Over the last fifteen years a new interest in the ethics of the Danish theologian and philosopher K. E. Løgstrup has arisen in the Anglo-American world. This interest gave rise, among other things, to a new edition of his recognized book *The Ethical Demand* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1997; with an introduction by Hans Fink and Alasdair MacIntyre).

*The Ethical Demand* can be regarded as Løgstrup's principal ethical work. However, this by no means implies that *The Ethical Demand* gives a definitive account of the author's ethical thinking. Løgstrup continued to develop his ethical ideas long after 1956, when *Den etiske fordring*, the Danish original of *The Ethical Demand*, appeared, pursuing ethical topics until his death in 1981. And this development consisted not only in elaborations but also in substantial extensions and, in some respects, important modifications. Therefore, in spite of its central position in Løgstrup's ethical writings, *The Ethical Demand* conveys only a limited view of Løgstrup's ethical thinking as a whole. His ethics is much more complex and far richer than the ideas expressed there.
Beyond the Ethical Demand

A part of this richness is contained in the six extracts from Løgstrup's later ethical writings presented here. Since these extracts have been taken from different books written during different periods of Løgstrup's thinking, a good understanding of them requires a certain acquaintance with the development of that thinking after *The Ethical Demand*. It is in order to meet this requirement that I shall not only present the principal ideas of these fragments, but also try to elucidate their relationship to *The Ethical Demand* and give some information about their background in Løgstrup's thinking as a whole.

1. **Clarifications of *The Ethical Demand***

In the years after its appearance, *Den etiske fordring* gave rise to extensive discussion, both in Denmark and to a certain extent in the other Scandanavian countries. When Løgstrup published a collection of essays in 1961 entitled *Kunst og etik* (Art and Ethics), he took the opportunity to add a rejoinder to the main points of criticism leveled in that discussion. This Rejoinder contains a number of important elaborations on, and clarifications of, *The Ethical Demand*, which are helpful in gaining a better understanding of this book. To offer Anglo-American readers the same opportunity as Scandinavian readers, I have included Løgstrup's Rejoinder as chapter 1 here.

In this connection something should be said about Løgstrup's language. The Rejoinder is Løgstrup's reaction to a discussion that was sometimes conducted in a sharp polemical tone. Such a tone was not unusual in the theological circles to which Løgstrup belonged in the 1950s and 1960s. At some points in his Rejoinder, Løgstrup rebuts his critics using similar rhetorical means. This may be distressing for readers who are accustomed to a more courteous academic discourse. Løgstrup's polemical style should not deter them from reading on, however. For one thing, it reflects the author's existential concern for the matter, not a lack of seriousness. For another, and most importantly, Løgstrup's elaborations and clarifications are certainly worth one's while.

Let me mention just a few of them. In his introduction to *The Ethical Demand*, Løgstrup presents his conception of the ethical demand as an attempt to define “in strictly human terms” the relationship to other people...
that is contained in the proclamation of Jesus (Løgstrup 1997, 1). In other words, in *The Ethical Demand* Løgstrup claims to give a philosophical elucidation of the ethical demand, which is supposed to be accessible to all human beings, whether they are Christians or not. However, since this elucidation makes use of concepts that stem from the Christian tradition, it is not always clear whether Løgstrup is speaking as a philosopher or as a theologian. Especially when he states that the recognition of the one-sidedness of the ethical demand presupposes the understanding that life has been received as a gift (namely, from God), one might easily get the impression that Løgstrup is making a theological statement, thereby frustrating his elucidation of the ethical demand “in strictly human terms” (ibid., 116–118).

In his Rejoinder, Løgstrup removes this ambiguity. He makes a distinction between the Christian sphere and the human sphere. The former includes Jesus’ granting of God’s forgiveness and his issuing the ethical demand as God’s demand. The latter includes the elucidation of the ethical demand in *The Ethical Demand*. This means, Løgstrup writes with reference to some of his critics, that “what I intended to say is that . . . ‘the religious truth that life is a gift’ and my ‘religiously colored ontology,’ or . . . the questions of creation and of an absolute authority, do not belong within the realm of the particularly Christian, but within the realm of the human—they belong to a philosophical ethics.” At the same time, however, he admits that in *The Ethical Demand*, he has not given a philosophical justification of the understanding that life is a gift from God. And he concedes that this flaw can only be defended with the “very trivial argument” that such a justification would be so demanding that it would have delayed the book by a decade!

As belonging to the human sphere, the ethical demand is specified at this point in the Rejoinder as “God’s *universal* demand,” which is “as old as creation.” On the basis of this view Løgstrup maintains his rejection, put forward in *The Ethical Demand*, of a Christian ethics in the sense of an ethics that derives its norms from the Bible. In a discussion with the Danish theologian N. H. Søe,2 who advocated such a Christian ethics, Løgstrup defends this rejection with the statement: “I regard it as a Christian claim that the ethical demand is not a specifically Christian demand.” Obviously, Løgstrup endorses the idea of a *lex naturalis* given by God to his creation from the beginning. This idea was an element of his Lutheran
Beyond the Ethical Demand

tradition and constituted an important part of the theological background for his conception of the ethical demand. That is not to say that Løgstrup's ethics is nevertheless a Christian ethics, in the last resort, so to speak. Løgstrup's reference to *lex naturalis* is precisely a theological justification of the possibility of a strictly human or philosophical ethics. Consequently, Løgstrup also opposes the Swedish theologian Gustaf Wingren's claim that the social norms can only be criticized adequately on the basis of the gospel. He maintains the view implicit in *The Ethical Demand* that such criticism can and should be exercised on the basis of the ethical demand. But he then goes on to add that a criticism of this kind would not differ from a criticism on the basis of the gospel. That is not to say that, for Løgstrup, Christian faith has no significance for social ethics. However, this significance does not consist in a specifically Christian criticism of the social norms, but rather in an extra incentive, drawn from belief in the Kingdom of God, to exercise a human or philosophical criticism.

