
“Created Possibilities of Life” – “Sovereign Expressions of Life”: Remarks on a Fundamental Theme in K. E. Løgstrup

1.

[18] If there is one motive that connects K. E. Løgstrup's later writings with his earlier ones, it is his endeavour to make philosophy and theology explain the limits to the power of human beings. It is behind the confrontation in the 40s beginning with the 19th century 'cultural' understanding of knowledge as an act in which human beings in a sovereign way shapes and forms matter that is in itself formless, and in the ethics of human beings as the sovereign creator of good and evil in a world of undifferentiated impulses. And it is the same fundamental theme that is manifested in the work of recent years, with looking for the point before the human where art and ethics meet – or for the point where the 'sovereign expressions of life' that are powerful – sovereign – in the same way, demonstrate this sovereignty by forestalling the will of human beings to form things. Therefore he has always wanted to argue in favour of the 'pre-cultural' when he turned polemically against any theology and philosophy, such as Kantianism or positivism, Kierkegaardianism or existentialism, which knowingly or unwittingly are rooted in a nihilistic world-view.

It is therefore surprising to find this conclusion to an engagement with Løgstrup's work: 'There is in-built self-redemption in Løgstrup's salvation religion. And the distance between the good creation and human beings is not greater than can be overcome with a little good will!' Nevertheless, this is the end point in an article by Johannes Møllehave on Løgstrup’s use of the sovereign expressions of life, published in Information on 22nd July 1966.

It is hard to find something that can excuse Møllehave’s conclusion. But somewhere in his premises there lies a misunderstanding. And Løgstrup is himself partly responsible for this, by a certain ambiguity which it is important to eradicate [19] if the discussion of his

1 Løgstrup has set out what he understands by the sovereign expressions of life in his lecture on ‘Sartres og Kierkegaards skildring af den dæmoniske indesluttethed’ [Sartre’s and Kierkegaard’s Depiction of the Demonic Inturnedness], Vindrosen, 1966, no. 1. [Translators’ note: The crucial part of this lecture can be found on pp. 49-61 of K. E. Løgstrup, Beyond the Ethical Demand, edited by Kees van Kooten Niekerk (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2007). In this text, ‘indesluttethed’ is translated as ‘self-enclosedness’, while the Princeton University Press translation of Kierkegaard has ‘inclosing reserve’. We have chosen the term ‘inturnedness’, where ‘slutet inde’ means ‘turned and closed’ into yourself. The term also contains an allusion to Luther’s conception of sin as incurvatus in se.]
theology is not only to be a shot in the dark. And that ambiguity appears in his answer to Møllehave in the Information article from 30th-31st July 1966.

2.

Møllehave accuses Løgstrup of riding two horses, which pull in opposite directions. Møllehave may well be proved right, except that we are dealing with two completely different horses from the ones he is put up on in Møllehave’s circus.

Møllehave claims that Løgstrup’s article from 1940 on ‘The Concept of Will in Luther’s De servo arbitrio’ (Dansk teologisk Tidsskrift) is not compatible with the recent expositions of the sovereign expressions of life. In his response, Løgstrup summarizes Møllehave’s objection as follows: ‘1. If our will is bound, so we cannot escape our inturnedness, the sovereign expressions of life are not to be found. 2. If man is blessed with the sovereign expressions of life, his will is free’.

However, the ambiguity one can find in Løgstrup does not concern the will’s being bound, but is to be found in the question concerning the sovereign expressions of life’s fulfillment.

Løgstrup’s article is divided into two main parts with the headings ‘the sovereign expressions of life and Luther’ and ‘the sovereign expressions of life and Kierkegaard’. But the parallel between the two main parts is only apparent. The second part certainly deals with the sovereign expression of life’s position in Kierkegaard’s theology. And the first certainly deals with the sovereign expressions of life, and also examines Luther’s view – but his view of the ethical demand, not his view of the sovereign expressions of life.

