Since the publication of the last newsletter (summer 2011), the international interest in Løgstrup’s ideas has by no means decreased. On 2 March 2012, just before the deadline of this issue, a seminar was held at Aarhus University on the occasion of the launching of a new book in the Løgstrup Library series. The book is entitled Løgstrup & sygeplejen (Løgstrup and nursing) and was written by Professor Kari Martinsen, Bergen, Norway. For several decades, Martinsen has utilised Løgstrup’s ideas for reflection about the practice of nursing, and thanks to her work, Løgstrup’s thinking has had great influence on nursing research in Norway. This influence was testified by the fact that, besides Martinsen, the seminar featured two other speakers from Norway. More about this will follow in the next issue of this newsletter.

Also the present issue of this newsletter bears witness to an ongoing international interest in Løgstrup’s thought. For one thing, it contains a report of a Løgstrup conference counting participants from Denmark, England, Norway, Estonia and the USA. For
another, it informs in a brief note about an Estonian PhD dissertation on Løgstrup’s ethics, which was defended at the University of Göttingen and published in Germany. In Denmark the interest in Løgstrup’s thought likewise continues unabated, which appears from the fact that the first impression of the popular Menneskets ondskab og livets godhed – Løgstrups filosofi om tilværelsen (Human wickedness and the goodness of life – Løgstrup’s philosophy of existence) was exhausted almost immediately after publication and got a second impression, so that 9000 copies have now been printed. This pleasant fact is reported in another brief note.

This issue further contains a contribution by Ole Morsing, associate professor of the history of ideas, Aarhus University, on the conflict-ridden relationship between Løgstrup and his colleague Johannes Sløk. Morsing briefly outlines the main ideas of his book about Løgstrup and Sløk, published last year. Another contribution is about the publication of a commentary on Den etiske fordring by David Bugge, associate professor of theology, Aarhus University, and the conference at which it was presented. Finally, there is a review by Bjørn Rabjerg, PhD student of theology, Aarhus University, on the new edition of Løgstrup’s doctoral dissertation, which appeared simultaneously with Morsing’s book.

Surveying the contributions to this newsletter, I note that it exhibits a strong bias in favour of Aarhus. In a way, this is inevitable as this is where your editor lives and works. However, this may have the unfortunate consequence that interesting aspects of the Løgstrup research and communication escape my attention and therefore regretfully are not passed on to the readers of the newsletter. To minimise the disadvantages of my local bias, I should like to encourage my readers to inform me about relevant Løgstrup events which are likely to fall outside the Aarhus horizon.

CONFRONTATIONS OF EXISTENCE, WORLD AND GOD – SLØK VERSUS LØGSTRUP

by Ole Morsing

Imagine that you are standing at a cove and have a wonderful nature experience. The question is whether this beauty by and in nature is a purely subjective view which depends on a specific historical understanding of the world or whether it is valid at all times? Løgstrup would say that the scene has always been beautiful, no matter that it is only us modern people who notice it. That is to say, things always already have a kind of
importance. But other people believe that the scene was not always beautiful, because things can only be known as having a kind of importance when “ego” is the perspective centre.

Basically, there are two very different approaches to the world. According to Løgstrup’s understanding, the meaning of the world precedes any cultural and human interpretation; Sløk, on the other hand, thinks that the world only in and with man and its cultural activity has a meaning. Sløk says that the world itself is never anything because it is always determined by one’s commitment, business and mood. It is up to everyone to judge whether he or she has ever faced the world as such. However, as will be shown later, this, according to Sløk, does not apply to God, because God is completely incomprehensible.

Now I have introduced Sløk. Johannes Sløk (1916-2001) and Løgstrup are in most of their careers colleagues at Aarhus University, where they become personal friends, but enemies in respect of their worldviews. In the following, I will confront Sløk with Løgstrup because Sløk has a completely different understanding of man, world and God. This is a qualified animosity, which I have written a book about (see below) and which in this context will hopefully help to discuss and sharpen the understanding of Løgstrup. I should add that Sløk’s understanding in almost all ways is an interpretation of Søren Kierkegaard, and therefore this also presents arguments for and against Kierkegaard.