Considering the fact that Løgstrup, in *The Ethical Demand*, offers a philosophical ethics, it is natural to ask on what kind of philosophy this ethics is based. In *The Ethical Demand* Løgstrup is not very specific on this point. We learn little more than that we must proceed “from the standpoint of our own existence” (Løgstrup 1997, 7), and that his analysis of trust is “of a phenomenological character” (ibid., 15). On this point the Rejoinder contains clarifying remarks, too: Løgstrup makes it clear that “[i]n my description of the phenomena, I have only worked with comparisons and distinctions within the natural language’s interpretation of life. In short, I have stuck to phenomenological analyses and steered clear of scientific investigations.”

The type of phenomenology referred to here goes back to the work of the German philosopher Hans Lipps, whose lectures Løgstrup attended in 1931–1932, and from whom he claimed to have learned the most. Lipps’s phenomenology shares with Heidegger’s existential phenomenology the presupposition that human existence or *Dasein* involves a fundamental understanding of one’s “being-in-the-world.” It is the task of phenomenology to interpret this understanding. However, Lipps’s phenomenology differs from Heidegger’s in two respects. First, whereas Heidegger is only interested in human “being-in-the-world” insofar as it reveals *Dasein’s* basic existential-ontological structure, Lipps analyzes many ways of
“being-in-the world” for their own sake, in order to understand human existence in its concrete multiplicity. Second, unlike Heidegger, Lipps takes his point of departure in an analysis of the word usage in natural language, led by the conviction that such usage contains a fundamental understanding of human “being-in-the-world.” It is this type of phenomenology that Løgstrup learned from Lipps and adopted as the methodological basis for his analyses of human conduct in *The Ethical Demand*. His description of the difference between anger and hate (Løgstrup 1997, 32–35, with references to Lipps) is a good example.

There is, however, an important difference between Løgstrup and Lipps (and Heidegger), in that Løgstrup used phenomenology not merely to describe human existence but also as a way to establish a normative ethics. Also on this point the Rejoinder is clarifying, because Løgstrup uses it to elucidate how he sees the relationship between phenomenology and ethics. In a reply to the objection that he has covertly implanted a positive evaluation in his analysis of trust, Løgstrup answers that positivity is not a quality we add to trust, but one that belongs to trust itself. Therefore a phenomenological analysis, though neutral in itself, describes trust as a positive phenomenon. And since phenomenology articulates a fundamental understanding given with human existence, the ultimate reason for the recognition of the ontological positivity of trust is this: “My life has given me to understand what is good and evil before I take a position on the issue and evaluate it.”

Finally, these reflections give us a background for understanding Løgstrup’s rejoinder to the criticism that in *The Ethical Demand* he committed the naturalistic fallacy. This criticism concerns Løgstrup’s claim that the ethical demand arises out of the fact that people surrender themselves in trust to one another. With regard to this claim, many critics had objected that Løgstrup had not accounted sufficiently for the transition from fact to demand. Løgstrup replies that these critics erroneously supposed that he was speaking of a scientific fact. Had he meant a scientific fact, the transition would indeed have been a leap. But by “fact” he meant a fact as it appears to us as enterprising and emotional beings, before it has been subjected to scientific reduction. It is this kind of fact that is expressed in the natural language, which is the point of departure for Løgstrup’s phenomenological analyses. And Løgstrup states that there is “the most
intimate connection” between the fact of self-surrender in trust in this sense and the ethical demand. The reason is that as enterprising and emotional beings we cannot help but take a position on the other person’s self-surrender in trust to us.

2. The sovereign expressions of life

In an article from 1967, the Danish theologian Ole Jensen has drawn attention to a peculiar ambiguity in *The Ethical Demand*. According to Jensen, Løgstrup on the one hand connects the ethical demand with trust as a fact and speaks of “the realities of trust and love,” which manifest the goodness of life (Løgstrup 1997, 141). On the other hand, however, he states that he operates with natural love as “an imaginary entity,” because actually we know only “a natural love to which we have given our own self’s selfish form.” Similarly, there is no unadulterated trust, because we “hold ourselves in reserve instead of surrendering ourselves” (ibid., 138–139).

In the extract from *Opgør med Kierkegaard* (Controverting Kierkegaard) that has been included here (“The Sovereign Expressions of Life,” chapter 2 in this volume), Løgstrup subscribes to Jensen’s criticism and claims unambiguously that trust and natural love are realities in human life.

The reason is that in the meantime Løgstrup has developed the conception of what he calls “the sovereign expressions of life.” The sovereign expressions of life are, roughly speaking, spontaneous other-regarding impulses or modes of conduct such as trust, mercy, and sincerity. Their characterization as “sovereign” is meant to indicate that they have the power to precede, or break through, our selfishness and express themselves in our behavior. Løgstrup gave his first detailed account of the sovereign expressions of life in 1968, in his book *Opgør med Kierkegaard* (Controverting Kierkegaard). Because this account is of seminal importance for the ethics of the later Løgstrup, it naturally found a place in the present volume.

It is not easy, however, to get a good grip of this account. The main reason is that it is embedded in a discussion with Kierkegaard in which Løgstrup controverts the latter’s view of Christian belief. The understanding of some passages therefore presupposes a certain familiarity with Kierkegaard. Another reason is that Løgstrup takes his point of departure in
an interpretation of Jean-Paul Sartre's play *Le diable et le bon dieu*, which he uses to illustrate some of Kierkegaard's ideas. Sartre's play, in turn, induces Logstrup to consider Goethe's play *Goetz von Berlichingen*, which has the same protagonist in Goetz, an army commander at the time of the German peasant revolt during the Reformation. Logstrup's references to these plays nicely exhibit a characteristic feature of his method, namely, combining phenomenological analyses with the interpretation of fiction. But they also complicate the reader's understanding, insofar as this becomes dependent on a certain acquaintance with the fiction. For these reasons, a few introductory remarks are in order. In the present context I restrict myself to Logstrup's relationship to Kierkegaard. Information about the plays is given in a prefatory note to the text.

