about what the other will then do, in a sense of trust that is then compatible with the silence and isolation that is involved in the ethical demand as Løgstrup characterizes it.

In his contribution, “Danish Ethical Demands and French Common Goods: Two Moral Philosophies,”<sup>2</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre considers the apparent contrast between twentieth-century French Thomistic moral philosophy and Løgstrup’s approach. On the face of it, he allows, there may seem to be a major divergence here, for Løgstrup rejects an appeal to rules in his account of the singularity and specificity of the ethical demand as arising from the particular situation in which one finds oneself in relation to the other who is in need, while by contrast Thomism is a natural law position that makes rules central to ethics in the form of laws governing



our moral lives. MacIntyre argues, however, that when considered more deeply, the two positions can be shown to complement each other: for only by combining both outlooks will the right balance be struck between spontaneity and reflection, particularity and generality, and concern with the good of others and concern with one's own. By setting both positions in their historical and social context, MacIntyre brings out the pressures that led each side to develop its view, while also emphasizing how Løgstrup's relation to the Lutheran version of natural law (also discussed by other contributors) makes it less surprising that underlying similarities can be found. MacIntyre argues that Løgstrup's attempt to institute a "normativity without norms" reflects the collapse of that natural law tradition and thus the desire to work outside it, while also explaining Løgstrup's fundamental similarity to Levinas, whose project (he argues) can be characterized in the same way. Nonetheless, MacIntyre suggests, once cut off from any natural law tradition, such approaches must remain one sided and ultimately unsatisfactory, reflecting the fragmentation of our current ethical lives.

In the paper that follows, "Spontaneity and Perfection: MacIntyre versus Løgstrup," Patrick Stokes engages directly with MacIntyre's paper and the themes it introduces. Stokes argues that MacIntyre is overly sanguine about the complementarity of Løgstrup's position with Thomism, and he focuses on a number of significant points of tension, such as their respective treatments of trust, of spontaneity, and of mercy, emphasizing throughout that it is Løgstrup's commitment to a phenomenological approach that underlies his differences from any natural law tradition, despite the similarities emphasized by MacIntyre. Stokes also resists MacIntyre's claim that the natural law tradition is ethically the more fundamental, where a position such as Løgstrup's (and Levinas's) is portrayed as an unstable residue that is left when that tradition has collapsed; on the contrary, Stokes suggests, it is the ethical situation as characterized by Løgstrup that might be considered the fundamental one, which is then distorted by the more reflective and elaborated outlook adopted by the Thomist. Nonetheless, Stokes recognizes the challenges that MacIntyre poses for Løgstrup's position if we do take it on its own terms, without attempting to integrate it into a more Thomistic and broadly Aristotelian framework. One particular sticking point is how the spontaneity that Løgstrup appeals

to is to be understood if not in terms of Aristotelian habit formation; another is Løgstrup's claim that the ethical demand is unfulfillable, which may seem dubiously coherent, as MacIntyre has argued elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> While recognizing these difficulties, Stokes nonetheless insists that they relate to what is fundamentally distinctive about Løgstrup's approach, so that while Løgstrup may not himself have fully resolved them, we need to take them seriously if we are to capture what makes his position important, rather than assimilate him too quickly to other existing options in such a way as (he thinks) MacIntyre tries to do.

The final two papers in the collection also relate to the claims Løgstrup makes about the unfulfillability of the ethical demand, and whether Løgstrup might be able to respond to MacIntyre's critique on this issue. Stern's paper, "'Duty and Virtue Are Moral Introversions': On Løgstrup's Critique of Morality,"<sup>4</sup> sets this against the background of Løgstrup's critique of Kant. In ways that are also discussed by Stokes and Martin, Stern shows that by making the Good Samaritan case central and paradigmatic, Løgstrup seems to want to emphasize the way in which the genuine ethical response involves no appeal to considerations of duty or virtue, but a kind of immediate and spontaneous reaction to the needs of the other. In some ways, when it comes to Kant, this is now a familiar criticism, made popular through Bernard Williams's "one thought too many" objection.

