Introduction
by Kees van Kooten Niekerk

'The Trampoline’s Reply’ is Løgstrup’s rejoinder to the critique advanced against his thinking by Johannes Sløk in his book Teologiens elendighed [The Misery of Theology]. Since Løgstrup’s rejoinder presupposes a certain acquaintance with Sløk’s critique, a brief account of some of its points is offered here.

Johannes Sløk (1916-2001) was a Danish theologian and philosopher. Having held chairs in systematic theology and the history of ideas he succeeded Løgstrup as a professor of ethics and philosophy of religion at the Faculty of Theology at Aarhus (1977-86). Sløk’s thinking was deeply influenced by Kierkegaard (about whom he wrote several books), and he advocated an existentialist theology, which rejected all metaphysical speculation about God and focused the meaning of Christian faith on the question of living authentically.

In The Misery of Theology, published in 1979, Søløk offers an account and critique of the main kinds of creation theology in the West European theological and philosophical tradition. In the third and last part of his book, entitled ‘Absurdity and Creation’, he describes and criticizes the creation theology of Løgstrup and some of his pupils. He does so, however, in general terms, without mentioning names and giving references. The names of Løgstrup and his pupils only appear in the list of literature at the end of the book.

An important target of Sløk’s critique is Løgstrup’s conception of the sovereign expressions of life. Sløk criticizes it in the context of a discussion of creation theology, because he thinks that it is based on the idea that life is a gift from God. According to him the category of gift is a misrepresentation; life could just as well be regarded as ‘an existing fact, which was no gift at all that somebody had given to somebody’ (p. 180). Moreover – with reference to the fact that the sovereign expressions of life sometimes are characterized as pre-cultural – he argues that everything in human life is culturally shaped and that, therefore, it is meaningless to search for something pre-cultural in human life. He illustrates this with what he calls compassion. He wonders why compassion, if it is a sovereign expression of life, has expressed itself so seldom in the history of mankind, as is exemplified by the ‘almost demonstrative absence of compassion’ (p. 188) in the ancient Greek-Roman civilization. The very idea that compassion is a sovereign expression of life is probably culturally conditioned by the fact that Denmark has been a Christian civilization for more than a thousand years.

Søløk bases the exposition of his own view on the statement that the human situation is absurd, in the sense that our claim to meaning is met by an indifferent universe. Since we cannot live without meaning, we create a meaningful universe for ourselves through culture and society. Within this context a rich theology is possible, which by rationalizing and systematizing confirms cultural and social meaning. However, such a theology is not conscious of its own historical relativity. For those who take the absurdity of the human situation seriously, a rich theology is impossible. They are aware of the misery of theology. For them only a ‘theology of misery’ is left, which ‘rejects the problems in their very quality as problems, since its misery consists in not being capable of advancing universal positive statements about God, giving reasons for them and arguing on the basis of them’ (pp. 209-10). This theology sticks to the proclamation of Jesus, which orders us to live seriously at the place of the world God has designated to us. Here it is our task, guided by the principle of love of the neighbour, to take care that our culture is humanized. In the theology of misery, creation means that I am referred to my concrete situation, with which I have to deal seriously. This is ‘the only
seriousness there is in life. In contrast to the many problems a genuine systematic theologian has to busy himself with: the problem of suffering, the ethical problem, the problem of death, the sexual problem, etc., the whole series of them. All that is abstract pastime, and it melts into thin air, when creation refers me to my concrete reality’ (p. 215).

[222] To get it over with, I begin with a few remarks about the polemical form of The Misery of Theology. Anonymous polemic cannot always be avoided. It also has its advantages. It may serve to draw the contours of the position that is being attacked. But there are dangers. Not just because the attacked persons are pushed into the solidarity of debtors who are liable for one another, but also because the polemicist is tempted to make his case easy for himself. A distinction can illuminate this. Although polemic and critique cannot be kept apart, polemic mostly concerns opinions while critique mostly concerns quality. The danger of anonymous polemic is that it detaches the opinions that it will attack from the context in which they have been thought out, to deal with them in cross-section which then deprives them of their sharpness and precision. Whereupon the polemicist can criticize them for lacking the quality of which the polemicist himself has stripped them. But as you will see, while I am a cautious man, I do not reject anonymous polemic. The fact is, I will not deny myself the right to use it against the existentialists, for if there is anyone who – as far as their basic position is concerned – is interchangeable, the one with the other, it is them.