In 1950 Logstrup gave a series of lectures at the Free University in Berlin in which he compared Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's analyses of human existence (published in Logstrup 1950). According to Logstrup, one of the main differences is that whereas Heidegger understands existence pre-ethically as *Sorge* (concern), Kierkegaard understands existence as basically defined by an infinite demand. In his evaluation of these thinkers Logstrup subscribes to Kierkegaard's point of view. But at the same time he distances himself from Kierkegaard's *specification* of the infinite demand. According to Logstrup, Kierkegaard construes the infinite demand on the basis of the absolute difference between God and humanity. As a consequence, its ultimate content is determined as the demand to express human inability and guilt face to face with God. Thus, in the last resort, Kierkegaard's infinite demand is a *religious* demand, not an ethical one. For Kierkegaard, moral life is only an occasion for the infinite demand, since it may make us aware of our inability and guilt. But by virtue of its religious nature, the infinite demand has no moral content. In contradistinction to Kierkegaard, Logstrup defines the infinite demand as an *ethical* demand, which demands that we take care of the other for the other's sake. In his elaborations of this idea Logstrup laid the ground for his conception of the ethical demand.

In the "Polemical Epilogue" of *The Ethical Demand*, Logstrup turned his attention to Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, which seemed to contradict his thesis that Kierkegaard only acknowledged a religious demand. In Logstrup's view, however, there is no contradiction. He points out that for Kierkegaard love of the neighbor consists in helping one's neighbor to love
Beyond the Ethical Demand

God. One reason is that this is best for one’s neighbor; another is that only thus can love be self-denial. If the Christian were to serve the neighbor’s welfare, the latter would applaud it, and that would spoil the former’s self-denial. But this does not happen if the Christian helps the neighbor to love God. This love will be interpreted as hate by one’s neighbor, and the Christian will be hated, despised, and persecuted for it by the world. Løgstrup concludes: “What is important to Kierkegaard is to be consistent in self-denial” (Løgstrup 1997, 222). This conclusion is in line with Løgstrup’s earlier perception that what matters for Kierkegaard is the individual’s self-renouncing relationship to God.

In the same context Løgstrup points out that Kierkegaard, in Concluding Unscientific Postscript, contrasts a religious relationship to God with living in immediacy, in which people have high ideas of their own abilities. Løgstrup rejects this way of opposing religion to immediacy. He blames Kierkegaard for not distinguishing between “immediacy” as devotion to one’s work and fellow humans and “immediacy” in the selfish form we give it. The latter must, of course, be condemned, whereas the former must not, since it reflects our zest for life. And taken by itself (that is, apart from the selfish form we give it), zest for life is a positive thing (ibid., 234–235).

In Øpør med Kierkegaard, Løgstrup makes the Kierkegaardian contrast between religion and immediacy the central frame of reference for his exposition of the sovereign expressions of life. The reason is that the sovereign expressions of life as spontaneous phenomena belong to the sphere of immediacy. As such they constitute, for Løgstrup, a positive way of living, which is radically different from Kierkegaard’s ideal of the individual’s relationship to God. Because of this contrast Løgstrup stresses here the reflective (in the sense of self-reflective) aspects of Kierkegaard’s ideal as a turn from immediate devotion to the world and one’s neighbor to a reflective preoccupation with one’s inner self. Needless to say, Løgstrup cannot accept that a true relationship to God should depend on such a turn. Instead he stresses that the fulfillment of the sovereign expressions of life already involves a true relationship to God.

This background illuminates some central aspects of Løgstrup’s exposition of the sovereign expressions of life. For Kierkegaard, as Løgstrup interprets him, the individual can only become an authentic self through reflection as the way to a religious relationship to God. In opposition to
this view, Løgstrup claims in “The Sovereign Expressions of Life” that the human person “no longer has to reflect about becoming his own person, nor has he to concern himself about becoming his true self; he has only to realize himself in the sovereign expression of life, and it is that expression of life—rather than reflection—that secures for a person his being himself.” Løgstrup even connects this kind of being oneself with freedom. What Kierkegaard designated as humanity’s fundamental “freedom of existence,” in Logstrup’s opinion “consists in the sovereign expressions of life.” Thus the sovereign expressions of life assume the function of conveying authentic existence, which Kierkegaard attributed to religious reflection. To be sure, Løgstrup merely criticizes Kierkegaard for thinking that “only through religious reflection can the human person accomplish the task of becoming a self” (emphasis added). In other words, he does not deny that we may become authentic persons through religious reflection. At the same time, however, it is obvious that Løgstrup regards being oneself in the sovereign expressions of life as the proper mode, or at least the preferred mode, of living authentically.

For Løgstrup the sovereign expressions of life also have a religious dimension. According to him they have been given to us by God to enable us to live our lives together. Thus the sovereign expressions of life are not only an alternative to Kierkegaard’s idea of authenticity through religious reflection. They also constitute an alternative way of being related to God. Again, Løgstrup does not present this way as an exclusive alternative. He agrees with Kierkegaard that God also creates the self for eternity by placing the human being in what the latter calls “movements of infinity.” But he does criticize Kierkegaard for his one-sidedness: “[W]hat he ignored was the fact that eternity creates the self not only for eternity but for the neighbor too, by investing him with the sovereign expressions of life as possibilities that match the claims in which eternity incarnates itself in the interpersonal situation.” Here we meet an important aspect of the difference between Logstrup’s view of Christian belief and the view he ascribes to Kierkegaard. And it is natural to consider Løgstrup’s religious understanding of the sovereign expressions of life as an elaboration of his thesis, already presented in the introduction of The Ethical Demand, that “it is in the relationship to our neighbor that the relationship to God is determined” (Løgstrup 1997, 4).