At the same time, contemporary Kantians have been resourceful in responding to this objection, and Stern considers how their arguments might also be successfully deployed against Løgstrup's view—which can also be criticized in its turn as involving "one thought too few," and thus leaving insufficient space for when reflection is needed in our ethical lives. In the end, Stern suggests, Løgstrup may find it hard to maintain his critique of the role of duty, and thus of morality, along these lines. Nonetheless, Stern argues, viewed rightly, Løgstrup can ironically find support from Kant himself for a critique of a different sort, for Kant also took the agent who acts from duty to be ethically inferior to the holy will, who acts rightly but without coming under the "necessitation" or bindingness of the moral law precisely because the holy will has no nonmoral inclinations for this law to constrain. This Kantian framework can also resolve the difficulty of the unfulfillability of the ethical demand, where again the key is said to be Løgstrup's claim "that what is demanded is that the demand should

not have been necessary,” so that the demand itself should be (as it were) “self-effacing”: that is, if the demand is represented to us as a demand at all, and we then attempt to comply with it as such, we have already shown ourselves to have fallen short by failing to be holy wills. The demand is therefore something that cannot be fulfilled in this sense: either one experiences it as a demand, in which case one has already failed, or one does not experience it as a demand, in which case one cannot obey it, so that either way it cannot be satisfied, but in a manner that would seem to avoid MacIntyre’s concerns.

In his contribution, “Løgstrup’s Unfulfillable Demand,” Wayne Martin likewise counters many of the presuppositions lying behind MacIntyre’s challenge, while also questioning aspects of Stern’s approach. Martin argues that MacIntyre’s objection pertains to an unfulfillable *command*, and to the utterance *of a commander*; but he points out that Løgstrup distinguishes a demand from a command, and insists that the ethical demand is silent. Moreover, whereas MacIntyre argues that an unfulfillable command would be baffling, Martin draws on the Lutheran idea that even unfulfillable commands can in fact serve an important educative function, in showing us something important about ourselves and our limitations *precisely because* they cannot be fulfilled. Of course, if the ethical *demand* is detached from any appeal to a commander, this might seem to leave its origin rather mysterious. Martin argues, however, that we can think of *situations* as making demands on us, illustrating the point by appeal to the situation of the Robert Redford character in the film *All Is Lost*. Martin also addresses the question of *why* Løgstrup took the ethical demand to be unfulfillable, identifying and critically assessing two discrete lines of analysis upon which Løgstrup relies in pressing this point. The first turns on Løgstrup’s pessimistic view about human psychology, while the second turns on a deontic peculiarity in the ethical demand itself, which in effect demands a form of spontaneous action that would make the demand unnecessary.

It is hoped that, taken together, these papers shed new and interesting light on the many aspects of Løgstrup’s ethical thought, as well as its context and development. As with any sophisticated thinker, there is room for both interpretive and philosophical disagreement over Løgstrup’s views,

and some of that is certainly reflected in these contributions. Nonetheless, beyond such disputes, there is an expression of serious engagement and respect for the thinking of this important philosopher and theologian, which we hope others will be able to share and take further.

## Notes

1. Cf. Stephen Darwall, *The Second-Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 104–15.

2. MacIntyre's essay was previously published in the *European Journal of Philosophy* 18 (2010): 1–16 and is reprinted here by permission of the author and the publisher.

3. Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Human Nature and Human Dependence: What Might a Thomist Learn from Reading Løgstrup?" in *Concern for the Other: Perspectives on the Ethics of K. E. Løgstrup*, ed. Svend Andersen and Kees van Kooten Niekerk (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 147–67.

4. Stern's essay was previously published in *Kantian Ethics: Value, Agency, and Obligation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 224–42, and is reprinted here by permission of the author and the publisher.



P A R T I

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Løgstrup, Kant,  
and Modern Kantianism



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## The Anthropology of Kant's Ethics

*K. E. Løgstrup*

Translated with an introduction by Kees van Kooten Niekerk

### Translator's Introduction

Although Løgstrup engaged with Kant throughout his ethical work, he did so most thoroughly in “The Anthropology of Kant's Ethics,” defining some of his basic ethical ideas in opposition to Kant's. This article dates from 1947, when Løgstrup was in the middle of developing the ethical views he was to publish nine years later in *Den etiske fordring*, the Danish original of *The Ethical Demand*. Hence some ideas are stated only sketchily. Moreover, he attributes a central role to a theological concept, which has now gone out of use, the concept of “ordinances.” Both features may hamper the understanding of his article. Therefore a brief introduction is offered here, which places the article in the context of the development of Løgstrup's ethical thinking and pays special attention to the role of the concept of ordinances.