Løgstrup says that on the ethical demand Luther’s position is that he was well aware that it is impossible to talk realistically [realistisk] about it, or maybe better: about its actions or its fulfillment, because to realistically talk about it would only be to describe human resistance against it. Human wickedness means that the ethical demand is never fulfilled; the realistic description can therefore only get as far as human resistance against it. But, continues Løgstrup, that did not prevent Luther in his social-ethical [20] writings speaking extensively about the ethical demand – while being utterly unconcerned about how unrealistic it is. Why? Because the demand’s unfulfillability does not alter its existence [virkelighed] by one iota. Even though there will never be a human being who comes along and fulfills it, it is not on that basis any less real, binding or valid. One might therefore say that the demand is an abstraction because it is never met, but Luther and Løgstrup are agreed that this by no means makes it an illusion.

So, as regards Luther, this is Løgstrup’s objection to Møllehave’s understanding of the sovereign expressions of life and his claim that if they are abstract in the way set out, then they are also illusions. But if Løgstrup can use the demand and its unfulfillability to counter Møllehave’s claim that the [sovereign] expressions of life are illusory, so Løgstrup’s argument must assume that there is a parallel between the demand and its unfulfillability on the one hand, and the sovereign expressions of life and the opposition
to them of humanity’s evil will on the other hand. But he does not say in the article what that parallel consist in.

But the idea just seems to be this: Just as the ethical demand can never be fulfilled, because our inturnedness always prevents it, just as little is it the case with the sovereign expressions of life; with them we face the same alternative as with the ethical demand: either it is more or less unrealistic to talk about them – or abolish them. Løgstrup’s argument must in other words be the following: that something is an abstraction does not necessarily make it an illusion; for example this is not the case when it comes to the ethical demand, and – and this is crucial – neither is it the case when it comes to the sovereign expressions of life.

But Løgstrup precisely does not think that the sovereign expressions of life are only something imagined which we are either forced to speak about unrealistically – or to let drop. How do I know? Among other things, from the words that follow immediately after the last reference in Løgstrup’s article. After having given an account of the ethical demand and its unfulfillability, he goes over immediately to talking of the sovereign expression of life and its power to assert itself by [21] breaking through our inturnedness. This is what its sovereignty consists in; it is more powerful than man’s will, it is able to fulfill itself in spite of human wickedness, it forestalls selfishness when it realizes itself. ‘If it could not and did not, we could not be so fortunate in our lives together as we are. This can only be the case owing to the fact that we live on what we do not owe to ourselves’.

However, this means that Løgstrup in the first part of his article argues from two different characterizations of what the sovereign expressions are. The one characterization is contained within the parallelism which according to the outline from the article must implicitly be understood as holding between the way of speaking about the demand as necessarily unrealistic due to its unfulfillability – and the sovereign expressions of life; this is to understand sovereign expressions of life as something that never happen, because human wickedness always prevents them from being realized. By contrast, the other characterization that immediately follows determines the sovereign expressions of life as something that realize themselves, but admittedly in spite of humanity’s wickedness which they are strong enough to forestall so that humanity will never be able to boast of the expressions of life as his performance or achievement. In other words, the first argument determines the sovereign expressions of life as something that is never realized, the second as something that is realized in spite of our wickedness. That it is the latter characterization that Løgstrup really has in mind can be seen from the simple fact that the expressions of life would indeed not be sovereign, if humanity’s will could stop them from ever being realized, since sovereignty consists precisely in something that is stronger than humanity’s will. With this definition of sovereignty, the first characterization is thus rendered absurd. But furthermore, Løgstrup could hardly call them expressions of life if they were never realized. Expressions indeed express themselves.
3.

In his article, Løgstrup does not take sufficient account of the fact that there is a difference between the demand and the expressions of life – despite their similarities. It is just the realization that constitutes the difference. And that is [22] crucial to keep hold of in order to understand Løgstrup correctly:

It is a misunderstanding to believe that the demand's unfulfillability means that its actions are never realized. The demand's actions happen all the time, we survive because its actions are done in fulfillment of the sovereign expressions of life. But the demand's actions can only be done spontaneously, i.e. without being demanded. Despite the demand's actions happening, it is thus still not wrong to talk about the demand's unfulfillability. Its unfulfillability resides in this, that logically it is always too late, for had it come in time it would have been superfluous; its actions would already be in the process of being realized, so that it would have no function or meaning. If the demand's actions were to be done as the fulfillment of the demand, in obedience to it, the motive for doing it would be a benefit. The action would ultimately be performed opportunistically, in the interest of payment in one way or another. The demand thus always corresponds to sin; therefore it is a demand to make itself superfluous, or: a demand that it should never have arisen, which therefore is not thinkable without regret over the fact that it is necessary. That the demand corresponds to sin is what gives it its unfulfillability.