I cannot refrain from meticulous reading, and I cannot resist noting that during this reading I have felt like a trampoline to which Sløk attributes views that give him the best springboard for the heavenward flight of his thoughts.

Sløk prefers to call his observations ‘distanced’, and that is indeed an apt word, particularly if he had said ‘vertically distanced’. H. C. Wind characterizes the book’s polemic as ‘public ridicule’. Sløk’s attack undeniably also comes from a place that is very high up, but I take the chance that the difference in height offers, to try to go into depth concerning our disagreement.

[223] Frailty and Independence The difference between a phenomenon’s robustness and fragility is not the same as the difference between higher and lower degrees of independence.

A fragile phenomenon can have a high degree of independence. This is the case for example with the zone of inviolability. Nothing is easier than to break into it and molest it, a word is enough, so fragile is it. But its independence is considerable. This manifests itself in different ways. There is a clear difference between the zone of inviolability and for example touchiness and prudery. The difference manifests itself in the fact that where the zone of inviolability is respected freedom reigns, while touchiness and prudery make a person unsafe. Independence also shows itself in the way that when the phenomenon is molested, it does not disappear. In its collapse the zone of inviolability asserts itself with the embarrassment that is spread.

Correspondingly, a robust phenomenon can have low degree of independence. A robust phenomenon like mendacity has such a low degree of independence that it can only function by means of the openness of speech. To lie is to pretend to tell the truth. And such a robust phenomenon as Schadenfreude can only obtain its access to its object through sympathy. Mendacity and Schadenfreude are parasitic phenomena.
One cannot say this concerning mistrust, which is too often a well-grounded phenomenon. Yet mistrust is founded on trust. Mistrust arises when the individual has the experience that things do not go as he had trusted that they would go. If there was no trust, there would not be something called mistrust. Disappointed trust is needed for mistrust to arise as such.

On the other hand, trust is an original phenomenon; philosophers and scientists agree about that. That children come into the world trustingly is affirmed by child psychologists and child psychiatrists.

That is to say, what I provisionally called high and low degrees of independence concerns the phenomenon in its distinctiveness. Not in the sense that the phenomenon with the low degree of independence would lack distinctiveness. Mistrust is as distinctive a phenomenon as trust, dissembling as openness, Schadenfreude as sympathy. Rather, high and low degrees of independence concern the phenomena in the sense that the phenomena with the low degree of independence as regards their distinctiveness are dependent and founded on another phenomenon of the opposite kind, while the phenomena with the high degree of independence are independent, unfounded, original.

By contrast, robustness or fragility has nothing to do with the phenomenon's distinctive nature, at least not directly; they rather relate to how well or badly the phenomenon fares in relation to the treatment it receives. It shows itself to be robust or fragile depending [224] on how well it stands up under the conditions in which it finds itself. Those conditions are not only set by the world in an outward sense, given with the environment and the society in which the individual grows up, but they are also set by the world constituting the individual himself with his endowments, his aptitudes, his character and temperament, a world which is more or less favorable to the phenomena. Both external and internal conditions are relevant to the fate of the phenomena.

It is clear that the relation between the distinctive nature and the conditions are different in the case of independent and dependent phenomena. External and internal conditions either trigger trust and provide favourable conditions for growth, or they damage it in its very source and provide it with poor conditions for growth. But the conditions do not produce trust. Not trust itself, only its fate in the individual's life, is a result of external or internal conditions.

By contrast mistrust is a result of the damage to trust by external and internal conditions. Indeed mistrust comes about through those conditions, but not without there being a trust to spoil.

Something similar applies to the two other sets of phenomena. Openness of speech and mercy are original phenomena. They have external conditions in the environment in which the individual grows up, and they have internal conditions in his or her natural aptitudes. The conditions co-determine the phenomenon's fate, but they do not produce it.