I will point to three decisive differences in Sløk’s and Løgstrup’s understandings: existence, philosophy and religion, or, as mentioned, man, world and God. First, I will deal with existence.
Existence

Sløk’s understanding of existence is linked to his understanding of freedom, but it is not a freedom to whatever. The premise is that human existence acquires content through the historical tradition it is born into, the environment it has grown up in and the character traits man is endowed with. But at the same time human beings exist in and through their concrete content, and this implies that, in their existence, they relate themselves to their content and in this way discover their freedom. This is not an empty freedom to anything whatever, but freedom to being oneself.

In his book *Eksistentialisme* (Existentialism) from 1964, Sløk writes that “freedom is the crisis where it is decided whether a human being will live inauthentically or whether they will make themselves authentic through choice and self-appropriation” (p. 110). In this way, human beings, at the same time, are what they are and become what they are. This radical understanding of freedom implies that the starting point of human beings is an absence of all kinds of essential factors. Not in order that they lose themselves in the empty freedom’s infinite possibilities but in order that they become who they are. Human beings are bound and obliged in the existential situation. Not by an ethical demand to live up to something, but by a demand to become themselves in an existential way. This is the only way of real existence.

Løgstrup does not understand man from an existentialist point of view because he proceeds phenomenologically. He insists that the important thing in existence is expressions such as trust and hope, but also power and language, etc. In this way phenomenology stresses that the world not only depends on or is determined by consciousness. Phenomenology identifies what appears to consciousness, which cannot be captured by scientific understanding.

Løgstrup’s phenomenological view presupposes that life has already been created. Life is not an empty substance. The phenomena of life have their own determinacy, which precede the individual’s own judgment. For Løgstrup this is the essential thing. In *Kunst og Etik* (Art and Ethics) from 1961, he writes: “My life made me its own before I made it mine. My life has given me to understand what is good and evil before I take a position on the issue and evaluate it” (p. 234 f.; *Beyond the Ethical Demand* (2007), p. 6). I shall try to understand what life tells me – then I maybe can live it properly.

As mentioned it is essential for Sløk’s view of humanity that it is not possible to identify any given understanding of life. Sløk insists on absurdity. The absurdity is that, in
a serious confrontation with life, life does not have any meaning at all. The absurdity consists in the clash of humanity with life: Any kind of understanding of life breaks down and any positive orientation in space and time sinks into nothing. Hereby it is revealed that the world itself is indifferent and unmanageable.

Sløk argues consistently in *Det absurde Teater og Jesu Forkyndelse* (The absurd Theatre and the preaching of Jesus) from 1968 that man is left disoriented, unable to act and without any meaningful language at all (p. 171). This brings me to my next theme: Sløk’s and Løgstrup’s philosophical understandings of what the world is.

The world

Sløk is convinced that nothing can be said about the world without a human perspective, and therefore all talk about the world as such has no meaning to him. Sløk argues that the nature and the universe are “dumb”. You cannot comment on what life itself is; it is meaningless to try to develop a philosophy where ontology, phenomenology and metaphysics become positively useful concepts.

Løgstrup’s view of the world is different. Løgstrup does not believe that human beings are able to face the world as such, but he believes that the world “speaks” to them. Løgstrup claims that both nature and the universe open comprehension, and he claims that this comprehension would not be possible if the nature and the universe had not “spoken”. The world is basically not available to humankind because the world has been created before it. All the essential philosophical and metaphysical questions in life are therefore not human inventions but “natural” problems, and they will never disappear.

God

Sløk’s and Løgstrup’s philosophical understandings of man and of the world are linked to their views of God. Sløk believes that God is completely incomprehensible. Sløk insists categorically that human beings live in their own (lost) history and that God is beyond human life and earth. It is not possible to find God in the created world; God can only be met in revelation. Only by accepting the created life as a paradox or an absurdity and by faith in God, humans can live their lives meaningfully. Neither metaphysic nor ontology can help. Only revelation and preaching can bring us near to God. Otherwise, says Sløk, you will be waiting for Godot!