By contrast the sovereign expressions of life always correspond to freedom. And that is just because they are fulfilling themselves. What is sovereign about them is that they get behind us, they forestall our evil. They therefore have the power to set us free – free to follow them in their fulfillment. The adequate attitude to them is thus also gratitude.

Møllehave has failed to see that there is a difference between the demand and the sovereign expressions of life. For since the sovereign expressions of life are not something man has at his disposal, but he is freely given them, they can never be his achievement.

For nothing is yet said concerning the will's bondage about what it is in bondage to. Just as the will can be bound to evil, so can it also be bound to the good. Where the sovereign expression of life is fulfilled, the expression of life preempts selfishness and binds the will to the good; the [sovereign] expression of life has the power to compel us to the good; it makes us its tool, it uses us before our will can become evil. As Luther [23] says: the will is a horse, which either God or the Devil rides.

4.

In The Ethical Demand there is no use of the term the sovereign expressions of life. But as we know, the phenomena appear there, in Løgstrup’s concern with trust and natural love. But the unclarity that Løgstrup’s reply to Møllehave contains is also found in The Ethical Demand. I would like to show this with one example:
On p. 158ff Løgstrup distinguishes between ‘the wickedness of human beings’ and ‘the goodness of human life’, and concerning this distinction he says on p. 161, that nothing can be subtracted from human wickedness nor anything added to the goodness of human life. The goodness of human life is ‘there and is there fully but in advance – and always in advance, among other things in the realities of trust and love’.

If we read with our current knowledge of Løgstrup’s view-point, one will immediately think that with trust and love’s ‘reality’ he must have meant the fulfilled life expressions of trust and love. But precisely here the ambiguity manifests itself, for if you turn back three pages to p. 158 one is astonished by formulations such as this: ‘What we know about from our own existence...can only be a natural love, to which we have given our own self’s selfish form’. What does this mean? Does ‘the selfish form’ mean that the love is never fulfilled, or that the selfish form does not come in until after the fulfillment as the exploitation of it? On p. 158, the first is the case. For here he continues, that natural love is something we are compelled to operate with ‘speculatively’ as an ‘imaginary entity’; the fulfillment thus never happens; ‘or to put it in philosophical terms, to speak about natural love in the manner of this discussion is to hypostatize it’. Here the fulfillment of trust and love is denied. They are abstractions, although this does not mean that as a result they are illusions.

The clearest indication that Løgstrup in The Ethical Demand does not carry through his characterization from p. 158 that the created possibilities of life are never fulfilled, we have in his use of trust at the beginning of the book. Here Løgstrup makes use of trust as an elementary fact in our life together, and as we know, he claims that with the power over another person that trust gives us, we immediately stand under the ethical demand to take care of the part of the other person’s life, which has been handed to us in trust. It goes without saying that the whole of this basic argument in The Ethical Demand would become meaningless, if trust were really not fulfillable, but could only be an ‘imaginary entity’. Indeed in that case, something could not be handed to us to take care of.

Harmonizing these views is impossible. The Ethical Demand contains the same contradiction in the characterization of created possibilities of life like trust and love, as we found in the answer to Møllehave. There are two interpretations of what later comes to be called the sovereign expressions of life.

Can one give an explanation of what it is that has prevented Løgstrup in discovering this contradiction in The Ethical Demand? I believe so.

5.