Mendacity and Schadenfreude are a result of the external and internal conditions' destruction of openness and sympathy. Mendacity and Schadenfreude come about through the conditions, indeed, but they are also grounded on the phenomenon on which they are parasitic, namely openness and sympathy.

The openness of speech is not something we can evade. We realize it in and when we speak at all. It is not up to us whether our speech is openness or not. The independence of the life expression is so considerable that we are in the power of its
sovereignty, whether we will it or not. The more we resist and dissemble, the more we realize speech's openness – as a trap.

By contrast, we have not inserted dissembling into our existence as something that realizes itself, only as a possibility which naturally goes with the openness of speech. It is up to us whether we want to use the possibility of dissembling or not. Dissembling is something we can avoid. By contrast the openness of speech is not something we can avoid realizing, not even when we dissemble.

To summarize: In the case of an independent, ungrounded and original phenomenon it is obvious that, however much the external and internal conditions promote or inhibit it, they do not create the phenomenon, while one certainly can ask whether it is not the conditions that create the dependent and grounded phenomenon; and if they do, whether the phenomenon has any distinctiveness at all. It is presumably the case that without the external and internal conditions the dependent and grounded phenomenon would not have come about. Its coming into existence is the result of the conditions. But, on the other hand, how it comes into existence, its distinctiveness, is not determined by its conditions; it is determined by its grounding in and dependence on a phenomenon of which it is the contrary.

But that means that fragility and robustness are at a wholly different level from the distinctive character of the phenomenon, so we get to know them in a wholly different way. We do not have the same access to them. A phenomenon's fragility or robustness is something we get to know from experience. We experience how fragile the zone of inviolability is when we are with a person who lacks tact, or when we read about Marc Voloschow in Gontscharow’s novel Slugten [The Ravine], or read about the informer in Tage Skou-Hansen’s novel Dagstjernen [The Day Star]. From experience we also become aware that there are differences of degree in the different phenomena's fragility or robustness. A phenomenon like mercy is far more fragile than trust. We know of mercy almost only as a momentary, quickly stifled and vanishing impulse, whereas trust is more persistent and persevering. For this reason we also do a lot for the ideas and institutions that mercy inspires. We make it the criterion of a social institution, of how well or badly it takes care of the weak. We have a well-developed health care service that functions as an institution on behalf of mercy, independently of how big or little a role mercy as an expression of life plays in the institution. By contrast because trust presents itself by itself with greater tenacity, we let it take care of itself and we do not do very much to convert it into an idea and institution. Undoubtedly we do too little, as is shown by the declining solidarity with society.

But the phenomenon's distinctiveness is something we cannot learn from experience, and therefore we cannot learn this way the difference between founded and unfounded, dependent and independent forms of distinctiveness. We learn to know about this from imagination, which in this connection is not a fabulating imagination but an analyzing imagination. We can also say as one usually does, that we learn to know it intuitively.

[226] But when the sovereign expressions of life are anything but robust, how can it be that they bear up the whole? They do not always do so. Time after time everything collapses. When both the individual person's history and the whole of human history is periodically ravaged by disasters, this is due to the fact that the phenomena which hold us up lack robustness.
When people and communities still recover, this is due to the expressions of life breaking through again. Just as it is due to the fact that, although the fragile phenomena fail indeed, we are so clever after all that we derive ideas from them. If there is nothing left of the phenomenon but an impotent impulse, we still have taken inspiration from it for the extracting of institutions from it. The life expression itself possesses no organizing power. It does not get a relation to organization until it is transformed into ideas and institutions. But the ideas and institutions presuppose the expressions of life.

The expressions of life are too fragile to prevent collapse, and they are too indispensible to be wiped out. We are not here dealing with technical constructions, where the higher and heavier the building is, the more solid are the foundations. The phenomena, that our life, society and nature rest on, are without the toughness that can just brush off malicious damage.

So it would not be spot on to say that Sløk has struck home at what is meant by the talk of the sovereign expressions of life, when he attributes the view to me that the sovereign expressions of life, being big and strong, hold up society like Atlas holds up the globe, bristling with health and muscle power. When Sløk asks: If the sovereign expressions of life play such a big role, why do we not notice them much more and why are they not there all the time? – then this question is quite beside the point.