Løgstrup’s critical attitude towards Kierkegaard’s view of human relationship to God throws light on his inclusion of Sartre’s Le diable et le bon...
Beyond the Ethical Demand

xviii

dieu. In Løgstrup's interpretation, Sartre's Goetz exemplifies a person who lives in a movement of infinity, though in an inauthentic manner. First he does so by trying to be absolutely evil, later by trying to prove that it is possible to be absolutely good. He gives all he owns to the poor. But the poor do not benefit from it. According to Løgstrup, the reason is that Goetz is religiously preoccupied with himself, not with the fate of the poor. Good actions "confer benefits and happiness upon our neighbor only if they proceed on terms that are a-religious, purely human." Løgstrup draws a parallel to Kierkegaard's preoccupation with the absolute good in his interpretation of the commandment of love as helping the neighbor to love God. What Løgstrup wants to say is, I think, that the religious movement of infinity easily leads to aberrations, and at any rate does not benefit the neighbor, because the agent is fundamentally preoccupied with himself or herself.

In this extract from Opgør med Kierkegaard, Løgstrup also addresses the question of the relationship between the sovereign expressions of life and the ethical demand. In The Ethical Demand he had stated that human selfishness prevents the ethical demand from being fulfilled in the radical sense of acting exclusively for the sake of the neighbor. In the present extract he states that it is the sovereign expressions of life and their works that are demanded. Consequently, the demand is fulfilled in the realization of the sovereign expressions of life. But this fulfillment is a spontaneous one, not a fulfillment in conscious obedience to the demand. In the latter sense, the demand remains unfulfillable: "The demand is unfulfillable, the sovereign expression of life is not produced by the will's exerting itself to obey the demand." It is not until the sovereign expression of life fails that the demand makes itself felt—but at that point fulfillment is no longer possible. This leads Løgstrup to the conclusion that "the demand demands that it be itself superfluous." That is, by demanding something that can only be realized spontaneously, without being demanded, the demand in reality demands that it should not be necessary that it make itself felt as a conscious demand.

The ethical demand belongs within the sphere of morality, which Løgstrup distinguishes expressly from the "pre-moral" sovereign expressions of life. In his treatment of morality, Løgstrup once again stresses the role of (self-)reflection. In contradistinction to the ethics of custom, modern morality is characterized by reflection, not only on the content of mo-
rality but also on the question as to why one should be moral at all. This question involves a duplication in the sense that one reflects not only on what is morally right, but also on one's own relationship to that which is supposed to be morally right—which duplication is expressed in Hegel's question, "Have I a duty to duty?" Building on a positive answer, modern morality is acting out of duty, or out of virtue as a disposition to act out of duty. But, according to Løgstrup, such morality is a "delivery of substitute motives to substitute actions." It is so because it is a substitute for the pre-moral sovereign expressions of life in which a person's actions are motivated by a spontaneous preoccupation with the needs of the other, without reflecting on himself or herself as a moral person. And from Løgstrup's critical attitude to Kierkegaard's ideal of reflection as well as to conscious obedience to the ethical demand, it is clear that he regards acting out of the sovereign expressions of life as superior to moral action—although he acknowledges, of course, that the latter "is better than brutality or indifference."

3. Sovereign expressions of life, character traits, and norms

In his ethical works after Opgør med Kierkegaard, Løgstrup continued to be preoccupied with his conception of the sovereign expressions of life. This led him not only to elaborate this conception, but also to determine its relationship to other moral phenomena such as character traits and norms. The present volume includes two central extracts resulting from this preoccupation: "Sovereign Expressions of Life, the Golden Rule, Character Traits, and Norms" (chapter 3, hereafter SGCN), from the book Norm og spontaneitet (Norm and Spontaneity), which appeared in 1972; and "Norms and Expressions of Life" (chapter 4, hereafter NEL), from the collection of essays entitled System og symbol (System and Symbol), which appeared in 1982, one year after the author's death. As their titles suggest, these extracts to some extent deal with the same subjects. I will therefore provide them with a common introduction. Together they give a representative (though certainly far from complete) picture of the development of Løgstrup's fundamental ethics after Opgør med Kierkegaard.

I begin by giving some information about the books from which these extracts have been taken. Norm og spontaneitet is divided into three parts.
Beyond the Ethical Demand

While the first part addresses issues in fundamental ethics, the second deals with specific ethical notions such as guilt, fate, and power. In the third part Løgstrup discusses concrete ethical problems, especially those relating to sexuality and politics. *System og symbol* is a posthumously published collection of essays that Løgstrup was preparing for publication prior to his death in 1981. It comprises reflections on ethical theory, contributions on social and political problems, and a number of literary analyses.

In *Norm og spontaneitet* Løgstrup adds an important feature to his description of the sovereign expressions of life from *Opgør med Kierkegaard*. The sovereign expressions of life defy being made a means to other goals than their own, which is the immediate service of the neighbor. As soon as they are instrumentalized in this sense, their spontaneity is broken, which destroys them, and indeed turns them into their opposite. If mercy, for example, is made to serve oneself or a third party, it is no longer mercy but unmercifulness. At the same time, according to Løgstrup, such instrumentalization will affect the radicalness of the sovereign expressions of life. As appears from *The Ethical Demand* (Løgstrup 1997, 44–46), by the radicalness of the ethical demand, Løgstrup means its demanding that we act exclusively for the sake of the other. Applied to the sovereign expressions of life, this means that their radicalness consists “not in any masterly feat but simply in the fact that the least ulterior motive is excluded” (SGCN). Since instrumentalization provides the realization of the sovereign expressions of life with ulterior motives, it destroys their radicalness. In this connection Løgstrup returns to the idea that the ethical demand does not make itself felt until the sovereign expression of life fails. But now he identifies the ethical demand with the Golden Rule in its biblical form: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Løgstrup likes this formulation because it enjoins us to act on the basis of our imagination of what the other needs. In his view this is an expression of the radicalness of the ethical demand. As a consequence, the later Løgstrup often speaks of “the Golden Rule” instead of “the ethical demand.”