In order to arrive at an explanation I will bring Løgstrup’s relation to [Rudolf] Bultmann into the picture. In Theologische Rundschau from 1956 we find a detailed critique of Bultmann’s Glauben und Verstehen [Faith and Understanding] II, written by Løgstrup.2

2 The paper exists in Danish as a typescript, available through the theological faculty in Aarhus, with the title: ‘Nihilismen som den kristne tros alternativ’ [Nihilism as the Alternative to Christian Faith]. In citing I shall refer to both the Danish and German
This critique must have been composed at a similar time that *The Ethical Demand* was being finished, and a part of it is included in *The Ethical Demand*’s polemical epilogue.³

How does this work connect with the question concerning the fulfillment of the sovereign expressions of life? In this respect these formulations stand out: ‘we [know] something from natural love concerning what love of the neighbour consists in’ [14; 273; 90]; however, one cannot see whether this knowledge stems from fulfilled natural love or from the destroyed possibilities of love. Elsewhere he speaks of the ‘realities’ of created human life as being there in advance: ‘Trust is there in advance, insofar as reticence and distrust are a lack of trust – and not conversely. Love is there in advance [25], in so far as insult, lust for power, envy, hatred and so on arise from and consist in stifling love in its emergence’ (20; 280; not in English version). Despite the fact that the word ‘realities’ is used here, the explanation shows that Løgstrup has in mind the misuse of expressions of life, in which their fulfillment is hindered. So when he says that ‘the individual’s evil will...gives his life’s goodness its perverted shape’, the shape here apparently means the selfish shape, so that we can only talk of the goodness of man’s life as an imaginary entity – as was said in *The Ethical Demand*. And we find the same meaning of ‘our self’s selfish form’ later in the article (28f; 288; 98), for here it is just this shape that gives our life its ambiguity: ‘The ambiguity is our will’s evil work’, he says, ‘we have destroyed what we should understand – so for that matter, we do not need to find the reason for our lack of understanding in a defect in our power of sight’ [translation modified]; there is apparently nothing to see, there are no sovereign expressions of life that are fulfilled.

Nevertheless there are other elucidations which indicate a way of understanding the expressions of life in their fulfillment. When Løgstrup claims against Bultmann that ‘the power of God is manifest not only in the limitations of our life but also in the unfolding of our life’ (14; 273; 90), one might be inclined to read it this way. And this reading seems to get confirmed when for example Løgstrup mentions ‘parental expression of their love for their children, in all its manifestations, in their determination to give them security, in their joy when their love is returned’ [p. 91]. Even if this determination and this joy are misused, the misuse does not hinder – at least not always – the parent’s love in its fulfillment, but – one might say – the misuse often consists in that fulfillment being hindered *lasting*. Løgstrup writes elsewhere: ‘If we accept them [i.e. the realities which are there beforehand] as though they were due to our own efforts, as though they were our own virtues and deeds, we will inevitably destroy them – directly, for instance, by self-righteousness and self-complacency, and reactively by resentment and wrangling’ [p.

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³ [Translators’ note: Jensen notes here that p. 20f of the Danish version and p. 279f of the German version of the article correspond to p. 275f of the Danish edition of *The Ethical Demand*. This is equivalent to pp. 95-96 of the English version of the article corresponding to pp. 249-50 of the English translation of *The Ethical Demand*.]
95, translation modified]. Is there not talk here of fulfilled realities? Can one boast of anything [26] or treat it as if it is due to you if it is not fulfilled?

Thus in other words also in the critique of Bultmann, there seems to be the same ambiguity. But it is more difficult to ascertain here. The tendency to see the created possibilities of life as not-fulfillable possibilities seems to be preponderant in this work, despite the fact that it was written at the same time that *The Ethical Demand* was finished. How can this be?

I believe one can find the explanation by becoming clear what it is that Løgstrup criticizes in Bultmann. He launches an attack on Bultmann’s theology, as sharing existence theology’s world-view, and thus understanding the world as an undifferentiated, formless, neutral mass, which first acquires content, form and meaning through the decision of the human being. In other words, it is Bultmann’s nihilistic world-view that he attacks. He is satisfied in this piece of writing if he can budge Bultmann on this point. Therefore the more nuanced world-view that Løgstrup is running up against Bultmann is not up for debate. A distinction between unfulfillable possibilities of life and fulfillable sovereign expressions of life is overshadowed by the more general distinction between nihilism and ontology. But this means that Løgstrup, in order to bring Bultmann into his thinking, has gone along with him for longer than one might expect – not just on the basis of the views he has today [i.e. in 1966], but also those from *The Ethical Demand* [1956], although he has written them at the same time as the Bultmann critique.