But it is no wonder Sløk goes wrong when he sets out the views of his opponents. It comes from the fact – as he himself explains – that he does not want to know anything about the phenomena other than what he can experience of them. He restricts his knowledge to what empirical research tells him. He renounces imagination and intuition, or rather he saves them for his activities in the history of ideas. Therefore he is blind to the phenomena in their distinctive natures and foundational relations. Thus when his opponent analyses a phenomenon in its distinctive nature, he reasons as follows: there is nothing but robustness and fragility that can be established empirically. If a phenomenon's independent distinctive nature does not consist in its robustness, then its independent distinctive nature is null and void. Because of the epistemological ascetism he has opted for, it lies beyond his horizon that a phenomenon that is empirically fragile can have an independent and original distinctive nature.

This is his standpoint. But his polemic is wrong from a methodological point of view. For it consists in ascribing to the opponent's analyses the standpoint that he occupies himself. This is the cause of his polemic's triumphant nature, to put it mildly. In order to ridicule them, he elucidates our analyses using a standpoint we do not hold.

He is apparently ensnared in the delusion that there is no other form of discussion. But there is. If a discussion is to go into depth, it must confront a standpoint with a standpoint. This is not to ignore the analyses, but in order to judge the standpoint through the analysis and vice versa.

In other words, there is one thing that constantly recurs in Sløk's polemic. He criticizes my conclusion from his own premises. But there is no enlightenment to be had from this, it just leads to marching on the spot. The only thing there is reason to discuss are our premises, as it is the difference between them that matters.

Even if the discussion does not result in one of the combatants laying down their arms, the dividends are still great if one can agree on what the disagreement consists in, and if the discussion reveals the width of the perspectives implied in the disagreement.
Whether one can make do with just empirical cognition and without phenomenological analysis need not be discussed. Without phenomenological considerations, the empirical sciences concerning human beings could not even get started. However what is open to discussion is whether the phenomenological description can be gradually eliminated as the empirical sciences progress. It seems that Sløk believes this, but I do not.

To go further into the relation between the empirical and the phenomenological will lead us too far afield here. I defer this to another occasion, where H. C. Wind’s reflections on phenomenology in the collection *Filosofien efter Hegel* [Philosophy after Hegel] (Copenhagen: 1980) should be taken into consideration. I would like to take a stand on his critique of my views, as I find his formulation of the problem on pp. 217-220 central and fruitful.

To Sløk I would just add regarding this point, that he cannot (as he does on p. 190) foist the claim on people who work phenomenologically, that they are uninterested in the results that are obtained by empirical and historical studies. Not only am I interested in empirical studies and results and take note of them, but I make use of them. This is testified in everything I have written. [228] I do not think that the empirical and the phenomenomenological methods exclude one another. On the contrary, it is Sløk who believes this: he believes the empirical excludes the phenomenological. I do not believe that the phenomenological excludes the empirical; if I did I would be mad. It is therefore neither right, that we cannot understand one another’s standpoint. Sløk cannot conceive that I think as I do, but I can indeed well understand that Sløk thinks as he does, assuredly as the epoch has a grip on me as it does on him.

Altogether it is not too much to say that Sløk is cheeky with the views he ascribes to his opponents. For example: He correctly says that not only our scientific knowledge but also our pre-scientific knowledge has a theoretical nature. A-theoretically we are cut off from relating to reality. Ole Jensen says the same; he does not merely say it, but it plays the largest role in his thesis. Yet Sløk attributes the view to the consortium that the pre-scientific understanding is a-theoretical.

This has a professional explanation. In the middle part in Sløk’s book, ‘The Thinking of Identity’ – which deals with people who from the standpoint Sløk occupies have thoughts that are pure gibberish – he thinks and writes brilliantly, so that one can only read it with the greatest pleasure and admiration. Thus Sløk does not deal with people without respect of persons. He does not treat everyone equally nicely. In the eyes of the historian of ideas, all others suffer from a very big flaw, which we must acknowledge, of not being 500 years old.

