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1. Context and background

*Back to the things themselves!* was the slogan with which Edmund Husserl presented phenomenology as the new fundamental philosophy in the beginning of the 20th century. No more speculative metaphysics, no more psychologistic and historicist beating around the bush. The idea was that philosophy would now go to what is central in order to lay open what is there, so that it could be examined and analysed.

There is an implicit matter-of-factness in this ‘to the things themselves!’, which also characterizes the title of K. E. Løgstrup’s *Ethical Concepts and Problems* from 1971: here there is no suggestion of any contextualization or some other 'noise'. On the contrary, you meet ‘the things themselves’, namely the ethical concepts and ethical problems.

However, the lack of context is merely apparent. For the text itself, that now for the second time is available in print as a separate book, was published originally not as such, but was written as a contribution to the anthology *Ethics and Christian Faith*, which was edited by among others the Swedish theologian Gustaf Wingren. In his preface he stated that contributions to the anthology are to analyse the relationship between the Christian worldview and ethics:

> A [particular] faith or view of life almost always has consequences for our understanding of human behavior. [...]. These consequences of a certain faith or view of life are usually called their ethos. [...]. The academic discipline, which analyzes different kinds of ethos, is as a rule called ethics. (Wingren and Aronson, 1971, p. 5)

The context of Løgstrup’s article is thus a publication that sets out to examine the Christian faith’s significance to ethics and [122] Løgstrup’s contribution deals with such *ethical concepts and problems* in light of this.

But is *Ethical Concepts and Problems* then 'just' an unfolding of Christian ethics, you might ask? The answer is that *secularization is a Christian precondition for universal ethics*. Wingren’s presentation of the problem of Christian faith’s consequences for ethics implies, according Løgstrup, precisely that Christianity sets people free to live as *human beings*: ‘The moral
and political order is set free’ in Christianity (p. 40).\textsuperscript{1} That is what secularization means for Løgstrup. The Christian should live as a human being among all others, and therefore it is precisely a \textit{Christian} assertion that there can be no \textit{specifically} Christian ethics. As he writes in \textit{Controversing Kierkegaard}:

\begin{quote}
It is a Christian assertion that the idea of creation is not a specifically Christian idea, and it is a Christian assertion that the radical demand is not a specifically Christian demand. (Løgstrup 1968, p. 120)
\end{quote}

Note that it is not said here that the radical demand is not a Christian demand – it is said that it is not a \textit{specifically} Christian demand. And it is pointed out that it is a \textit{Christian assertion} that the demand is universal – it is not a universal philosophical assertion that it is. His precondition for saying lies within Christian faith, which tells the Christian that the earthly life with its political and moral order are set free from specifically Christian regulations, which therefore means that we must not use Christianity as an ethical or political doctrine on how to act in the moral and the political realm. Therefore Løgstrup claims in several places that, \textit{based on the correct understanding of what Christian faith is}, one cannot not give specifically Christian arguments, neither politically nor ethically.\textsuperscript{2} Therefore Løgstrup’s contribution [123] to Wingren’s anthology on ethics and Christian faith is an attempt to provide a universal ethics, and according to him such an ethics is the only one that is possible on Christian terms. The question, however, is what we should understand by ‘Løgstrup’s ethics’?

\textbf{2. Løgstrup’s ontological ethics}

As we saw, Wingren defines ethics as the discipline that examines and analyses the relationship between, on the one hand, faith or understanding of life, and on the other hand our actions. It is important to take note of this characterisation of ethics, because this approach puts the emphasis on ethics as a descriptive discipline. The descriptive element in ethics is here the

\footnotesize{\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{1} All unattributed references in round brackets are to the Klim edition of \textit{Ethical Concepts and Problems} in which this afterword appears. [Translator’s note: Numbers in square brackets are to the pages of Rabjerg’s afterword in the Klim edition. A translation of Løgstrup’s text by Kristian-Alberto Lykke Cobos and Kees van Kooten Niekerk is forthcoming with Oxford University Press.]
\textsuperscript{2} Examples include Løgstrup 1956 chapter V (pp. 125-132) and Løgstrup 1950 chapter 7 (especially pp. 107-110).
\end{quote}}
relationship between an understanding of life and actions in life: How are our actions influenced when a person takes up a certain understanding of life, in this case the Christian faith? Ethics as a discipline has multiple ways to respond, depending on the perception of what the good is that one has taken up: Which ways of reasoning are to be followed, which goals must be pursued, what character traits should be developed? Ethics in this sense is the question of what we must do to realize the good – and it is seen as an implied premise that we actually are able to realize this; thus, ethics is at its core a fundamentally optimistic project – not because one might imagine that all will comply with the appropriate ethical teachings, but because it is assumed that it is possible to do so at all.