This is clear, if one dwells a little on what Løgstrup writes concerning the world’s ambiguity as the consequence of man’s wickedness. As created, life has an unambiguous shape and form; but man continually degrades it so that it is not possible to come to perceive anything other than darkness and gloom. Løgstrup concedes this to Bultmann, but thinks it is inconsistent of Bultmann, because it is in conflict with his view of the decision, which implies a nihilistic world-view in a more absolute sense. Whether Løgstrup is right in this objection is unimportant in this context; for it is certain that he is so preoccupied in pulling Bultmann away from his nihilistic existence theology (absolute nihilism), viii that he is ready to share his view [27] of the ambiguity, provided that it is interpreted as the result of human wickedness. But this concession to Bultmann goes too far. For given the existence of sovereign expressions of life breaking through and realizing themselves, then one can no longer argue that human wickedness has such a total power, as was attributed to it when it had to comprise such a total ambiguity. Already Løgstrup’s own statements in *The Ethical Demand* concerning trust as a sovereign expression of life conflicts with his concession to Bultmann with respect to the world’s ambiguity. The Løgstrup who claims the sovereign expressions of life are fulfillable cannot lay claim to this talk about the ambiguity at the same time. He must now say that fortunately human power is not so colossal. But as I said, the confrontation with the existence theologian Bultmann overshadows everything else in this work.

Now Bultmann has recently answered Løgstrup’s critique in the new American book, *The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann*. Here we see surprisingly that Bultmann does not want to be known at all as a nihilistic existence theologian, but agrees with Løgstrup’s view-point to the extent that Løgstrup just talks about what is created as squandered and always
destroyed and unfulfilled life possibilities. Løgstrup’s attack fizzles out against this background; there is not the expected explosion. Now I believe that Bultmann must have compromised a good deal with existence theology in order to reach agreement with Løgstrup; so it may well be that there is a bang in Løgstrup’s fireworks after all. But this is not the interesting thing in this connection; instead, it becomes clear when this answer comes forward from Bultmann, that Løgstrup’s lack of clarity with respect to the possibilities of life and their fulfillment or lack of fulfillment has prevented a new confrontation with Bultmann on a new front, although it is – at least for the sake of clarity – at least as important as the first. As we get to realize that Bultmann is not interested in defending the stronghold of existence theology which Løgstrup wants to put him in, it then dawns on us that for this reason no real consensus is created, because the more nuanced question concerning the realization of the possibilities of life is not resolved. That is: not resolved by Løgstrup’s critique of Bultmann; for Bultmann is in his [28] answer clear enough on this point; he stresses that he can be in agreement with Løgstrup, concerning his talk of life possibilities, that are always prevented from being realized.

A new reply to Bultmann is therefore required here, and curiously enough it can be constructed quite simply, by turning Bultmann’s own words against him. As far as I can see, there are not just two unmediated views in Bultmann, the one the existence theology that Løgstrup attacks, and the other the one Bultmann himself highlights in the American book; there is also a third Bultmann, who is closer to Løgstrup’s claim regarding the sovereign expression of life’s fulfillment. But I will return to this.

6.

I would now like to pay fresh attention to The Ethical Demand. For now there should be an opportunity to explain, why the two opinions on the created possibilities of life – as respectively fulfillable (at the beginning of the book) and unfulfillable (on p. 158 [p. 138]) – cannot be mediated.

I think this is because in The Ethical Demand, on the one side Løgstrup turns against Bultmann, but on the other side he wants to retain Bultmann’s scheme for relating law to gospel.

What Løgstrup resists throughout the whole book is the existence theological, nihilistic, world view. But head-on rejection of the criticized point of view steals the show to such an extent that the nuances in the positive position are not properly set out, although they were in fact available.

At the same time, Løgstrup wants to distance himself from any ‘enthusiastic [sværmeriske]’ tendencies. It is therefore important for him to emphasize that his rehabilitation of the created possibilities of life does not upset the scheme for the relation between man’s total sinfulness and the gospel, which he took over from dialectical theology in the broadest sense, as much as from Bultmann as from Tidehverv. And when he believes he can argue this way, is this because the rejection, the battle-front, erases all nuances. With what he says on p. 158 [p. 138], he wants to forestall all objections and speculations in that regard [29]. I wonder if that is not the explanation?
But when this is said, one must add that Løgstrup must choose. And in reality he has also made his choice. In recent years it is only the realization of the sovereign expressions of life that have concerned him, whereas the idea concerning the unfulfillability of the possibilities of life only surfaces occasionally, in a Tidehverv inspired inertia – as for example in his answer to Møllehave. But does this choice impact on the dialectical-theological scheme for the relation between total sinfulness and the gospel? Løgstrup has not yet resolved this question, probably because the ambiguity was not recognized. I imagine, however, it is more or less possible to work out what he will answer, and I will try to unravel it here.