The concept of ordinances (often called “creation ordinances”) played an important part in Lutheran theology in Germany during the interwar



period. This concept originated from Luther. According to him, at creation God ordered human life in certain ways, which serve the maintenance of life. Luther distinguished three basic ways: the household (consisting of family life and working life), the state, and the church. Each of these “ordinances” (German: “Ordnungen”) comprises different vocations (e.g., spouse, parent, and provider in the household), and each vocation has its own rules, which can be known by reason, independently of God’s revelation. In German interwar theology Luther’s view was elaborated and extended. For example, the people (*das Volk*) came to be regarded as an ordinance as well. Some theologians went so far as to use the idea that the people and the state are God-given ordinances to justify Nazism. This is one of the reasons why the concept of ordinances has gone out of use in postwar theology.

In 1934 Løgstrup gave four lectures as part of an application for a readership at the Faculty of Theology in Copenhagen. One of these lectures dealt with the ordinances. Løgstrup starts by pointing out that humans are social beings, who are in need of being supported by one another. Society meets this need through basic forms, which correspond to basic forms of existence, for example matrimony and economic collaboration. Society’s forms have their own, inherent regularities, for example the economic laws of supply and demand. Life within these forms is bound to these regularities. This does not alter the fact, however, that these forms and their regularities can be used for moral as well as for immoral purposes. From a Christian point of view the basic social forms are God’s creation ordinances. This is not to say that they must be identified with the existing social order. On the contrary, the existing social order is largely determined by sinful abuse of the ordinances. Christians cannot avoid living within this order, but they should do so in a permanent effort to restore it to God’s original purpose, which is love of the neighbor. Thus Løgstrup subscribes to the conception of the ordinances, but without using it to justify the existing social order, as did some contemporary German theologians.

In his doctoral thesis from 1942 Løgstrup analyzed and critiqued Kantian epistemology. According to him this epistemology’s understanding of knowledge as the mere product of our thinking builds on the idea that human life in itself is without shape. Therefore this epistemology must be regarded as an exponent of our time’s dominant view that only culture can create meaning for human life, which is meaningless in itself. Now, this view

is contradicted by the Jewish-Christian belief that created human life has a definite shape prior to our cultural shaping. Løgstrup specifies life's created shape partly as living in relation to others, partly with reference to the life of Jesus. Jesus lived his life in accordance with life's created shape. If we lived like Jesus, we would spontaneously serve our neighbor. However, being sinners, we have destroyed created life. Therefore we need a law that *demand*s that we do that which we ought to have done spontaneously. And our destruction of life is so radical that we cannot even know the law by ourselves. We have to turn to the law that God has revealed in the Bible. Thus Løgstrup offers a *theological* critique of Kantian epistemology, which gives rise to ethical considerations. Moreover we notice how his conception of created life leads him to define the correlation between spontaneity and demand that henceforward will constitute the fundamental structure of his ethics.

Soon after the publication of his thesis Løgstrup combined the idea of the correlation between spontaneity and demand with the conception of the ordinances. He did so by means of what he called "the laws of life." These are laws that serve humaneness in different kinds of human relationships. They are life's inherent laws, which are so natural that we do not even discover them until we have broken them at the expense of humaneness. Examples of such laws are that parents shall bring up their children to obedience and that employers shall treat their workers justly. Reviving a central idea from the conception of the ordinances, Løgstrup now asserts that we can get to know the laws of life by ourselves, independently of God's revelation. Thereby he has taken an important step on the path towards a purely "human" or philosophical ethics.

In "The Anthropology of Kant's Ethics" Løgstrup offers a critique of Kant's ethics with a special view to its understanding of human nature. In Kant's ethics, Løgstrup says, human nature is determined as a bundle of inclinations, which from an ethical point of view is mere disorder and lawlessness. Therefore ethics cannot be founded on human nature. Instead it is founded on pure reason. According to Løgstrup the problem with this view is that Kant neglects the fact that "human nature is an ordered nature, the ordinances of which are ordinances for our life with and against one another, so that we are forced to take part in each other's lives in responsible relationships."

How should this be understood? Prima facie it seems that Løgstrup, in contrast to Kant, wants to found ethics on human nature in the sense of

deriving certain rules or laws for living together from it—the more so as we realize that he did this some years earlier with his concept of the laws of life. However, if this is what Løgstrup meant, it is puzzling that that concept is completely absent here. Moreover, he does not specify the ordinances—which could have given us a hint of such laws. Instead, the ordinances figure merely as the framework of the fact that we are forced to live in responsible relationships with one another. It is this fact which is now the point of departure for Løgstrup's ethics. By virtue of those relationships, he says, we cannot avoid deciding for or against other people. And here we are not faced with Kant's formal moral law, but with the material "law of responsibility telling us that we ought to serve our neighbor." The various laws of life have been replaced by one, fundamental law, the law that one should serve one's neighbor.