However, Løgstrup grasped the problem of why we act the way we do differently. In his early masterpiece *The Ethical Demand*, it is emphasized that the demand is amongst other things unfulfillable. The unfulfillability consists in both what might be called (1) unfulfillability as a logical necessity, and (2) an anthropologically contingent characterization of humankind’s moral being. The unfulfillability’s logical necessity is repeated by Løgstrup in [124] *Ethical Concepts and Problems* in which it is subsumed under the radicality of the demand: ‘The radicality of the demand consists in the fact that it demands to be superfluous’ (p. 18). It is impossible to satisfy the demand because what the demand demands is that the demanded love had materialized without being demanded. When the demand arises, it is too late, because what you should have done, should have been done spontaneously. The demand reveals our selfishness, that we were concerned with ourselves, where we should have been concerned with the other. Here, there is a close connection to Løgstrup’s characterization of morality: Morality and its rules spring from the fact that the other person ‘no longer has the mind in [their] power’, as Løgstrup writes (p. 33). When we are concerned with the other, we do not need moral rules to act. But when we lose this concern, then moral rules are necessary to replace it: ‘In short, moral rules are safeguards, which we resort to when the direct relationship fails’ (p. 33).

When the mind is not in someone or something else’s power, it is abandoned to itself in its own power – the self’s selfish power. This leads us to the unfulfillability’s anthropological

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3 These labels correspond to what David Bugge termed respectively unfulfillability ‘in principle’ and ‘not-in-principle’ in Bugge 2011 p. 207ff.
characterization of the human being. One of the clearest articulations of Løgstrup’s view of humanity we find in The Ethical Demand:

To show trust and to deliver ourselves up, to entertain a natural love, is goodness. In this sense goodness belongs to our human life though we ourselves are wicked. Both apply completely, so that there is no place for a reckoning in terms of more or less. Often such a reckoning does take place, for example when it is said that there is ‘at least some good’ in a human being! To which we can only reply, ‘No, there is not!’ When speaking of the notion that there is ‘at least some’ good in human beings, one means to subtract something from wickedness and then add it to goodness – on the individual’s own account! As if trust and natural love were not given to human beings, but were a human being’s own achievements and belonged to the account of the self. (Løgstrup 1956, p. 161/1997, pp. 140-1)

Clearly, this characterization of the human being as evil has its background in Løgstrup’s Lutheran-Protestant understanding of Christianity [125], where human nature is determined by sin in the form of human selfishness. But the characterization cannot be reduced to a pure presupposition of faith. Like the rest of his contemporaries, Løgstrup had rich empirical support for the wickedness of human beings through the historic events of the 20th century. However, it is characteristic of Løgstrup’s thinking that whereas existentialism interpreted these experiences as the basis for ethical relativism and existential absurdity, Løgstrup goes another way: the wickedness of human beings does not mean that existence is cruel and meaningless. The account of human beings is not the only one, of which Løgstrup is keeping track. Central to Løgstrup’s writing is that there is already from the 1930’s onwards a kind of ‘double bookkeeping’, where the second account is the account of created life. The anthropological account of human beings must be supplemented by the ontological account of human life. As Løgstrup writes: ‘But there are two accounts to keep and to hold distinct from each other: our given life’s account and our ego’s account’ (p. 23). Only through this sharp distinction, which we might call Løgstrup’s ‘two account doctrine’, is the relationship between human wickedness and the goodness of human life clearly/revealed. It is in the ontological account that we find the

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4 Cf. p. 114: ‘[…] we have experienced disasters of wars and revolutions on a scale and depth the like of which hardly any generation in human history has experienced previously […].’