First one can ask what Løgstrup – so to speak – ‘achieves’ of theological ‘benefit’ by claiming that the sovereign expressions of life are fulfillable. To which I provisionally answer that he benefits by putting determinate limits on human power. There is indeed a power of completely divine dimensions one attribute to the human, when one claims that with his evil he is capable of rendering everything barren. In order to give Christ all honour, one claims de facto that humanity is mightier than his own creator; this thus dares to be an outrageous consequence. One lacks a distinction, between humanity’s wickedness and his power. Because the wickedness is total, it therefore in no way follows that humanity’s power is that too; this would indeed be a most peculiar logic. There is certainly no limit to humanity’s wickedness, but there are certainly considerable limits to what devastating effects it can have, and the limits come together with the limits of human power in general. After all, Løgstrup claims that humanity is not able to prevent the sovereign expressions of life breaking through and coming before our wickedness in preempting it. We can impede them, but cannot prevent their coming. Wickedness consists in the fact that we do not let trust, love and so on come to pass, because we immediately exploit them and misuse them, but wickedness does not mean that they do not have being. In other words, in Løgstrup’s preoccupation with the sovereign expressions of life we see that his basic motive, his concentration on what lies before human culture and activity, comes through in a [30] wholly unexpected way: we live by what is before us and mightier than us. We do not owe everything to ourselves, nor in the sense that we would be to blame for the destruction of all things. (On the same basis one could moreover say, that neither are we responsible for creation’s whims; therefore Løgstrup also gives the problem of theodicy a new application.)

In fact Løgstrup comes to correct the whole dialectical-theological scheme for the relation between sin and the gospel. We do not only meet the limit of our power in the law’s coercion over us, but also in the coercion which the grace of created life exercises over our evil will in preempting it in the sovereign expressions of life. This is his correction. But as I said, it is a limitation for our power, not our wickedness. Therefore in Løgstrup’s theology humanity is quite as much in need of the gospel as in the theology of Bultmann and Tidehverv. It thus cannot be imputed to Løgstrup that there so to speak arises a relation of concurrence between the grace of creation in the sovereign expressions of life and the grace of Christ. Despite the considerable preoccupation with the sovereign expressions of life, all the problems remain that only religious faith resolves, and indeed they become all the more apparent; this applies not only to humanity’s sin, it applies also to the problems of fate and of death.
What Løgstrup’s adjustment means in addition I will try to show in relation to Wilhelm Herrmann.4

Wilhelm Herrmann is – except maybe for Kierkegaard – the first theologian in Protestantism who explicitly and consistently wants to separate theology from being confused with objective knowledge. He therefore avoids any attempt to give faith a metaphysical grounding in some postulated objective supra-reality, but he just as consistently rejects any attempt to give a scientific or pseudo-scientific grounding to faith. Faith has nothing to do with objective conceptions, neither scientific nor metaphysical.

So what does it have to do with? Faith has to do with man in his relation to God. By virtue [31] of what in man’s reality is this relation possible, one might ask. And Herrmann puts every possible effort into resolving the question. And his answer is, that revelation concerns what in the relation between human beings is hate and love, trust and distrust, and the like. Therefore Herrmann latches on to what Løgstrup calls the sovereign expressions of life, first and foremost the relation of trust. Human beings only know trust as something they are freely given to show, Herrmann says. It is another person’s love or care that makes me trusting, safe and free in the relation, so I do not need to be on guard against him. Herrmann often uses the obvious example, of the child’s trust and sense of security in relation to his or her parents. We know when we trust that we do not owe this freedom from being suspiciously wary to ourselves, but the liberation comes from the love of the other. And we know, following Herrmann, that the person who is set free by trust shows this to the other person, and so inspires the other to maintain mutual trust. In trust there arises a space between those who are involved in it, and this space is maintained so long as those involved do not break it down either through mistrust or by exploiting the other’s vulnerability. We use the expression of a vicious circle; in trust one can also speak of a virtuous circle.