*Nature and culture* A view which I have advocated is that in and with the development of culture, certain characteristics come into play there are sovereign in relation to the individual as well as in relation to society. I have called the characteristics ‘pre-cultural’, and the word indicates a foundational relation and obviously not a temporal relation. The expressions of life I call sovereign have come about in the course of history. The ethical demand has emerged historically with an historical proclamation. Only it seems to me that the time or the occasion for its historical emergence is not the criterion for whether an expression of life or a demand merely is a cultural creation or more than that. Rather this is a matter of its own inherent characteristic, its unconditionality, which shows that it is not merely a cultural creation.
Søk has a different view: he claims that if a sovereign expression of life is not merely a cultural creation, it must have manifested itself everywhere and at all times. The premise for this view is that there is an empirical-historical criterion for whether something is only a cultural creation [229] or something different and more than that; and the place for our disagreement and our dispute belongs here, as I do not share this premise.

But Søk moves our disagreement to a place where it does not belong. He pretends that for me it is a matter of how far the sovereign expression of life has been present anywhere and everywhere, and he pretends that I have argued that it has been active around the globe from the dawn of history until today. He does this, in order not only on his behalf, but also on my own behalf, to set the empirical-historical criterion going and say: well, you can then see that there have been times when the sovereign expression of life did not exist. As if the empirical-historical criterion were mine.

The description of phenomena In what I have written, I present the idea of creation partly as arising through the idea of annihilation and partly through the analysis of particular and typical phenomena, not isolated from them as a general and formal statement. So when Søk polemizes against the statement that the world is created in abstraction from the idea of annihilation and in abstraction from the description of phenomena, he has abandoned what is central from my point of view. In order to polemicize against my views, he must abandon them.

Søk holds that creation theology is the basis for the analysis of the expressions of life that are sovereign, which is why only the creation theological basis interests him. For me however things are the other way round: the sovereign expressions of life are (amongst other phenomena) the basis for the idea of creation. The foundation relation, such as is set out in my analysis, is turned upside down by Søk. This happens in order to formalize and generalize my analysis of particular and typical phenomena. Yet Søk is aware that unlike classical creation theology, nowadays one builds on phenomenological description. But why does he go away from this, when this is what he wants to polemicize against?

To this question Søk will answer: What we say about God we have always and already said about the particular and the typical. He is correct about this. But the sticking point is that we cannot speak about the particular and the typical without speaking about God. vii This is what the dispute is about. Søk claims that we can talk about the particular and the typical without talking about God. If we can do this, Søk is right, that talk about God is unnecessary and empty. I claim, that we cannot talk about the particular and typical without talking about God.

Pathos Søk’s book consists in history of ideas, reproduction of the results of the empirical sciences [230] and polemic. He gives little space to his own standpoint, which has given the book its name – only three and a half pages at the end. This states that it is God’s will that a person live in the society which, as things are, constitutes the conditions of his life. Not in order to bow to society, but as a task for the individual’s concern, which can in extreme cases consist in revolt. However if a person concerns himself with ‘the problem of suffering, the ethical problem, the problem of death, the sexual problem’, then his life is godless. God wills that earnestness forsakes the problems. ‘... I have other things to do than conjuring up problems, I have to live in my place in my designated world. The
problem has been replaced with a task, but, by contrast that task is entirely earnest’. To act is earnestness and pleasing to God, to think at the behest of problems is frivolous and godless.

What can Sløk be thinking with his opposition between decision and action on the one side and the problem and thinking on the other side? He could think one of two things:

1. He may think that there is a difference in the understanding that is involved in decision and action, and the understanding that one struggles with in dealing with problems. Thus that we have to do with two kinds of understanding: one kind when the understanding is carried through in an action, and another kind when it is carried through in the execution of a problem.

2. Or he could think, that the understanding which the theologian and philosopher struggles with in dealing with problems, he uses to evade action, despite the fact that the understanding is the same in both cases.

And what does Sløk actually think? This is something we cannot become clear about. And nor should we, because without this ambiguity and indeterminacy, existentialism would collapse. Existentialism is to remain suspended between the two conceptions without committing to either of them.