5 This is akin to Løgstrup’s great theological inspiration, Martin Luther, and his famous ‘two Kingdoms’ doctrine.
concept that is so characteristic of Løgstrup’s later writings, namely the sovereign expressions of life. However, the opposite concept, the circling thoughts and emotions, remain on the anthropological account. Therefore, they are precisely not expressions of life, but expressions of the human. In Ethical Concepts and Problems, the ontological account leads Løgstrup to describe his own (and Luther’s) ethical position as ontological (p. 12). Hereby Løgstrup interposes a third basic position between the two dominant views: teleological and deontological ethics. What characterizes ontological ethics is that it arises out of ‘[...] the basic conditions under which we live, and which are not up to us to change [...]’ (p. 12).6

2.1. God-given and self-made emotions

The distinction that leads on to the contrast between the sovereign expressions of life and the circling thoughts and emotions, has a long history. We find the opposition already in the 1930s where it emerges in Løgstrup’s sermons and notebooks. Here Løgstrup becomes aware of what he described as two different kinds of emotions that ‘[...] in fact [...] do not have anything to do with each other – which are opposites in every respect’ (Løgstrup 1939, p. 118f). The first and primary group of feelings or emotions are those that ‘[...] have been given to us through our created humanity’, Løgstrup writes, and he continues:

Just as the eye with its sight, the ear with its hearing, just as our body, our understanding are given to us by God, because he happens to have created us in this particular way – in similar fashion there are also movements of the human spirit given to us by God, movements which he happens to have created and given to us. These are movements of spirit that are true in themselves: joy, sorrow, pain, love, fear, anxiety, horror, compassion. These are all movements in which we stand in a true relation to our surrounding world [...]. (Løgstrup 1939, p. 118)

Løgstrup describes these emotions as God-given, and what characterizes them is that they are openings into the outside world and fellow human beings: ‘Joy, when it really is joy, is always joy in something created, things of beauty, which we see or hear [...]’ (Løgstrup 1939, p. 119). Similarly, love is openness to one’s fellow human beings, and so are compassion and sorrow –

6 For a more detailed study of Løgstrup’s ontological ethics, including the opposition between the sovereign expressions of life and the circling thoughts and emotions, see Rabjerg 2014a + b.
[127] compassion because it reveals our fellow human beings and our community in life, while sorrow reveals the other person's significance and indispensability for us. The opening movements of the spirit reveal the outside world:

In these movements we are open to reality as it is. In these movements of spirit, life is laid bare for us. In these movements of spirit life lies naked and understood as it is in truth. (Løgstrup 1939, p. 119)

The second kind of emotions are the self-made emotions. What is characteristic here is that they shut us up inside ourselves in enclosedness and seclusion from the outside world. As the name suggests, we have fabricated these self-made emotions ourselves, Løgstrup writes, after which he cites a number of examples:

These self-made emotions are: disappointment, feeling insulted [fornærmet], over-excitement, contentment, discontentment, annoyance, self-pity. These are our own artefacts. Therefore, they do not open up our spirit towards the surrounding world and our fellow human beings — but they confine us within ourselves. […] they lure us away from life. They are lies in themselves. A human being who feels insulted [fornærmet] is a liar — just by feeling insulted. (Løgstrup 1939, p. 119)

In Ethical Concepts and Problems, Løgstrup speaks of what he calls ‘displaced trust’ (pp. 24-27). The displacement consists in the original expression of life trust, which is an opening up to the outside world, being conquered by the self whereby trust is distorted and takes on a selfish form: Instead of having an open trust in life, trust is displaced, so it becomes a trust that what we conquer will be ‘heaven on earth’ (p. 25). This idea we also find in the sermon from 1939. The example that Løgstrup takes up here, is the transformation of the God-given emotion of sorrow into self-pity. What happens in this transformation is that ‘it is no longer the lost person that our mind is taken up with [128] in longing, but it is ourselves we see’ (Løgstrup 1939, p. 120). Here sorrow is corrupted by our inturnedness, and we turn what is God-given into our own self-made feelings.