In *System og symbol* Løgstrup designates the radicalness of the sovereign expressions of life as their unconditionality. Their “quality of unconditionality . . . consists in defying any ulterior motive” (NEL). But here he adds that this unconditionality implies that the sovereign expressions of life defy justification. The reason is that any attempt to justify them will
make them contingent on a goal different from their own and thus instru-
ment-alize them—which, as noted above, is precisely what they forbid. That the sovereign expressions of life cannot be justified means that they confront us with an ultimate authority. Løgstrup makes this point in the context of a criticism that he levels against the attempt to justify moral norms by deriving them from general principles. According to him, this attempt ends in a decisionism with regard to the acceptance of the general principles. “What is lacking is the confrontation with an ultimate au-
thority” (NEL).

One might ask: What vindicates Løgstrup's conception of the sove-
eign expressions of life, not least the claim that they confront us with an ultimate authority? Generally, of course, this conception is based on his phenomenological approach. We have already seen (in the preceding dis-
cussion of the Rejoinder) that, according to Løgstrup, phenomenological analysis gives access to the positivity or negativity that is inherent in some phenomena, trust being one example. In *Norm og spontaneitet* he returns to this idea and elaborates it in the context of a discussion of British moral philosophy in the twentieth century. He values this philosophy’s analyses of general ethical terms such as “good,” “evil,” “right,” and “wrong,” but regrets the fact that the British moral philosophers after G. E. Moore did not examine substantive “ethically descriptive phenomena” such as trust, ver-
acity, and cowardice.7 According to Løgstrup it is characteristic of these phenomena that they “cannot be described in abstraction from their good-
ness or badness” (SGCN). They are sovereign in the sense that they “have intimated to me what is good and bad before I consider the matter myself and evaluate it.” And Løgstrup adds, giving his definition of the sovereign expressions of life an epistemic twist: “This is the reason for calling the positive expressions of life sovereign” (SGCN). Here the recognition of the positivity of the sovereign expressions of life is represented as some-
thing they make me understand rather than an insight I acquire of my own accord. And it seems to me that there is only a short step from this thesis of their epistemic sovereignty to the idea that the sovereign expres-
sions of life confront us with an ultimate authority.

In the included extract from *Norm og spontaneitet* Løgstrup also dis-
cusses the relationship between the sovereign expressions of life and char-
acter traits. He had already occupied himself with character traits in the article “Ethik und Ontologie” (Ethics and Ontology, 1960), which was
Beyond the Ethical Demand

translated into English and added as an appendix to the new 1997 edition of *The Ethical Demand*. There his treatment of character traits is embedded in an account of the origins of morality in people’s preoccupation with the tasks and common projects of life. In such preoccupation, “[t]he demands are completely incorporated into the concrete situation and are not divorced from it in special reflection about its morality” (Løgstrup 1997, 274). Løgstrup’s point is that the rules of human work and community naturally arise from this preoccupation and need not be the subject of explicit reflection in order to guide our action. It should be noted that in this context Løgstrup uses the concept of morality in a wider sense than in *Opgør med Kierkegaard*, including what could be called “pre-reflective morality.” And regarding his positive view of immediate action, it is hardly surprising that his treatment of pre-reflective morality is not encumbered with the negative connotations that reflective morality has in *Opgør med Kierkegaard*.

Løgstrup makes a similar point regarding the character traits that are required for the performance of the tasks and common projects of life: “The task, the job, the community and cooperation produce morality as well as the character that follows from it” (Løgstrup 1997, 274). Thus he claims that the character traits that correspond to pre-reflective morality arise naturally alongside it, without being made the object of conscious training. He illustrates this claim with Joseph Conrad’s story (in *The Nig-ger of the Narcissus*) of the black man Jimmy’s rescue by four sailors from drowning.

These ideas return in *Norm og spontaneitet*. In the meantime, however, Løgstrup has developed his conception of the sovereign expressions of life. Therefore he has to answer the question of how to relate these ideas, especially his view of character traits, to that conception. First, Løgstrup points to some phenomenological differences between the sovereign expressions of life and character traits: the former primarily concern personal relations, whereas the latter primarily concern work or tasks; the former defy being made a means to other goals than their own, whereas the latter can serve both good and bad goals; finally, the former cannot be produced by practice, whereas the latter can. Second, Løgstrup claims that sovereign expressions of life and character traits can converge in a concrete situation “without it being possible to say . . . which is which” (SGCN). He illustrates this with the same story he used in “Ethics and Ontology.” The difference is that now not only character traits but also sovereign ex-
pressions are said to participate in the sailors’ rescue action. Because we have to do with immediate, pre-reflective moral action, the previous contrast between the sovereign expressions of life and morality has vanished. And from a systematic point of view one might say that Løgstrup’s description of pre-reflective morality constitutes a kind of intermediate between his conception of the ethical demand and his conception of the sovereign expressions of life.

In The Ethical Demand Løgstrup discusses at length the relationship between the ethical demand and what he calls the “social norms,” which is a comprehensive designation for law, morality, and convention. His development of the conception of the sovereign expressions of life entailed a similar task, namely, consideration of the relationship between these and the social norms. In Norm og spontaneitet he sets about performing this task by considering Stephen Toulmin’s view that a concrete moral position has to be justified with reference to a general principle that expresses an accepted social practice. Løgstrup criticizes this view as a kind of moralism, which replaces regard for the other with conformity to moral rules. As an alternative justification he proposes making explicit the moral experience of the concrete situation. To be sure, Løgstrup does not deny that reference to general principles or norms may play a part in ethical argumentation. But he stresses that norms and principles are subordinate to moral experience: “Before the relevant requirements on agency are requirements imposed by principles, they are requirements imposed by the specific and concrete situation, which latter enjoin us to act in ways answering to ethical predicates with descriptive content . . . including especially requirements prescribing communicative acts whose descriptions involve such predicates—a sovereign expression of life, the showing of trust, the offering of help, veracity, and the like” (SGCN).