Strictly speaking, we are dealing with two distinctions. The one is the difference between the individual and the typical. The other is the difference between decision and action on the one hand, and understanding and knowledge on the other.

Existentialism concentrates on decision and action, which, obviously is as individual as everything else that goes on historically.

What we can all agree upon is that as individual as an historic event is thanks to the space-time continuum in which it occurs and of which there only exists one – so it must have typical features if it is to be understood at all. When we respond rationally or irrationally to what occurs historically, we respond to the event’s typical characteristics.

[231] It does not make any difference that the historic event is an ethico-religiously motivated decision and action. Neither ethics nor religion have the power to do away with the typical and retain the individual. Without the typical, the decision and action would be without understanding, blind and arbitrary, not worth calling decision or action. I cannot imagine that an existentialist like Sløk could think, that the decision and action, or the task as he also puts it, should be individual and without typical and understandable features.

Now a society’s culture is never unproblematic, and neither is the concern that Sløk advocates, so that without interesting himself in problems and reflecting upon them, he cannot decide on or do anything whatsoever. The care, in which he is acting on his own responsibility, does not relieve him of problems. There are situations where it is straightforward what it is right to do, and such a situation Sløk has set out on pp. 191-2, and there are situations where to become clear over what to do causes headaches. Being responsible for an action is being able to render an account of it, and this can also be done for an action where it is straightforward what is the right thing to do; only then, rendering an account of it would be superfluous.

Why can Sløk not admit that it is the same type of understanding which is carried through in action and resolving a problem, since we obviously do not have a different understanding from the understanding of the typical? Therefore he could very well maintain the other view, namely that the person with the problem shirks the action. Why
does Sløk refuse to be clear? The answer is simple: that would make his polemic rather too personal. It would become a personal polemic against the person’s personal relation to his understanding.

But would that never be appropriate? Well, I think it would. But certainly only when the person will not admit that he with his existence betrays his understanding, though it is obvious that it is this he is doing. But is it ever obvious? Yes, every time a person bigs himself up so much that his behaviour contradicts what he says. In short, this polemic is appropriate in opposition to big words, and because big words are an occupational disease of theologians, this polemic is appropriate again and again.

But Sløk will not restrict himself to this. He is hunting different game, he intends to bring down those who are preoccupied with problems and for that reason engage in thinking as best they can. However the hunt risks amounting to nothing. For if the person who deals with problems does not use big words and [232] is aware that he uses the problems to avoid action, what becomes of Sløk’s polemic? One of two things. Either it fizzes out, or it becomes Sløk’s assertion that, while the opponent deals with problems, Sløk takes care of the task and lives in decision and action.

But for all the world the polemic must not fizzle out. For then pathos bites the dust, and Sløk’s standpoint cannot do without pathos. The polemic’s pathos is needed to cover up the fact that the standpoint consists in making it uncertain whether it is the person he is after or whether he entertains the illusion that there is a difference between the understanding achieved concerning an action, and the understanding achieved concerning a problem. The unclarity is needed to make the controversy have pathos without making it embarrassingly personal.

In order to contrast my standpoint with Sløk’s: When Sløk says of those people who do not renounce problems that they live in thin air and in abstract diversion, I do not dispute this. I would just add to this that it is not the fault of the problems, but that each individual must shoulder responsibility for this. Because, since the understanding of the problem is the same as the understanding of the action, the problems could very well make the individual’s life into a life of seriousness, freedom and ingenuity, into a life of courage and responsibility of the sort that Sløk calls for.

In Schørring’s recently published book Ammundsen og det sociale engagement [Ammundsen and Social Engagement], in the section on Tidehverv’s confrontation with Ammundsen, there is an account of K. Olesen Larsen’s theological position. It invites comparison with the last three and a half pages of The Misery of Theology.