An interchange between the two accounts therefore does take place: There is something transferred from the ontological account into the anthropological one. But unlike a regular bank transfer, the two amounts do not match. On the contrary, we could say that what stands as positive numbers on the ontological account are recorded as a negative in the
anthropological account. In the transfer, what is transferred is distorted into its opposite, or put differently, any transfer is in reality a theft, a usurpation.

2.2 The sovereign expressions of life

In *Ethical Concepts and Problems* we find no further elaboration on what characterizes the sovereign expressions of life and the encircling thoughts and emotions. Instead, Løgstrup refers in a footnote to his account of them in *Controverting Kierkegaard*. However, a deeper understanding of these phenomena is crucial if we are to reach an understanding of Løgstrup’s very special kind of ethics.7

The characterization of expressions of life as sovereign means that they have the power to break through our inturnedness and thus tear us out of our self-concern and into being concerned with our fellow human being instead. This does not mean that the expression of life always succeed, because we can take hold of the expression of life and thus destroy it (as we saw with distorted trust and sorrow that turns into self-pity). But it does mean that life is created with and contains these expressions of life, and that they cannot be eradicated completely.8 [129]

Løgstrup also characterizes the expressions of life as definitive. With this he points out that the expression of life is a complete whole, which cannot be manipulated. Mercy is something determinate that cannot be changed without completely disappearing and turning into manipulation or exploitation. If the Samaritan had the slightest ulterior motive in helping the waylaid

7 David Bugge notes that it is more accurate to speak of Løgstrup’s position as a criticism of ethics, as in fact it is a rejection of our ability to live up to the ethical standard referred to. See Bugge 2012 and more comprehensively Bugge 2011.

8 In this respect, Løgstrup’s thinking undergoes some development. Where Løgstrup around the time of *Ethical Concepts and Problems* claims that sovereignty implies that we cannot prevent expressions of life registering themselves (even if we subsequently can stifle them), we find in *Ophav og omgivelse* [Source and Surrounding] the thought that trust has external conditions, including in the child’s case ‘[…] the parents’ behavior in the home and in society, in the child’s temperament and character’ (Løgstrup 1984, p. 220). A child who grows up in a home where he or she is exposed to psychological and physical violence, could be so affected by this that trust will have great difficulty in breaking through the self-enclosedness. In this way, the environment and upbringing can destroy the possibility for the expressions of life to break through in a person’s life whereby the child is robbed of for example the possibilities for love, trust and self-forgetful joy.
Jew, he would not be merciful, but cynically exploitative. The expressions are not our creation, and therefore we cannot change them or take hold of them without destroying them. According to Løgstrup, we can see from this that the expressions of life must be understood as created and gifted to us.

An important characteristic of the expressions of life is also that they are identity creating. In *Controverting Kierkegaard*, Løgstrup criticizes the view that being yourself, winning your identity, is a project that must take place in reflection and resignation. On the contrary, the human being should not worry about becoming a self, writes Løgstrup:

The human being is freed from this concern. Winning our identity and becoming a self is something the individual has to let occur behind their backs by leaving it to the sovereign expressions of life. Eternity has incarnated its demand on us in the inter-personal situation and the sovereign expressions of life that correspond to it. Eternity has incarnated itself, not first in Jesus of Nazareth, but already in creation and in the universality of the demand. (Løgstrup 1968, p. 120.)

Løgstrup argues that in the sovereign expressions of life we are simply ourselves, without further ado. But how can this be when we know that the self for Løgstrup is seen as wicked, while the expressions of life are good? The answer is that Løgstrup operates with a split self, between what we could call respectively an *original and spontaneous self* and a *reflective, inturned self*. When we are left to ourselves, we are in the power of our inturnedness. Reflection catches us up within ourselves, and in this way our circling around ourselves prevents us from being ourselves. But when the expression of life seizes us, we are opened up to the outside world and our fellow human beings, so that we, through the sovereign expression of life, escape from our self-circling self. The sovereignty of the expression of life creates the possibility of actualising the original self that is otherwise submerged beneath self-absorption and inturnedness.