The idea of the laws of life would never return in Løgstrup's works. Therefore I think we are entitled to conclude that he has given it up in the present article. The reason is probably that he now takes seriously the historical character of the ordinances. This is suggested by his reference to Franz Lau (in note 5 of the article), who emphasizes that the ordinances are not natural but the product of the human shaping of nature, and it is supported by Løgstrup's own writing some years later that we give the ordinances a historically changing cultural shape. Interestingly, he illustrates this with the upbringing of children, pointing out that modern pedagogics has shown that authoritarian upbringing in our time has adverse consequences for children, which it probably did not have in a patriarchal society (KH pp. 96–97/KHE pp. 88–89). The message is clear: when the historical character of the ordinances is taken seriously, it is no longer possible to consider them as expressions of specific universal laws.

If I am right that Løgstrup in the present article has given up the idea of the laws of life, he can then hardly regard human nature as the source of specific moral rules. What, then, is the ethical role he ascribes to human nature here? He is not very explicit on this point, but he comes closest to a specification when he writes that human nature is "an ordered nature in the sense that [human beings] have been created to live in ordinances in which they are bound to the others in responsibility." The idea seems to be that human beings by virtue of their social nature have to live in certain ordinances, which—whatever their specific cultural shape—have in common that they bind humans to each other in relationships in which they

are responsible for how they treat one another. By way of such ordinances as matrimony and economic collaboration human nature as a social nature inevitably imposes on us responsibility for others. And it is this responsibility that faces us with “the law of responsibility”: that we ought to serve our neighbor.

At the end of his article Løgstrup specifies the law of responsibility as the enjoinder that “everything the responsible person says and does in this context has to be said and done for the sake of the other and not for the responsible person’s own sake.” This qualification shows that Løgstrup is thinking of the radical ethical demand, which is the “human” or philosophical version of the Christian commandment that one should love one’s neighbor. That it was this which he had in mind is underlined by his reference to Luther’s *lex naturalis*, which Luther identified with the love commandment. So it can be said that we here witness the birth of Løgstrup’s conception of the ethical demand. At the same time, however, he does not explain how or why our being responsible for others faces us with the radical demand. This question was still waiting for elucidation in *Den etiske fordring* (*The Ethical Demand*).

## The Anthropology of Kant’s Ethics

### I. Temptation and Conflict

It is characteristic of the examples with which Kant illustrates his exposition of the nature of moral life that none of them, taken individually, describes a situation which is problematic in that, however he twists and turns, the agent cannot avoid neglecting things he is obliged to do. None of Kant’s examples states an ethical conflict in the strong sense that a human being, by his own fault or not, has gotten into a situation in which different things he is morally obliged to do collide so that honoring one obligation means that another is neglected.

Because the obligation that the conflict forces one to neglect is also an ethical one, the agent is usually in doubt and filled with uncertainty. And even when the situation is so clear that there is no doubt as to what has to be done, the decision carries the full burden of responsibility, which is bound to call forth uncertainty.

By contrast, the examples offered by Kant always turn on temptations. The agent is tempted to yield to an inclination or disinclination, even though this is at the expense of his duty. A person does not feel like aiding another person in distress although she is able to do so. A talented person prefers indulging in a life of sheer pleasure to undertaking the effort to develop and cultivate his talent (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* [GMM], Academy Edition, 4:423). A person gives way to his covetousness so he makes it his business to increase his fortune by any means, as long as it is safe to do so. Thus, if the occasion arises, he appropriates money given to him as a deposit if he does not thereby run a risk, for example when the owner has died and has not left anything written that documents the deposit (*Critique of Practical Reason* [CPrR], Academy Edition, 5:27). So in these cases the inclination or disinclination yielded to is the disinclination to aid others, the love of pleasure, and covetousness, respectively.

That Kant's examples always turn on temptations appears no less clearly when the situation is analogous to an ethical conflict in the sense that a person is in trouble, embarrassment, or need, so that the temptation specifically consists in the fact that his strength of character is put to the test. A hard-pressed person is tempted to make a promise with the intention of not keeping it (GMM 4:402–3). A little later in the same work this example is taken up in a somewhat more detailed version. Hard-pressed by need, a person is tempted to borrow some money, although he knows that he shall never be in a position to pay it back. However, he also knows that he will not get it on loan if he does not promise solemnly to pay it back (GMM 4:422). Or a man is in the situation that, under the threat of the death penalty, his prince tries to force him to give false testimony against an honest man the prince wants to dispose of (CPrR 5:30).