In Løgstrup’s view, it does not make sense to wait for Godot. He insists that we have to interpret our experiences of life. There are phenomena in our lives which are in
accordance with the gospel. Although Christianity is anything but a view of life, no understanding of Christianity can be found without a view of life. Consequently, one must accept the phenomena of life, e.g. trust, hope etc. Living life means that we love, hate and die. Living life takes precedence over preaching life. The preaching must be understood with our elementary life experiences, or else faith will turn into fanaticism and coercion.

Ole Morsing has written the book _Løgstrup og Sløk_ (Løgstrup and Sløk), published by Klim in 2011 as a volume in the Løgstrup Library series.

### A COMMENTARY ON DEN ETISKE FORDRING (THE ETHICAL DEMAND)

*by Kees van Kooten Nieerk*ck

Although it appeared more than 50 years ago, _Den etiske fordring_ is still one of the most widely read and discussed ethical books in Denmark. Since its first publication in 1956, a great number of impressions have been issued, and in 2010 a new, fourth, edition appeared at KLIM as a volume of The Løgstrup Library series, provided with an instructive postscript by Hans Fink. However, _Den etiske fordring_ is by no means an easy book, and it may be even more difficult to understand now than it was in the 50s, because times have changed, and many of its original presuppositions no longer exist. Obviously, in these circumstances a commentary can be very helpful. David Bugge, associate professor of theology, Aarhus University, got the idea, took the initiative, and now his commentary has appeared – as the first volume of a series of commentaries to Løgstrup’s main works, which will be included in The Løgstrup Library.

Bugge’s commentary actually consists of two books, a compendium and a companion. The _Kompendium_ gives a brief explication of the principal ideas of _Den etiske fordring_ in the context of a detailed elucidation of the train of thought. The companion, entitled _Hinandens verden_ (one another’s world), is the commentary proper. Following _Den etiske fordring_’s own organisation, it analyses, explains and discusses Løgstrup’s thoughts, from time to time interrupted by discussions of central problems, e.g. the question of whether Løgstrup committed the so-called naturalistic fallacy. In doing so, it not only takes account of Løgstrup’s other publications but also his unpublished manuscripts. Moreover, it considers the literature that Løgstrup implicitly or explicitly entered into
dialogue with, scholarly literature as well as fiction. Finally, it contains many references to relevant secondary literature. Thus Bugge’s books offer the reader all possible help to understand Løgstrup’s original and deep, but also refractory, main ethical work.

The books were presented to the public at a seminar held on 26 November 2011 at Aarhus University. A number of speakers addressed subjects related to Den etiske fordring. Under the provocative title “If human beings aren’t hypocritical, they are amoral”, Bugge discussed Løgstrup’s pessimistic view of moral motivation. Fink elucidated Løgstrup’s understanding of good and evil against the background of the history of moral philosophy. Svend Andersen and Ole Jensen debated Løgstrup’s controversial idea that there is no Christian ethics, and Kees van Kooten Niekerk expounded the concept of trust in Den etiske fordring and beyond. Bjørn Rabjerg compared Løgstrup’s phenomenological approach to ethics with that of Max Scheler, and the seminar was concluded with a comparison between Løgstrup’s and Hannah Arendt’s philosophies of life by Peter Aaboe Sørensen. As usual, the seminar attracted more than one hundred people, and quite a few of them have probably been inspired to read or re-read Den etiske fordring.

AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE ETHICAL DEMAND

by Kees van Kooten Niekerk

An international conference entitled The Ethical Demand in the Philosophies of Løgstrup, Kierkegaard and Levinas was held on 19-20 November 2011 at Hotel Helnan Marselis at Aarhus. This conference was a sequel to a similar conference held in December 2010 at Sheffield, and it was organised by the same people (cf. Newsletter no. 6, Winter 2011, pp. 9-10). There were 24 participants, mostly from the United Kingdom and Denmark but also including some from Norway and even one from Estonia. A special guest was Stephen Darwall, professor of philosophy, Yale University, who is a specialist in the history and foundations of ethics and has shown interest in the ethics of Løgstrup.