In System og symbol Løgstrup gives a further determination of the relationship between norms and the sovereign expressions of life. He points out that we do not become aware of the sovereign expressions of life until a failure or conflict or crisis disrupts our immediate preoccupation with the needs of the other. This may become an occasion to formulate the sovereign expressions of life as norms. Important norms are, or ought to be, based on the sovereign expressions of life: “An ethical norm does not become fundamental because it is general or abstract, but because it is founded in a spontaneous expression of life” (NEL). Such a norm owes its

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"ought" to the unconditionality of the expression of life. That is not to say, Løgstrup emphasizes, that the unconditionality or the norm's "ought" dissolves the need to deliberate. There is no direct road from the sovereign expression of life or norm to concrete action. Sovereign expressions of life and norms have to be concretized with reference to the circumstances of the situation, and this concretization is our own responsibility. As a consequence, to justify our actions "[i]t is out of the question to invoke the expression of life, even though it may have undergirded the action" (NEL). Obviously this line of thought corresponds to the view, put forward in *The Ethical Demand*, that the ethical demand does not bypass a person's own judgment, and that one's action cannot be justified by pointing to the prompting of the ethical demand (Løgstrup 1997, 105–106).

Løgstrup's thesis that the sovereign expressions of life, by virtue of their unconditionality, confront us with an ultimate authority reminds us of another claim he put forward in *The Ethical Demand*: that the demand places "a person face to face with an ultimate authority which insists that the demand is fulfillable" (Løgstrup 1997, 171). This ultimate authority is God, the Creator (ibid., 167). Løgstrup's use of the same term in connection with the sovereign expressions of life suggests that "ultimate authority" has a religious connotation in this context as well. Actually, in the last section of the present extract from *System og symbol* Løgstrup explains why he thinks that the sovereign expressions of life point to a divine creator. One reason is the expression's sovereignty, which indicates that it does not stem from us. Another is its unconditionality. This unconditionality "bears witness to the fact that it [the sovereign expression of life] is not created by us, but comes from the universe" (NEL).

One might wonder why Løgstrup does not say that the sovereign expressions of life were created by a divine power, or by God, but merely says that they come from the universe. The reason is, I think, that he speaks as a philosopher here and, consequently, does not wish to go beyond what he regards as metaphysical speech. As was already noted in Fink and MacIntyre's introduction to the new edition of *The Ethical Demand*, during the last decade of his life Løgstrup drew together his philosophical views in a four-volume publication with the common title *Metafysik* (see Løgstrup 1997, xxvii–xxviii). This is not the place to give an account of Løgstrup's metaphysics. Even so, I draw attention to one aspect of this work that may explain his speaking of the universe in the present context. In the volume...
on the philosophy of religion, entitled *Skabelse og tilintetgørelse* (Creation and Annihilation), Løgstrup makes a distinction between the transitions from experience to metaphysics and from metaphysics to religion. The former is asserted to have the character of an analytical judgment (in the Kantian sense of the word). Løgstrup illustrates this with the sovereign expressions of life: their unconditionality is a metaphysical feature that is entailed by the experience that they are destroyed by being made dependent on other goals than their own. On the other hand, the transition from metaphysics to religion is asserted to be synthetic, because it has the character of an imaginative interpretation that transcends empirical experience (cf. Løgstrup 1995a, 241–251).

By his pointing to the unconditionality of the sovereign expressions of life in our context, Løgstrup has moved into what he himself regards as a metaphysical discourse. In combination with the evolutionary view of human descent (to which Løgstrup subscribes in our text), this means that that unconditionality and the concomitant “ought” must come from the universe. This is still metaphysics in Løgstrup’s sense of the word, because we have not left the empirical world. Had Løgstrup said that the sovereign expressions of life were created by God, he would have made the transition from metaphysics to religion. And that was not his purpose in a purely philosophical essay on an ethical subject. For his religious interpretation of the sovereign expressions of life we must turn to *Skabelse og tilintetgørelse* (Løgstrup 1995a, 89–92), to which Løgstrup himself refers at the end of our text (NEL).

4. Ethics and politics

*The Ethical Demand* is mainly concerned with individual ethics, that is, with the question of how individual persons should live their lives in relation to other persons. That is not to say that *The Ethical Demand* does not deal with social and political issues, but it does so primarily from the point of view of how the moral agent faced with the ethical demand should relate to the social and political world as a given reality. It does not contain normative reflections on how society ought to be arranged and ruled. However, this restriction should not be taken as characteristic of Løgstrup’s ethics as a whole. Both before and after *The Ethical Demand*,

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Løgstrup put forward many normative considerations about social and political questions, especially in *Norm og spontaneitet* and *System og symbol*. It is not possible to offer a representative selection of these considerations in a volume like the present one. Instead, we have chosen to present two extracts (chapters 5 and 6 in this volume) that deal with the relationship between ethics and politics in general—“politics” taken in the wider sense of reflection on social and political issues. More precisely, these extracts concern the relationship between the two key conceptions of Løgstrup’s ethics—the ethical demand and the sovereign expressions of life—and politics. The purpose is to give the reader a first impression of the scope of Løgstrup’s ethical thinking as a whole.