Also in these latter cases a person is tempted to yield to certain inclinations at the expense of that which duty commands, the only difference being that these inclinations are aroused by the trouble he has met with. But in spite of his trouble the individual is not for a single moment in doubt as to what he ought to do, which Kant emphasizes strongly. Ethically the situation is not problematic at all, not even in the last-mentioned case where life is at stake.

Thus Kant's examples are peculiar in that they never concern situations in which two ethically justified considerations collide, but they always describe situations in which an ethical and an unethical consideration

collide. To put it briefly, Kant's ethical examples are never of conflicts but always of temptations.

This is no accident. It is undoubtedly bound up with the fact that Kant's ethics has no room for the fact that human nature is a nature that is already in advance ordered with respect to ethics. Kant does not attach special importance to the fact that every human being is born to a life in certain ordinances.<sup>1</sup> He has no sense of the fact that the ordinances make demands on us in the sense that we, as we grow up, are tied and bound by them in responsible relations to other people. And we have no guarantee that these responsibilities do not collide from time to time and bring about ethical conflicts.

## 2. Epistemology and Ethics

The observation that Kant's examples always deal with temptations and never with conflicts raises the question as to what concept of human nature reigns in his ethics, first and foremost the question of what explains why there is no place in it for the ordinances.

The answer is that Kant's ethics comes into being by his setting to work once again the entire terminology he had developed in connection with his critique of knowledge, and applying it to the data of moral life. These do not get their own, unprejudiced interpretation, but are tucked into the straitjacket of the epistemological concepts—and this applies to the concept of human nature that underlies Kant's ethics as well. This procedure also means that those ethical data remain unnoticed which fall outside the scope of the epistemological pairs of concepts and which cannot be translated into epistemological language, for example the concept of ordinance and the concepts of responsibility and ethical conflict connected with it.

The epistemological pair of concepts that is applied before all others is the contrast between empirical and pure knowledge. The decisive feature of moral life is obligation; the primary ethical concept is the concept of duty. Now, that which is obligatory is absolutely necessary; but from the epistemological reflections we know that that which is absolutely necessary has its *a priori* ground in the concepts of pure reason. Therefore, obligation must have its ground there too. It cannot possibly be sought in experience, "in the nature of man, nor in the circumstances of the world in which he is placed,"

for that which has its ground there can only give rise to empirical knowledge, which, as such, can never be absolutely necessary (GMM 4:389).

“The nature of man” and “the circumstances of the world in which he is placed” are thus determined in advance by the epistemological contrast between pure and empirical knowledge. What is worth knowing about human nature and the circumstances of the world in which we live is first and foremost that they can give rise to empirical knowledge only. Empirical knowledge has to do with contingent data only, and that is why the first thing that is to be said about human nature and the world is that everything is contingent here. The ordinances are thus from the outset—by virtue of the epistemological orientation—reduced to contingent circumstances, and the ethical concept that belongs to life in the ordinances, that is to say the concept of responsibility and the conflicts it gives rise to, fails to be put on the agenda of ethics.

### 3. The Anthropology of Kant's Ethics

What, then, is the further content of the concept of human nature that reigns in Kant's ethics? In order to define it we must briefly go into the relationship between inclination, volition, and reason, the three factors which play a decisive role here.

Among all the objects of the sensible world, possible objects of the will are objects of desire. That is to say, among all the objects we sense and know there are some which, in addition, cause either desire or aversion, and these are possible objects of our will. Hence it is the power of desire that provides the will with its objects.

Now, the difference between desire and volition consists in the fact that, whereas desire is irrational, the will is determined by reason. The relation between desire and its object is a relation of pleasure and inclination. One expects pleasure, delight, or satisfaction from that which one desires. Thus there is an immediate relation, and that is why the act which is caused purely instinctively by pleasure and inclination and which procures the desired object is a purely animal act. On the other hand, the will's relation to its object is a relation determined by reason. The way in which reason determines this relation consists in its giving rules or, to use Kant's term, maxims to the will. Therefore an object is never the object of the will

immediately, but always by virtue of the maxim. Hence the will does not merely have an object but also a form, that is, the maxim's form.

Now, reason's determination of the will's relation to its object can be of two widely different kinds. It can be the case that desire and inclination determine the object of the will. In that case reason plays a very modest part, which consists only in making a rule, a maxim, out of our desire and inclination. For example, if a person is strongly inclined to take offense, then reason can make that inclination into the maxim that one *will* not tolerate any insult without revenge. As the inclination has given rise to a maxim one goes by in each individual case, it has turned into will.