The conference was introduced by Hans Fink (philosophy, Aarhus), who pointed out that Løgstrup sets out his conception of the ethical demand from the first-person standpoint (the point of view of the person who is faced with the demand) rather than the second-person standpoint, upon which Darwall bases his ethics (I make a legitimate claim on you, which, by virtue of its legitimacy, applies to me as well). Next, Svend Andersen (theology, Aarhus) defended the thesis that Løgstrup’s conception of the ethical demand is a transformation of Kierkegaard’s idea of the demand. He referred to a series of lectures
held by Løgstrup in Berlin, which were published in 1950 as *Kierkegaards und Heideggers Existenzanalyse und ihr Verhältnis zur Verkündigung*. In these lectures Løgstrup adopts Kierkegaard’s idea that we are faced with an infinite demand. However, he does not understand it as the demand that we be nothing before God, as he thinks Kierkegaard does, but as the demand that we serve our neighbour. Interestingly, George Pattison (theology, Oxford), Saturday morning’s last speaker, based his lecture on the same publication. Having given an account of Løgstrup’s comparison of Kierkegaard’s and Heidegger’s views of guilt and the demand of existence, he stated that Løgstrup’s interpretation of Kierkegaard’s view of the demand is a misreading. For Kierkegaard, the demand does not merely concern our relation to God; the demanded relation to God works out in concrete works of love of the neighbour. It does so by virtue of our being empowered by God’s love of us.

Saturday afternoon first featured a lecture by Robert Stern (philosophy, Sheffield). Stern addressed Darwall’s critique of divine command ethics, a critique which Darwall thinks applies to Løgstrup’s ethics as well. The key problem of divine command ethics is, according to Darwall, that God’s demands can only be obliging if they can be legitimised by independent reasons, and in that case we should obey to them for those reasons, not because God demands them. Stern argued that this critique does not affect Løgstrup because he is not really a divine command theorist. According to Løgstrup, we owe to God compliance with the ethical demand because God has granted us our lives as a gift, not because of God’s demanding. Saturday’s last speaker was David Bugge (theology, Aarhus), who emphasised the importance of literature in Løgstrup’s thinking. In Løgstrup’s view, the complexity of life cannot be captured sufficiently by abstract philosophical and theological language. Therefore, philosophers and theologians do well to consider literature, which will often open their eyes for aspects of life they would not have discovered otherwise.

The Sunday morning session started with an analytical account by Paul Faulkner (philosophy, Sheffield) of the relationship between trust and the ethical demand. Faulkner explained that trusting a person involves vulnerability and the expectation that the trusted person does a specific act on the trusting person’s behalf, which confronts the trusted person with the demand to do that act. Faulkner regarded Løgstrup’s analysis of trust as illuminating in several respects but suggested that the ‘logic’ of trust does not fit with Løgstrup’s idea that the demand is silent, because its silence implies that the trusted person cannot know from the trusting person’s expectation what she has a reason to do. Sunday morning’s second and last lecturer, Anna Marie Pahuus (philosophy, Aarhus), also addressed Løgstrup’s view of trust and the vulnerability involved in it, but argued
further that the notion of respect, which is not prominent in Løgstrup’s thought, is just as important as that of trust. The conference concluded with a discussion, which was introduced by questions put forward by Stephen Darwall. In response to this introduction, the discussion proceeded to issues of Løgstrup’s conception of morality, the relationship between care and respect for autonomy, and – once more – the relationship between the ethical demand and trust.

The conference offered a fruitful exchange between Anglo-Saxon acuteness and Scandinavian familiarity with Løgstrup’s work. To make the conference papers available to a wider audience – and to give the participants the opportunity to study them further – the organisers decided to arrange their publication together with the contributions to the Sheffield conference.

**BOOK REVIEW**


by Bjørn Rabjerg

Løgstrup’s first main work is now available again, this time in an expanded version with Løgstrup’s own planned revision included as an additional text and with a valuable postscript by Kees van Kooten Niekerk.