In *The Ethical Demand* the social and political world is addressed under the heading of social norms. The overarching question is how the individual who wants to comply with the ethical demand should relate to these norms. Løgstrup’s answer is that, on the one hand, these norms have a guiding role for the specification of the ethical demand, because they have the function to protect us from exploitation by one another. On the other hand, however, their guidance is insufficient. For one thing, adherence to the motive of the demand, namely, concern for the other for the other’s sake, is often decisive for an appropriate specification. For another, we should allow for the possibility that social norms become obsolete, in which case observing them may even cause violence (Løgstrup 1997, 53–63). This fairly positive view of the social norms does not mean that Løgstrup is not aware of their historical relativity. On the contrary, he discusses this relativity at length and illustrates it using a number of historical examples. However, according to Løgstrup their historical relativity does not detract from the guiding role of the social norms, because in a given historical situation they are highly determinative of the view of good and evil for those who have grown up in this situation, and thus for the concretization of the ethical demand (ibid., 64–104).

With reference to this view it is understandable that Wingren could accuse Løgstrup of uncritical acceptance of the existing social norms, and even compare his position to that of the German theologian Friedrich Gogarten (whose theological endorsement of the existing social norms in the 1930s functioned as a legitimation of Nazism). But it was easy for Løgstrup, in his Rejoinder, to reject Wingren’s accusation by pointing to his considerations about the insufficiency of the guidance provided by the so-
cial norms. In this connection he emphasizes the ethical demand’s critical function with regard to the social norms.

This emphasis set the stage for Løgstrup’s later attempts to determine the relationship between ethics and politics. Generally speaking, these attempts are characterized by seeking a viable route between two extremes: the view that politics can be deduced from ethics, on the one hand, and the view that there is no connection between ethics and politics, on the other.

This is already manifest in the first extract included here as chapter 5, the section “Politics and Ethics” from a lengthy essay entitled “Etiske begreber og problemer” (Ethical Concepts and Problems), which was published in 1971 as Løgstrup’s contribution to a Scandinavian book on ethics and Christian belief. Here Løgstrup contends that it is impossible to arrange society on the basis of the expectation that people will live by the ethical demand or, as he prefers to call it at this stage, the Golden Rule. Human egoism prevents this. One year later, in Norm og spontanitet, Løgstrup would illustrate this point aptly with reference to the field of economics. The economic arrangement of society, he states, has to incorporate profit and competition, taking account of human egoism. Without it people work only on command, and only if they are monitored. If they are not, they merely work to meet their own basic needs. This was precisely what happened in the Soviet Union after World War I. As a result millions of people starved to death. Løgstrup concludes, laconically: “So dangerous is it to be moral” (Løgstrup 1972, 184; my translation). On the other hand, according to Løgstrup, it would be just as mistaken to banish ethics from politics. At the end of “Politics and Ethics” he attacks a proposal in this vein, as it was made by the German-Danish social scientist Theodor Geiger. Geiger had argued that cooperation in a complex, large society cannot be based on feelings such as love and sympathy, but has to be ensured by an objective order in which there is no room for moral feelings. Løgstrup agrees with Geiger that we need an objective order, but denies that this should exclude ethics from politics: the objective order can, and should, be inspired by ethical considerations.

According to Løgstrup this can be done when we “moderate morality for use in our society.” That is to say, the love commandment or the Golden Rule must be transformed into a political idea on the basis of which society should be ordered such that people are compelled to “act as though
they loved their neighbor, knowing full well that they do not." Løgstrup shows the implications of this transformation by imagining how the Good Samaritan would behave if, in an attempt to put an end to robbery between Jerusalem and Jericho, he decided to become a "Political Samaritan."

The other extract, included here as chapter 6, is the essay “Expressions of Life and Ideas” taken from System og symbol. This extract deals with the relationship between the sovereign expressions of life and politics. It is Løgstrup’s central claim that the sovereign expressions of life constitute the foundation upon which our rationality builds. But they themselves cannot be rationalized, that is, incorporated into the rational structure of society. At the same time, however, without the sovereign expressions of life this structure would collapse, since, as Løgstrup puts it, they are responsible for “sustaining the whole.” Obviously he is thinking of the fact, mentioned above, that without the sovereign expressions of life, communal life would cease to exist. Were it not for natural trust, openness of speech, and mercy, human communication and cooperation would not be possible. As a consequence, our rationally structured life together would not be able to function, because it builds on communication and cooperation.12

As the title of this extract suggests, Løgstrup is dealing here with the relationship between the sovereign expressions of life and the ideas or ideals that underlie our organization of society. By analogy with his considerations in “Politics and Ethics,” Løgstrup stresses that we cannot ground the social order in the sovereign expressions of life—for first because they cannot be rationalized, and second because if we tried, we would fall victim to the illusion “that society could be founded on a high-minded morality.” The ideas with which we organize society can have different sources, for example the need to tackle difficulties engendered by the existing order. But whatever their sources, it is the function of the sovereign expression of life to be a touchstone in the question of “whether our ideas banish the expressions of life from the social order.”

Løgstrup exemplifies his argument with the idea of equality. In modernity this idea has come to be of central importance for the foundation of the social order. It has a positive function as a safeguard against the arbitrary distribution and exercise of power. But if it is construed as the idea of an equal opportunity that gives way to ruthless competition, it is con-
verted from a life-affirming principle into a life-denying one. Indeed it is
precisely mercy, the sovereign expression of life, that, used as a touch-
stone, makes us realize this.

Løgstrup's preoccupation with the idea of equality moves him to con-
nect his reflections on the relationship between ethics and politics with his
metaphysics in a way that reminds us of the way he connected his view of
the sovereign expressions of life with his metaphysics at the end of the
other extract from System og symbol, discussed above. According to Løg-
strup in “Expressions of Life and Ideas,” the political idea of equality is
founded in an underlying equality “in which, by the hand of nature, we al-
ready find ourselves.” Løgstrup has in mind what is usually called “human
dignity,” which is a kind of equality in the sense that it pertains equally to
every human being, regardless of his or her contribution to the common
good. He characterizes this equality in ways similar to the sovereign ex-
pressions of life: it "sustains the whole," political equality cannot be de-
duced from it, and it has to be a touchstone for the social order.