But reason can also determine the will in quite another way, so it is reason and only reason and not some inclination which determines whether something is to be the object of the will or not. This cannot happen in such a way that it is now reason instead of desire that gives the will its object, for reason alone, that is to say pure reason, does not have a concept of an object in any of its a priori elements.<sup>2</sup> If reason alone, that is to say pure, a priori reason, is to determine the will in its relation to its objects, this can happen only in such a way that it determines the form of the will's maxims, and thereby determines which of the objects presented by desire as possible objects of the will are morally good and which are morally bad.

But what, then, is the point of reason's determination of the maxim's form? What is reason's own law, with which the form of the maxim shall be in agreement? The answer is that the law's content is its own universality: you shall only act according to maxims about which you can will that they should be universal laws. To put it differently, the formulation of the law follows from the unconditionality with which reason determines the will. This determination is not conditional on any inclination whatsoever. Reason does not get content from anywhere else, but insists only on its own law in its mere universality.<sup>3</sup>

But the will gets its object and the maxim gets its matter from desire and inclinations. And they keep getting their objects and matter from there, also when the maxim according to its form can be a principle for universal legislation, for objects cannot be gotten from elsewhere. It is out of the question that the will, which is determined by pure reason, should come up with other objects than those from desire, or that the moral law should replace the maxims. No, the moral law tests the maxims as to whether they can be made into universal laws or not, whereupon it



recognizes, transforms, or rejects them. If a person has made his inclination for sympathy (which consists in his need that others fare well, CPRR 5:34) into the maxim that he will promote the happiness of other people, then the moral law accepts this maxim, because according to its form it is capable of being a universal law. It just happens that at the very moment at which it is pure reason that determines the maxim's form and the will, the agent no longer wants the object (the happiness of others) for its own sake. For in that case it would be an inclination (the sympathetic disposition) that is at work. No, the agent wants the object for the sake of the law and its universality—out of reverence for it. (One does not want other people's happiness for their sake and for the sake of one's own satisfaction, which is the same, but because it can be demanded that everyone will this.)

In this account of how the relation between inclination, volition, and reason can assume two different forms, human nature is determined as a bundle of inclinations. In his ethics Kant only knows of human nature as various, contingent "special predispositions" (GMM 4:425). And it is this nature with all its inclinations that the temptations come from.

However, it lies beyond Kant's horizon that human nature is a nature which is ordered in advance, so that life takes place in ordinances that make humans responsible beings and lead them into ethical conflicts. Because of the contingency of the inclinations human nature is on the contrary seen as devoid of order and devoid of law—that is to say, from an ethical point of view. Laws are to be found only in practical reason. Therefore, only practical reason is capable of creating order.

From an ethical point of view human nature and the world remain contingent in spite of their being epistemologically ordered into a unity of experience by the pure concepts of reason. For in Kant's philosophy there are two very different kinds of order; order is one thing in epistemology and quite another in ethics. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* and the *Prolegomena* Kant had set out how all contingent data and connections become objects and objective, necessary connections by means of the pure concepts of reason, among which especially the categories of substance and causality are important. That is to say, they become "nature" in the sense of a connected whole determined by law. But in Kant's philosophy there are two different kinds of law. That which is law-determined regularity from an epistemological point of view is sheer lawlessness from an ethical point of view.

Indeed, where the causality of natural laws reigns, from an ethical point of view there is lawlessness. For the fact of the matter is that the object is the cause of the inclination's awakening; the object "arouses" the desire. In turn the desire or the inclination is the cause of the act, which procures the object; the inclination "brings about" the act. If the will follows the inclination and the role of reason merely consists in making a rule out of the inclination (so the inclination and not reason determines what we will), this will and this reason belong in the sensible world and are themselves parts of its causal chain.<sup>4</sup> Thus this entire connection between object, inclination, will, reason, and act is recognized theoretically as a law-determined (causal) connection. But practically it is nevertheless mere disorder and lawlessness.

A closer examination of what is really happening when one makes a maxim out of one's inclination shows that as a rule the inclination is made immoderate. Covetousness is made immoderate by being turned into principled covetousness through the maxim that one will increase one's fortune by any means, if these do not get one into difficulties. (Therefore, when Kant sets out to show that such a maxim is not suitable for being made into a law that applies to all, he also puts forward the argument that in that case the inclination will wear itself down [CPrR 5:27–28]; obviously we cannot all be covetous at the same time.) Resentment becomes immoderate when it is elevated into a principle through the maxim that one will let no insult go without revenge. Making a maxim out of an inclination means as a rule removing as many restraints as possible for its free course, that is to say, making it ruthless by making it principled.