When K.E. Løgstrup defended his doctoral dissertation on 14 January 1943, it was the conclusion of more than a decade’s work on epistemological and ontological problems. In 1932 he was awarded the gold medal by the University of Copenhagen for his prize essay on Max Scheler’s *Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik*, in which Scheler tried to found his moral philosophy on phenomenology. In his discussion of Scheler’s project, Løgstrup saw phenomenology as a useful method to establish a theory of values, but he found it inadequate as a means of justifying the moral “ought”. This led him to epistemology and the problem of perception (specifically the problem of understanding) and thus the question about the epistemic and metaphysical nature of immediate experience and its objects, which is a central problem in his dissertation from 1943.
As indicated in the title, Løgstrup sees a conflict between transcendental idealism and theology. The conflict lies within the area of epistemology, namely between, on the one hand, neo-Kantian constructivism and, on the other, revelation. Løgstrup concerns himself with the kind of idealism he found in contemporary neo-Kantian epistemology. Here perception is viewed as a forming process, where the perceiving mind via a priori intuition and categories shapes the sensed matter, both in sensing it as being there (perceiving in a narrow sense of the word) and understanding it as being something (cognition). Now according to Løgstrup, this theory of perception is at odds with Christian theology as it sees all perception as a constituting process where the ego forms the object and thus creates meaning and value. Hence, according to idealism, there can be no objective experience or cognition of God. In Judean-Christian theology, however, there is such a thing as an objective cognition of God: God is a person who reveals himself to us through his word as spoken in the Gospel (§2 and 32).

This identifies a conflict between transcendental idealism and theology: Whereas transcendental idealism sees perception as the constitution of meaning through man’s a priori transcendental cognitive faculties and thus as a precondition denies the possibility of objective cognition of God, Judean-Christian theology holds as a precondition that the world is created by God and that God reveals himself to us in the Gospel, thus being not just an object of cognition, but a person. This conflict is the symptom of a difference in basic understanding of life [Livsforståelse]. Transcendental idealism rests upon a basic understanding of life as being without form or meaning [det skikkelsesløse Liv], whereas Judean-Christian theology presupposes the opposite: that life is created with form and meaning and therefore must oppose idealism (§24).

But this is only the first main objection that Løgstrup makes towards transcendental idealism, and being merely the clarification of differing understandings of life, it is not the most powerful one. His next objection, however, is more ambitious as it aims at exposing an inherent flaw or shortcoming within the epistemology of transcendental idealism. The main problem is that transcendental idealism is based on an epistemology of sight, and consequently its attention is directed at the perception of mute things or objects. But this idiosyncrasy renders transcendental idealism blind (or rather deaf) to the other, the other person. The problem of perception within transcendental idealism is dwarfed by the problem of understanding, because transcendental idealism treats other people merely as mute objects to be perceived – not as persons who speak and thus reveal themselves to us and engage our understanding. Here Løgstrup introduces central themes from the so-called I – Thou philosophy, and as Martin Buber did in 1923, Løgstrup applies this I and you
relation to man’s relation to God: God is not visible, but he can be heard, namely through his spoken word to man in the Gospel (§32).

An important point, however, is that Løgstrup’s position in the dissertation is at odds with not only transcendental idealism but also certain aspects of revelation theology. As opposed to robust revelation theology, Løgstrup argues that there is such a thing as knowledge of God, which is not based on revelation. This “knowledge” is (because of sin) de facto reduced to being a fundamental question within all of human life, namely a question of the origins of life, i.e. a question about the creator. Thus there is a place for a kind of natural theology, and Løgstrup specifically states that this residual knowledge of God is prior to and to a certain extent necessary for understanding revelation (§27).

As it turned out, it took four dissertations – three of them rejected and re-written – over a period of ten years before the fourth dissertation was accepted in 1942. Løgstrup handed in manuscripts in 1933, 1938 and 1940, but all of them were rejected – largely because they balanced between theology and philosophy and thus were found fruitful, but lacking, in one area or the other.