A key to understanding Løgstrup’s thinking here can be found in Luther’s concept of sin, where the human being is determined as *incurvatus in se* – curved inwards on ourselves. For Luther, sin is where the self, rather than being directed outwards in an openness toward life, imprisons itself and closes in on itself, so that the self confines itself in selfishness. This marks the fall, where spontaneous outward directedness is destroyed and turns into demonic inturnedness. The original itself loses its spontaneity and drowns in reflection. Thus, the
expression of life has the power to pierce through this inturnedness so that the human being is opened up to the outside world, whereby we, if only for a brief moment, can be ourselves (in the original sense), without being trapped in our reflected and inturned self.

We have thus arrived at a fourth characteristic of the expressions of life, namely their spontaneity. This characteristic is often criticized in the Løgstrup-reception. A frequent objection is that spontaneity may indeed involve a freedom from self-centeredness, but that spontaneity can also be a bad thing. Therefore, Løgstrup cannot use spontaneity as a criterion for what is good. However, this objection fails to realize that spontaneity does not act as a criterion in Løgstrup. The distinction between what is an expression of life, and what are self-made circling thoughts and emotions, does not have its basis in whether an emotion or action is spontaneous or not. On the contrary, the basis is phenomenological and metaphysical. The metaphysical basis is the idea of the created life (ontology) and the human being’s sinful nature (anthropology). The phenomenological basis rests on whether an emotion involves an opening out onto the neighbour and life (e.g. openness of speech and compassion), or whether it is confining (e.g. falsehood and hate). Løgstrup is (mostly) well aware that spontaneity does not distinguish the sovereign expressions of life from self-made emotions, which he also points out in Ethical Concepts and Problems:

But also our destructive emotions and reactive feelings pre-empt us. As a power over ourselves and as an opinion about ourselves, we lag behind our impulses, emotions and thoughts, whether they are positive or negative. [...] We can only come to understand ourselves through critical observation of what we have already thought, felt and done. (p. 18)

Phenomenology is therefore not focused on spontaneity as such, but it concerns the question of whether a phenomenon opens us up or confines us: the expressions of life are spontaneous, they grip us before we reflect, but the same could be true of our destructive emotions. Understanding whether a spontaneous emotion or action is an expression of life or not therefore rests on the concept of sin and creation as metaphysical assumptions. Thus, spontaneity as a characteristic of expressions of life is not a psychological category.\(^9\) [132]

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\(^9\) To put it another way: what is relevant to whether an act is an expression of life is not whether it is psychologically spontaneous. If this were the case, spontaneous violence could be called an expression of life. What is relevant is whether the action is the result of an
2.3. The circling thoughts and emotions

The circling thoughts and emotions are characterized by their being opposites to the sovereign expressions of life. The sovereign expressions of life are not mine, rather they take hold of me and open up new opportunities in life that I could not produce myself. By contrast, the circling thoughts and emotions are my thoughts and emotions; the inturnedness is my inturnedness, which locks up the situation. Hatred, falsehood, envy, etc. are always my creations and thus my degradation of the life of which I am part. In Løgstrup’s words, the expression of life is a ‘possibility-maintaining possibility’ while the circling thoughts and emotions are ‘possibility-dissolving’ possibilities (p. 16).

A further elaboration of this thinking is to be found in Løgstrup’s analysis of the will in Chapter 8. It is worth noting that both the text and the line of thought here originate from the very earliest part of Løgstrup’s authorship, from his article from 1940 on ‘The Concept of the Will in Luther’s The Bondage of the Will’. As Løgstrup almost verbatim recycles this text, which is highly critical of human nature, it is an indication that Løgstrup did not see Ethical Concepts and Problems as a self-critique – despite the fact that he had introduced the concept of the sovereign expressions of life only a few years earlier, in the middle of the 1960s.