In the first years, Tidehverv’s polemic was extremely. This is because that which the pioneers attacked they had known to their own cost. They knew what they were settling accounts with from their own experience. The polemic was an act of liberation, which is why it was so violent and to the point. Reading Schjørring’s book, one realizes what particularly gave Olesen Larsen’s Kierkegaard-inspired talk about the singular situation and the existential decision its attacking impetus. This was the previous generation’s talk concerning personal ethico-religious aspiration and growth, the individual’s continuous progress in piety, and Christianity’s contribution to the process of refinement as the meaning of life.

This background has gone, so when today Sløk insists on the singular situation and the existential decision, his opponent is different from who it was for Tidehverv half a
 century ago. His opponent is thinking’s preoccupation with problems. In this way [233] he is closer to Kierkegaard. That which is to give his talk topicality is not polemic against experience and striving, but against problems and thinking.

But what about the pathos of polemics? While Tidehverv’s polemic could be both harsh and personal, this was because big words were an integral part of the preaching that they turned themselves against. Can problems and thinking trigger as harsh and personal a polemic as big words? Can we be for Sløk what Ammundsen was for Olesen Larsen? Sløk would very much like us to be that. For pathos is important for Sløk, because as already said, otherwise there would be nothing to hide the position’s indeterminacy and ambiguity. Sløk knows a way out: What the big words in liberal theology and its personality cult were for Tidehverv’s polemic at the beginning of the century, must the richness that theology gets from its occupation with problems be for Sløk’s polemic.

The way out is impassable, it is a rhetorical one. As we all know, there are people who wake up in the morning to the idea of what they have to change that day. They have a perverted relation to action. I find it difficult to imagine that there are people who wake up in the morning thinking about what new problem the day will bring, but I cannot exclude the possibility. A person here and a person there can acquire a perverted relation to anything on heaven and earth. But if Sløk does not have such abstruse cases in mind, then ‘richness’ is taking an irrelevant view to problems, and instantly to deny that any problem whatsoever can be an assignment is a pietistic obscurantism, to which theological existentialism keels over. As if we choose problems, and problems do not choose us. As if we choose the epoch, and the epoch does not choose us. We meet difficulty after difficulty, wherever we turn, wherever we look. Who gets the task of dealing with which problems is determined by interest, experience, training, their office, where they live, and so on. The same circumstances determine who disregards which task. To proceed thoroughly in trying to illuminate and overcome one difficulty or another is to concern oneself with problems.

To come to polemicize against concerning oneself with problems, Sløk must deny that this can be a task. He must separate tasks and problems from one another. But he is so eager to deal a blow to the concern with problems as richness, passing time, lack of seriousness, and godlessness, that he does not pay any attention to what happens with the task by his doing so. He can only determine tasks in opposition to problems [234] through narrowing down tremendously the conception of a task. They become private. Or has he noticed this? Does he think that it speaks in favour of his view that the task is rendered private by being cleansed of problems. But this is to come full circle: existentialism has turned back into the pietism it originated in, rebelled against, but from which it has never escaped.

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Translators’ notes

1 This article has been reprinted as an appendix in Svend Andersen’s commentary to Løgstrup’s Skabelse og tilintetgørelse: see Svend Andersen, Af og til intet: Ledsager til K.E. Løgstrup: ‘Skabelse og tilintetgørelse. Metafysik IV’ (Aarhus: Klim 2015), pp. 234-47.

By 'zone of inviolability' Løgstrup is thinking of the fact that we have a legitimate claim to keep our motives to ourselves so that they are not made public, e.g. in a conversation.

Løgstrup writes in more detail about these characters in *System og Symbol* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1962), pp. 13 and 211-13 respectively. In both cases the issue concerns a person who violates another person’s zone of inviolability by exposing the latter’s motives.

Wind inquires about what he calls the ‘autonomy’ of a phenomenon such as trust, the characteristic that is only accessible to phenomenology in contradistinction to science. He thinks that Løgstrup identifies it as the unconditionality of the sovereign expressions of life, but criticizes this identification as biased towards metaphysics and religion and too separate from visible appearance, and thus the phenomena themselves.


This is the middle part of Sløk’s book, called ‘Fra skabelsesteologi til identitetstænkning’ [From creation theology to identity thinking].


On pp. 191-2, Sløk discusses a gradual regeneration of mutual trust between partners after one party has been unfaithful.