After its publication in 1943, the dissertation became increasingly hard to obtain, even though Løgstrup had been planning a revised version. In 2011, however, the dissertation was reissued featuring two valuable additions compared to the original from 1943. Firstly, Løgstrup’s own revisions are now incorporated into the original text either as additional footnotes, with omissions indicated by brackets and, what may be even more important, with four completely revised chapters placed as appendices. Secondly, Kees van Kooten Niekerk has written a very informative and useful postscript, where he (1) places the dissertation within the context of the previous three rejected manuscripts and the prize essay, (2) discusses the central lines of the dissertation, (3) elaborates on Løgstrup’s revision of the original dissertation, and (4) draws the lines from the dissertation to Løgstrup’s later works on ethics, epistemology and theology.

There are two points that I would like to highlight with respect to this new edition: (1) I find it regrettable that the dissertation is not available in translation and that there is practically no English-language literature on it. It is therefore to be hoped that the dissertation – or at the very least the postscript – will become available in English translation. (2) Quite a few errors have occurred in the process of converting the original

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1 The details about Løgstrup’s revision can be read in Kees van Kooten Niekerk’s article in Newsletter no. 7, summer 2011.
text to digital text through scanning and text recognition software. The result is a number of typographical errors and, unfortunately, a few misprints which affect the readability and sense of the text.

Nonetheless, the 2011 edition of Løgstrup’s dissertation is a very valuable contribution to the ongoing Løgstrup research – especially with the added revisions and postscript.

**BRIEF NOTES**

*A PhD dissertation on Løgstrup’s ethics*

In 2010 Johann-Christian Pöder, who is an Estonian theologian, defended his PhD dissertation on Løgstrup’s ethics at the University of Göttingen. The dissertation was awarded the top score of *summa cum laude*. It has now been published as *Evidenz des Ethischen. Die Fundamentalethik Knud E Løgstrups* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2011, XIII+362 pp.). According to the author, “the book regards the ethics of Knud E. Løgstrup as belonging to the most important ethical approaches of the 20th century and aims to give a comprehensive presentation of it from both philosophical and theological perspectives. It thus explores the basic elements of Løgstrup’s ethical thinking, showing that according to Løgstrup there is evidence of the ethical as a constitutive dimension of the ethical-ontological structure of human beings. From a theological perspective, this is the imperative and indicative presence of the vocation of humankind as God’s creature which is God’s own work. By doing this, the author combines methodologically systematic, historical and comparative approaches. The main interpretation perspectives include the transcendental-ontological outlook of Løgstrup’s ethics and the situated and contextualised notion of subjectivity, but also – more specifically – the overcoming of the is-ought dichotomy and the transcendentalisation of the creation orders. To make the special outlook of Løgstrup’s ethical thinking more transparent, his ethics is analysed in comparison with Max Scheler, Karl-Otto Apel, and others. In the theological part, the comparative analyses include, for example, Bultmann, Brunner and Herms. The book ends with 11 theses and a conclusion that Løgstrup’s ethics are an impressive and provocative invitation to take the irreducible alienness of the ethical experience seriously”.

*A Danish introduction to Løgstrup*

The book *Menneskets ondskab og livets godhed – Løgstrups filosofi om tilværelsen* (Human wickedness and the goodness of life – Løgstrup’s philosophy of existence), which was
presented by Bjørn Rabjerg, its editor, in the last issue of this Newsletter, was published in September 2011 by Theology, Aarhus University. In 13 short articles, it introduces various aspects of Løgstrup’s thinking, catering for upper-secondary school pupils and organised study groups. It was presented to upper-secondary school teachers and pastors at a seminar held on 23 September 2011 at Aarhus University. The seminar offered the opportunity to acquire free class-sets, and since it was well attended, the first impression (6000 copies) was exhausted almost immediately – there were even too few copies to meet the demand. A second impression of 3000 copies has later been issued. The book is also available as e-book and can be read at [http://mags.datagraf.dk/aau/4/4](http://mags.datagraf.dk/aau/4/4).