Along with Luther, Løgstrup rejected any idea of free will. The notion of free will is a reduction of the will to an abstract capacity to choose. This makes the will dis-engaged, but this is always a construct that can only find a place in an abstract and idealized space of thought. For Løgstrup the fact is that the will is always concrete as a will to do something: ‘[...] willing something is having left the position where we have a free hand’ (p. 62). The will, in the strict sense, arises when we meet resistance in our attempt to achieve what we will (in the weakened sense). Here the will may be strong or flexible – but never free. [133]

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emotional state that is an opening out towards life and our fellow human being, or whether it springs from becoming enclosed within the self. This can be established phenomenologically. If one then asks how it is we know that it is bad to be enclosed and good to be open to the world, then the answer is to be found in the metaphysical basis: the concept of sin and creation supplemented with Løgstrup’s reference to the phenomenological evidence: from trust, we know that it is good (cf. for example Løgstrup 1968, p. 23f).
What, then, is it that the will *wills*? The answer is that the will always wills evil, and it wills this with necessity:

Now, when the will wills evil with necessity, but not through coercion, this means that the will does not decide for itself what it wills. In their will, human beings are not their own masters [...]. (p. 69)

The human being is not free to choose between good and evil, as the will is already bound to human nature, which is selfish and submerged under sin. The human will is bound to evil:

This means, therefore, that human beings, when they are without the spirit of God, do not do evil against their will, and under force, as though they were taken by the scruff of the neck and dragged into it, like a thief or a footpad being dragged off against their will to punishment; but they do of their own accord and with a ready will. And by themselves human beings cannot relinquish, tame or change this desire or will, but they continue to will and lust after it. (pp. 68-9)

When the human being is without the spirit of God’s, we are abandoned to ourselves and hence to our will to evil. But what does it mean to have the spirit of God? It means being in *faith*; but for Løgstrup, thinking along Lutheran lines, there is no room for any pious notions of faith as a personal achievement, which can lead to a growth in faith thus creating a gap between the select proper faithful and the lost unfaithful or insufficiently devout. The only thing that can liberate human beings from themselves are fellow human beings and this happens in the sovereign expressions of life. When I am grasped by something else, it binds my will to it, if only for a moment, and in this moment I am free from myself.

In a journal from the same time as the original article on Luther's concept of the will, Løgstrup writes: [134]

We say that human beings are unfree in the way they conduct themselves. This is to say that a human being is imprisoned within themselves.—Human beings are their own prisoner; this is the hopelessness of existence, because it means that we are incapable of freeing ourselves—any attempt to do so will only imprison us even further in ourselves. Cf. Luther’s struggle with monasticism. Because we ourselves can do nothing but imprison ourselves more and more in bondage and reflection and self-absorption, in short: in pride. —We can only be freed by our fellow human beings. We can only free our fellow human beings – and through him and her be freed from our imprisonment in ourselves... / [...] Freedom is given to us by our fellow
human beings—by serving him and her, or by getting involved with each. (Notebook XXV.3.1, p. 34)\textsuperscript{10}

When the human being is not taken up with other things, they are thus imprisoned in their own circling thoughts and emotions, whereby the will is bound to these and thus to the person themselves. Only when the inturnedness is broken through by an occurrence from the outside - when a fellow human being breaks through and makes an impression – are we grasped, and the will can bind itself to something that is not ourselves.\textsuperscript{11}

How do Luther and Løgstrup know that the human will is always in advance bound to evil, one may ask? Many will find Løgstrup’s answer surprising, because there are no philosophical justifications for it – rather it is only a matter of faith [trosmæssig]. Luther can assert such a characteristic of human beings – not as a universal truth, which requires rational, philosophical justification –, but on the contrary:

Luther can answer for everyone, without stating a universal truth that the will is bound by nature, because he knows from the word of God that human beings are sinners and can only be saved by grace. (p. 70)

This anthropology rests therefore on a religious truth – though it has an empirical basis, which Løgstrup for his part highlights with reference to the catastrophes of his time (p. 114) (cf. above).

By distinguishing between the two accounts, the ontological and anthropological, Løgstrup can talk about ethics without it turning into a humanly realizable discipline. He deals with the ethically good and evil in his thinking, but the result is not a teaching about how humans must act in order to realize the good. For human beings are, strictly speaking, incapable of realizing the good; the good is realized only \textit{in spite of} us. Existence is created with a sovereignty within it, which has the power to break through human wickedness, and without which human beings could not exist: ‘If the sovereign possibilities of life did not bring themselves about by themselves, in spite of our will, we could not exist; not even in our malevolence’ (p. 17).