For Herrmann trust is thus the experience of freedom in dependence in a determined situation, i.e. a freedom that is given and which one did not create for oneself. And in the space of trust those involved see that they owe their trust to a third besides themselves and the other person. The space of trust is before human beings, it is ontologically prior to human beings. The only adequate attitude to it is therefore gratitude. The space of trust can therefore only persist as long as gratitude persists.

To live in gratitude, if it applies to one’s whole existence, including life outside the situations of the sovereign expressions of life, will mean to stop laying down conditions on life, and what is this other than the attitude of faith? Therefore Herrmann also claims that if human beings would remain true to what they know from the space of trust, they

4 Wilhelm Herrmann (1846-1922) has not least played a decisive role for both Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann. What concerns us here is the theological meaning the phenomenon of trust played for him; it is also a basic phenomenon in his ethics, but in a wholly different way from Løgstrup!
would be in faith. And they would be that independent of whether the space of trust was allowed to [32] persist, they would remain in faith even if the other shakes their trust. If human beings were true to their experience in trust, Herrmann says, they will have 'Religion' [in Herrmann’s understanding of the term]. That is: trust is not 'Religion', the sovereign expressions of life is not 'Religion', but it is its possibility, because they point back to that which is prior to human beings and towards which one should live in gratitude. At the same time, if a person remained true to his experience of trust and the sovereign expressions of life altogether, this person would be a believer – outside of Christ. This is how the sovereign expressions of life give the possibility of faith.

But now humanity is not true to what he knows about trust.\textsuperscript{51} Not only does the self break down the space of trust, both by self-righteously taking what is granted him as if it was a product of his own efforts, and by using the other person’s vulnerability against him, so that the space is transformed into a circle of distrust; but it also shows its faithlessness towards that which is experienced in trust, by not drawing the further consequences of this. Therefore, although the space of trust contains the possibility for faith or 'Religion', it is a possibility that man’s wicked will will always prevent coming about. Therefore everything becomes demand, law – for, as we saw – the demand appears where it is too late, i.e. where there is sin.

Thus the fulfillment of the sovereign expressions of life never means a concurrence relation between life’s grace and gospel. If one claims this, one sees the sovereign expressions of life themselves as 'Religion – for still using Herrmann’s expression, for what they are not; they are only the possibility for ‘Religion’ or faith that are given with life.

Wilhelm Herrmann thought that this possibility given in trust could also be a human reality [i.e. outside of Christ]. That is his fault; we can criticize him for this. However it is no fault, on the contrary it is highly creditable of him, to show that the possibility of faith is given with the sovereign expressions of life. – It is now highly interesting that Bultmann in *Glauben und Verstehen* [*Faith and Understanding*] volume I, pp. 101-104 addresses exactly this same criticism of Herrmann, and except for that he agrees with him.\textsuperscript{5} In other words, here Bultmann agrees that the sovereign expressions of life can be fulfilled, and he agrees that this gives the possibility for [33] faith. In other words, the Bultmann we encounter here, is in line neither with existence theology nor with what he replies to Løgstrup in the American book; however, he is in line with the Løgstrup who we know in these recent years, who works with the sovereign, fulfillable expressions of life. The third ‘Herrmannesque’ Bultmann is the one that Løgstrup could have played off against the first and second Bultmann.