Human nature thus consists of certain desires and inclinations, which are subject to the causality of natural laws. Kant has nothing else and nothing more to say about human nature. He neglects the ethically decisive fact that human life is a life in certain ordinances. This means, in other words, that Kant in his considerations assumes that human beings are isolated individuals. For, as we have seen, his entire ethics builds on the alternative that either the will is determined by the maxim's form in agreement with the mere universality of the law, in which case it is good, or it is determined by the maxim's matter, and then human beings are eudaimonistically minded, for the maxim's matter is always an object we desire because we expect pleasure from it. With this alternative Kant assumes that there are no material factors as determining reasons for the human will except the ethically lawless (and mostly immoderate) lusts and inclinations, the

course of which is only subject to the causality of nature with its psychological and biological laws. That he does not know where else to seek material factors that could be determining reasons for the will is due to the fact that, on principle, he knows human beings as isolated individuals only.

However, Kant's alternative does not hold good if one considers the ethical fact that human nature is an ordered nature, the ordinances of which are ordinances for our life with and against one another, so that we are forced to take part in each other's lives in responsible relationships. Consequently, the individual is faced with the decision for or against the other (or the others), whether he wishes it or not. And here the law is not a formal principle but a material one. It is the law of responsibility telling us that we ought to serve our neighbor.

In this connection there are thus two widely different ethical conceptions. Kant's ethics is the prototype of one of them. It builds, in principle, on the view that human beings are isolated individuals. This does not mean, of course, that its adherents do not know very well, and also take into consideration, that human beings have to live their lives together with other people, but for them this is merely a supplementary fact. This is betrayed by their abstracting from the fact that human beings by their very nature are ordained in advance to a life with and over against the others, so that they have nothing more to say about human nature than what can be said about the inclinations and their psychological and biological laws. Since this is all that can be said *materialiter* about human nature, the law is consequently conceived of as a purely formal principle, which pure reason has to retrieve from itself.

Luther's ethics is the prototype of the other ethical conception. His ethical point of departure is that human beings, by virtue of the fact that their created nature is an ordered nature,<sup>5</sup> have to live their lives with and against others in ordinances, so that it is in these responsible relations that they hear the law, which is material as a *lex naturalis*.

#### 4. The Function of Reason

In Kant's ethics the order of human life does not come from human nature but from human reason. From an ethical point of view the order constituted by theoretical reason is mere disorder and lawlessness, because the

order of theoretical reason, among other things, consists in leveling the ordinances down to contingent circumstances. Therefore reason has to establish order in a new, a practical way. Consequently this order is not human nature's own—created—order, but one supplied by reason.

When Kant attributes this task to reason, the presupposition is that reason already in its theoretical use is not simply a tool. On the contrary, as pure reason it is an entirely independent source of knowledge. Not in the sense that its concepts and laws just lie ready to be found in it. They are not “innate.” Reason itself has to devise and produce them, but to produce them out of itself. Pure reason develops into an entire system, as Kant shows in *Critique of Pure Reason*.

But in ethics it is added that reason here uses its concepts and laws in a way that is alien to them, because their use is practical. As outlined earlier, this happens in such a way that the law of pure reason, by determining the form of its maxim, determines the will regardless of, and as a rule contrary to, the inclinations. Thus the moral law, being the law of *pure* reason, is a purely formal principle.

By contrast, in the ethics in which the primary ethical fact is that human life takes place in ordinances, the law is not reason's own. The ethical requirements are not derived from a general principle of reason, but the law presents itself in the responsible relationships of which life in the ordinances consists.

This does not mean that the law comes from the other person for whom the responsible person is responsible, for it is characteristic of responsibility that it is a two-sided relation. To be responsible is (a) to have responsibility for a second person and (b) to be responsible to a third person. The law comes from the one *to* whom the responsible person is responsible. And to the question: “Who is this person?” the answer is that it is the creator who has created human beings such that their nature is an ordered nature in the sense that they have been created to live in ordinances in which they are bound to the others in responsibility.

The one who says to the responsible person, “You shall,” is not the one *for* whom the responsible person is responsible, but the one *to* whom the responsible person is responsible. For example, when Luther says that parents in relation to their children are in God's stead, the parents are those who are responsible, the children those for whom they are responsible, and God is the one to whom the parents are responsible for how they have acted in

their responsibility for their children. But the children for whom the parents are responsible are certainly not those to whom the parents are responsible.<sup>6</sup>

In this form of ethics the law is not a law which a pure reason procures out of itself and with which it practically creates order, but the law presents itself in the natural relations of the ordinances, which are given in advance insofar as human nature, having been created, is an ordered nature. Moreover this law is material, because being responsible for another means that everything the responsible person says and does in this context has to be said and done for the sake of the other and not for the responsible person's own sake.