\textsuperscript{10} The text is by all appearances from 1938-39, which in turn is when Løgstrup was working on the article on Luther's concept of the will: cf. Løgstrup 1940.

\textsuperscript{11} In the later writings, Løgstrup makes clear that it is not only human beings who can break through our inturnedness: nature and art can accomplish this too.
Thus, we see that Løgstrup’s ontological ethics is grounded within the framework of human pessimism, where with the sovereign expressions of life as a basis he finds room for optimism side by side with human wickedness – without subtracting something from evil wickedness and then adding it to goodness or vice versa by confusing the two accounts. As Løgstrup highlights in *Ethical Concepts and Problems*, Nietzsche’s error is the same as the one made by the Existentialists, namely that they merge the two accounts into one, and that they thus leave it to the account of human wickedness to cover the whole of existence. However, this error does not prevent Løgstrup from praising Nietzsche for his ability to understand and disclose the true nature of human beings. Nietzsche is right in unmasking how human hypocrisy is ‘all-encompassing’ (p. 23), but it is just not the whole truth about human life. Nietzsche fails to see that what is decisive in life is due to ‘[…] expressions of life that we do not owe to ourselves’ (p. 23). However, what is crucial to understand here is that this ontological objection to Nietzsche offered by Løgstrup does not mean he has now become naïve and does not change his pessimism about human nature, for the goodness of the expressions of life does nothing to alter the all-encompassing evil of human beings:

> We are guilty of everything which is an object for disclosure; it is our own degradation of our life. By contrast, none of the expressions of life, which we have brought into view, are owed to ourselves, they are given to us with our existence. (p. 23)

The two spheres are located on different ontological levels: our circling thoughts and emotions are produced by us, while the expressions of life are created, which is why they are not ours, but rather anonymous. We could put it this way: that the expressions of life are part of what is created and given, which is why they are ontologically *primary*, while our thoughts and emotions only exist through us, which is why they are ontologically *secondary*. Løgstrup’s ontological project can thus be seen as a correction of Nietzsche’s unmasking: Nietzsche did not realize that an ontological truth arises out of his unmasking of humanity’s falsehoods: ‘The disclosure does not serve a truth of an ontological nature’ (p. 24) for Nietzsche, but that is precisely what it does for Løgstrup.

3. The connection between the expressions of life and the ethical demand

What *Ethical Concepts and Problems* above all contributes to Løgstrup’s works is that here he embarks on making the relationship between the ethical demand and the sovereign
expressions of life clear. Thus, the book bridges the gap between the early masterpiece *The Ethical Demand* and *Controverting Kierkegaard* which appeared 12 years later.

What is demanded is the expression of life which was absent or was displaced through our inturnedness or through our will to power. The demand demands to be superfluous, because the demand precisely does not arise in the meeting between people upheld by the sovereign expression of life. Only when the expression of life fails, does the demand enter, and it does so with a reference to our concern for the other, which was trumped by [137] our attention to/concern for ourselves. Thus, we cannot strictly speaking be obedient to the demand, as only without the demand’s intervention can we do what the demand requires. This is the somewhat cryptic idea that lies behind the formulation: ‘Human beings must be more than obedient to be obedient, they must be trustful, sincere, compassionate’ (p. 18). In his analysis of duty, Løgstrup therefore consigns it to the role of a substitute motive for substitute actions (p. 53). Duty must step in when it is too late, namely when the sovereign expression of life is absent: ‘It has to leap into the breach as a new and much needed motive, if the action is even to take place’ (p. 53). Løgstrup’s critique of Kant and duty ethics, which shows up in several places in *Ethical Concepts and Problems*, targets the way that Kant overlooks this fundamental, ontological level, and that his duty ethics therefore strictly speaking replaces true ethics with a substitute ethics.

4. The cultural and the pre-cultural

The sovereign expressions of life and the ethical demand are independent of any human cultural construction. Here, Løgstrup is a metaphysical realist: The sovereign expressions of life and the ethical demand are conditions of our existence, just as it is. They are thus realities in all cultures at all times. But this does not mean that Løgstrup is a critic of all kinds of ethical relativism. On the contrary, constructivism has a very fundamental significance in Løgstrup’s ethics, but only when taken in the context of the fact that the demand and the expressions of life are not constructs.