\textsuperscript{5} [Translators' note: Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen: Gesammelte Aufsätze I*, Vierte, unveränderte Auflage, 1986, p. 104 [our translation], where Bultmann writes that if in spite of our destruction of the space of trust, we ‘want to hold onto what was given to us in the experience of trust, we either hold onto an idea of the good as a power in history, or onto a demand whose requirement we understand, i.e. we then stand under the law’ [i.e. not under the gospel].]
This brings me to my final consideration: Løgstrup’s point of view as one thus also can find it in Bultmann, does not create a concurrence relation between life’s grace and the gospel. On the contrary, it brings theological ‘benefits’ with itself, of which I have mentioned one, namely the limitation of human power. I will highlight one more ‘benefit’. This is implied in what was said concerning William Herrmann and concerns the question of the point of connection to revelation. Let me put it this way: Bultmann could have saved himself some frantic expositions of the connection in contradiction, if he himself had stuck to what he himself had granted Herrmann. Obviously Bultmann is correct that revealed grace is the complete contradiction of man’s evil will, of his selfish desires and yearnings. But the only way to understand revealed grace is not that it says exactly the opposite of what we wish and desire. There is a another connection point when one sees the sovereign expressions of life as fulfilled. It is to be found in the fact, that with the experience of freedom in dependence in trust and love, this makes possible ‘Religion’ or faith. A little challenging one could say that thereby a human being does not just have a ‘prior understanding of faith, but a prior experience of it, i.e. he knows that to be given freedom is something over which one has no power, but for which one can only be grateful. I believe this is the same as what Ernst Fuchs is thinking in the following formulation: ’Faith connects to a saving [ein Haben], not a deficit’. What is meant by a saving? I wonder if Fuchs had this in mind elsewhere when he wrote: ‘in your life you must heed the experiences that you get with love’ (Gesammelte Ausätze III, 170)? By these experiences, I want to say, God has himself given us the conditions for understanding the gospel. That is, revealed grace connects to [34] created life’s grace, God connects to his own work in the sovereign expressions of life.

Translated by Ole Jensen and Robert Stern

Translators’ notes

1 As this article was originally published in 1967, by ‘later writings’ Jensen is referring to Løgstrup’s work around this period.

2 The Ethical Demand [Danish original Den etiske fordring 1956], translated by Theodor I. Jensen, revised and edited with an introduction by Hans Fink and Alasdair MacIntyre (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1997), Chapter 7, §6, p. 138ff.

3 The Ethical Demand, 7.6, p. 141, translation modified.

4 The Ethical Demand, 7.6, p. 138, translation modified.

5 The Ethical Demand, 7.6, p. 138, translation modified.


Jensen’s terms ‘absolute nihilism’, and ‘Bultmann 1’ (see translators’ note xiii below) refer respectively to formulations such as the following: ‘[T]he situation in which my life is encompassed by darkness on all sides is incomprehensible ‘; ‘When nihilism is taken to be the true alternative to faith, there is a choice of letting the darkness be nothingness, and our life be utterly meaningless, or call the darkness God so that our existence acquires a meaning through our renunciation of all our own demands on life in order to let God rule’ (Løgstrup, ‘The Doctrines of God and Man in the Theology of Rudolf Bultmann’, p. 94).

With this word, Jensen refers to Luther’s polemic against the left wing of the German reformation, the Schwarmgeister, e.g. Thomas Müntzer.

Tidehverv was (and is) an influential movement within the Danish church with its own journal with the same name. It was founded in 1926 as a reaction against the sentimental and pietistic Christianity of movements like YMCA. Theologically it was strongly influenced by Kierkegaard but also the dialectical theology of Karl Barth and the existential theology of Rudolf Bultmann in Germany. Løgstrup was closely connected with the movement for a time but finally broke with it in 1961. When Løgstrup attacks Kierkegaard in the Polemical Epilogue in The Ethical Demand and in his Controverting Kierkegaard this is very much meant as an attack also on the theological basis for the Tidehverv-movement.

This is intended as Jensen’s view, not Herrmann’s.

This refers to the discussion about the ‘Anknüpfungspunkt’ in German dialectical theology in the 1930s to 50s.

Jensen uses the German phrase ‘Anknüpfung im Widerspruch’ (cf. R. Bultmann: ‘Anknüpfung und Widerspruch’, Glauben und Verstehen II, 1952, p. 117ff.). The issue may be summarized as follows: The gospel connects to, i.e. is understandable with, our natural religious desires for security in life and death. But it only does that while simultaneously rejecting and condemning these same desires as being our fundamentally selfish and wishful illusions (Bultmann here explicitly agrees with Feuerbach). It is condemnation and grace in the same dialectic act. Here we meet the nihilistic existentialist theologian Bultmann, the ‘Bultmann 1’, whom Løgstrup so strongly opposes in ‘Nihilismen som den kristne tros alternativ’.

I.e. what in the German discussion was called ‘Vorverständnis’.