As a consequence, in this ethics reason is reduced to a mere tool. It does not have to find and formulate the law, for the law is already given with the responsibility. On the contrary, the responsible person has to use his reason to obtain clarity about how the other can best be served in the given situation and under the given circumstances.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in this respect too, Kant's ethics is completely opposed to Luther's, since for the latter there is never a question of "the command's possibility of being brought forward from human reason and being considered as the formulation of the immanent religious and moral principles of reason." The created purpose of reason is to focus on the things that are under human beings, not those above them.<sup>8</sup>

## Notes

This article is a translation of K. E. Løgstrup, "Antropologien i Kants Etik," published in *Festskrift til Jens Nørregaard den 16. Maj 1947* (Copenhagen: Gad, 1947), 146–56.

1. Translator's note: By "ordinances" Løgstrup refers to the idea that God at creation ordered human life in certain ways, which serve the maintenance of life, e.g., matrimony and economic collaboration.

2. In themselves, without sense intuition, the categories are empty, and the ideas concern that which lies beyond the limits of our experience. Therefore, neither can give an object to the will.

3. The law applies to all people regardless of their inclinations. The maxim's content, on the other hand, is an inclination or its object. Therefore the maxim has validity for the subject's own will only, because one person has an inclination for one thing, another for something totally different.

However right these and other ways of fixing the difference between maxims and laws may be, Kant's formalism here prevents him from perceiving the situation

in which maxims come into being. In his ethical considerations the epistemological terminology is not merely used as a technical aid for clarification but gets out of hand and dominates everything. Kant clarifies just as much concerning the contrast between maxims and laws as the application of the epistemological terminology allows—not more.

What is the situation of a maxim? Why do people make maxims? It is not merely an intellectual pleasure. People make maxims because they want to have firmness in their lives, but lack the only thing which can convey it, that is to say, the enlightenment from the law. Hence they have to content themselves with the substitute of being principled instead, which is, however, nothing but the stubbornness with which one arms oneself when one has to content oneself with the second-best solution.

A person does not know when to take an insult seriously and stand up for himself, and when not to take notice of it. Now and then he revenges the insult and now and then he ignores it. Then he wants to get out of this changeable and random game, but since he has not found the law that liberates from it, he makes himself a maxim. And then it is quite clear that it is a purely subjective matter whether the maxim is going to be that one will revenge every insult, or that one will rise above it. The maxim applies only to the individual, because it has been established as a means for him to control his own instability and the randomness of his reactions by making one single inclination dominate all the others.

Therefore I think we are entitled to say that the decisive difference is that there is enlightenment in the law, whereas the maxim is blind. Since firmness presupposes enlightenment, the latter's firmness is only apparent. Nowadays we would speak of "principle" instead of maxim when concerned with this contrast, inasmuch as we speak of "being principled" and "going on about principles." People resort to principles when they must have firmness in their lives but cannot be informed about the law.

4. This is because reason is not only a power relating to ideas that determine it through an "ought," but is also a power the activity of which has natural causes and which thus belongs among the appearances (*Prolegomena* §53).

5. Cf. Franz Lau, "*Äusserliche Ordnung*" und "*Weltlich Ding*" in *Luthers Theologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933), p. 24.

6. It is curious that Gogarten in his ethics [Friedrich Gogarten, *Politische Ethik* (Jena: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1932)], where all considerations are concentrated on the concept of responsibility, does not make a distinction between being responsible for someone and being responsible to someone. He keeps his expressions floating between those two relations without fixing them on one or the other.

By the way, it is characteristic that whereas the concept of duty (and virtue) is the keyword in most theological ethics of the nineteenth and the beginning of the

twentieth century, after the advent of dialectical theology and existentialist philosophy it has been replaced by the word “responsibility” (and “decision”).

7. The fact of the matter is that the insight in what serves the other is the responsible person’s insight and not the other’s. It is quite possible that the responsible person’s insight results in doing the opposite of what the other person wishes and perhaps believes is the responsibility of the responsible person to do.

8. Ruben Josefson, *Den naturliga teologins problem hos Luther* (Uppsala: A. B. Lundequistska, 1943), 72, 91, 20. [Translator’s note: Løgstrup cites in Swedish.]