Løgstrup calls this equality “cosmic equality.” The main reason he
gives for this terminology is that as an attribute of human beings, this
equality must have emerged from the universe through biological evolu-
tion. This raises the question as to how an apparently purely natural pro-
cess can give rise to something so unconditional as cosmic equality. Løg-
strup does not propose an answer here. But in Ophav og omgivelse (Source
and Surroundings), one of his four volumes on metaphysics, he states that
the unconditional nature of cosmic equality suggests a religious inter-
pretation, which claims that a divine power is involved in the processes of the
universe (Løgstrup 1995b, 104–106). It is easy to see that this argument is
analogous to Løgstrup's above-mentioned metaphysical reflections about
the unconditionality of the sovereign expressions of life and his pointing
to their religious interpretation in Skabelse og tilintetgørelse.

Whatever one may think of the ideas described here, it can hardly be de-
nied that they contain original, and sometimes eye-opening, views. Some
of them may invite contradiction. But even the most critical reader can
learn something from the extracts presented here. I consider some points
particularly instructive: Løgstrup's acute phenomenological-psychological
descriptions of what is going on in and between human beings; his taking

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such descriptions as the point of departure for ethical considerations, which gives his ethics a concrete character that is absent in much traditional ethics; his stress on our fundamental and beneficial dependence on the sovereign expressions of life, in opposition to the usual emphasis on human independence and autonomy; his nuanced and realistic attempts to relate ethics and politics; and finally—for those interested in theology—his connection between the sovereign expressions of life and the doctrine of creation. In my opinion these points convey as many reasons why, like The Ethical Demand, this volume deserves to find attentive readers.

Notes

1. For a survey of Løgstrup’s life and work, the reader is referred to Hans Fink and Alasdair MacIntyre’s introduction to the new edition of The Ethical Demand (Løgstrup 1997, xv–xxxxviii).

2. Niels Hansen Søe (1895–1978) was Professor of Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion in Copenhagen from 1939 to 1965. His theological thinking was influenced decisively by Karl Barth. He is best known for his Kristelig Etik (Christian Ethics) from 1942, which appeared in five editions. Here, using the New Testament as his point of departure, he developed a specific Christian ethics based on God’s revelation in Christ.

3. Gustaf Wingren (1910–2000) was Professor of Systematic Theology in Lund from 1951 to 1977. The overarching interest of his theological work was to relate a Lutheran view of Christian belief to human life, regarded in the perspective of the doctrine of creation. He drew inspiration from Løgstrup, among others. His interest is reflected in the titles of the two books in which he set out his understanding of Christian belief: Skapelse och lagen (1958; English edition: Creation and Law, 1961) and Evangeliet och kyrkan (1960; English edition: Gospel and Church, 1964).

4. Cf. the introduction to the new edition of The Ethical Demand by Fink and MacIntyre, Løgstrup 1997, xvi–xix. Although in his Rejoinder Løgstrup does not refer to Lipps, the many references to him in The Ethical Demand testify to his influence.

5. Ole Jensen (b. 1937) is a disciple of Løgstrup’s. From 1974 to 1978 he was Professor of Systematic Theology in Copenhagen. In 1976 he obtained his doctoral degree in theology with the thesis Theologie zwischen Illusion und Restriktion (Theology between Illusion and Restriction), 1975, in which, on the basis of some of Løgstrup’s ideas, he criticized German existentialist theology for supporting western environmental destruction. He is best known for his commitment to ecology and for his interpretations of Løgstrup’s work.

7. Unfortunately, Løgstrup was apparently unfamiliar with British descriptivism as represented by, for example, Philippa Foot. At any rate he does not relate his considerations in Norm og spontaneitet about ethically descriptive phenomena to British descriptivism. For a general discussion of Løgstrup's treatment of British moral philosophy in the twentieth century, see Brenda Almond's contribution to Andersen and Niekerk (2007).

8. A two-volume translation into English of parts of Løgstrup's metaphysics was published in 1995 under the title Metaphysics by Marquette University Press. This translation includes the complete text of Skabelse og tilintetgørelse (Løgstrup 1995a) and a selection from the other three volumes (Løgstrup 1995b).

9. Friedrich Gogarten (1887–1967) was Professor of Theology in Breslau and Göttingen from 1931 to 1955. He was one of the initiators of the so-called dialectical theology in Germany in the 1920s. His principal theological interest was to connect Christian faith with responsible living in the world. In his Politische Ethik (1932), to which Wingren refers, he pleaded for conformity with the existing social order and glorified the state as the maintainer of that order. These ideas are put into relief by the fact that in 1933 he declared his support (though only temporarily) to the political group Die Deutsche Christen (The German Christians), who backed Nazism.

10. Løgstrup's essay was republished in 1996 as a book with the same title.

11. Theodor Geiger (1891–1952) emigrated in 1933 from Germany to Denmark. From 1938 to 1952 he was Professor of Sociology in Aarhus, with an interruption in 1940–1945 because of the war. He has concerned himself with many branches of sociology and is regarded as one of the founders of the concept of social stratification. His many publications include Sociologi: Grundrids og hovedproblemer (Sociology: Outline and Main Problems), 1939, which was the first Danish textbook of sociology since the nineteenth century, and Die Gesellschaft zwischen Pathos und Nüchternheit (Society between Pathos and Sobriety), 1960, to which Løgstrup refers.

12. Giddens 1991, chapter 3, can be seen as an explication of the role of trust for life in a rationalized society. See especially the author's emphasis on the importance of people's trust in the representatives of expert systems if they are to have confidence in the functioning of those systems (pp. 83–88).

References


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Beyond the Ethical Demand

xxxii


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