In Chapter 4, Løgstrup raises the question: *Are the Ten Commandments still valid?* He answers the question in part with the help of Luther. In all morality, there is something absolute and something relative. The absolute is the difference between good and evil, and this
Løgstrup formulates as follows: ‘To be concerned for the other is good; trumping the other through concern for ourselves is evil’ (p. 35f). This absolute difference between good and evil Luther characterizes as the *natural law*. According to Paul, it is written in every human heart (Romans 2:15), which means that it is known to all people and applies in all cultures at all times.

By contrast, that which is relative in all morality, is changeable. That is, it varies from time to time and from culture to culture. The reason is that morality’s relative content is grounded in culturally constructed structures and the structures of our societies are culturally shaped. This changing and culturally bound content in morality Luther calls *the positive law*, and it is only valid by virtue of its time and its place.

Now, if we transfer this conception onto Løgstrup’s own conception, it becomes clear that the ethical demand and the expressions of life belong to the absolute, which is unchanging and valid for all times. But the demand and the expressions of life cannot stand alone as the actions that follow from them need to be shaped culturally: how to take care of the other person in any concrete situation requires knowledge of the particular culture. As Løgstrup writes in *The Ethical Demand*:

> It is integral to the demand that the individual themselves, with whatever they might have left in terms of insight, imagination, and understanding, must work out for themselves what the demand involves. (Løgstrup 1956, p. 32/1997, p. 22)

Insight, imagination and understanding are rooted both in what is universally human and in what is cultural. We know about other people’s welfare, because we ourselves are human beings: we know of a person’s emotional life and basic needs – at least in some general sense. But our insight into what is good and bad for other people, we also acquire to a large degree from our knowledge about the society and the culture of which we are part. Our lives are shaped by society in the way that culture dictates a great deal of the opportunities that are available to us, whether this involves family life, work, hobbies, friendship etc. In Chapter IV of *The Ethical Demand*, Løgstrup provides a thorough analysis of the variability of cultural and social norms through time, and in *Ethical Concepts and Problems* he supplements this with a short reflection on the Ten Commandment’s significance today: The Ten Commandments do not remain valid as their meaning is dependent on the law of Moses, to which they are connected. Therefore, in today’s monogamous society, for example, we understand something different.
by the commandment not to commit adultery, than the Jews did in their time (under polygamy) (see. p. 37). ‘[...] for this reason we should let Moses be the Sachsenspiegel of the Jews, and not let ourselves be troubled by Moses’, writes Løgstrup in a rendition of Luther (p. 38).\textsuperscript{12}

The relation between the absolute and relative element in moral is due to the fact that the positive law is – at its best – an attempt to formulate and concretize the natural law. In successful societies, the legal laws and cultural norms are designed in a way so that they seek to ensure the concern for and to prevent exploitation of fellow human beings. But precisely because the content of the natural law’s is so general, it cannot be concretised definitively. This problem is related to the silence of the demand, which according to \textit{The Ethical Demand} is broken in only two respects, namely through the prohibition of taking over the other person’s responsibility and of taking away the other person’s understanding of life as a gift. The absolute content of the pre-cultural part of morality contains an insight, which we try to capture culturally in our moral norms and rules, as well as in the legal laws, but ultimately these are insights that cannot be transformed independently of culture, and therefore the pre-cultural and absolute element in morality is bound up with a changing and historically relative cultural content. The natural law is concretised in the positive law, but the concretisation will always be incomplete and time-bound. [140]

5. Political thoughts of a fundamental nature

In politics we find another way in which the pre-cultural can be transformed culturally. Alongside ontological ethics, this is a central theme of \textit{Ethical Concepts and Problems}. For Løgstrup, ethics and politics are connected insofar as ethics must serve as a basis for political power.

Critics have often objected to the idea of linking ethics and politics together as an expression of empty-headed idealism or enthusiasm [sværmeri]. Many political ideas have therefore been brushed aside with the observation that they are beautiful as ideals, but they do not work in practice. The reason why they do not work, is that human beings do not act in accordance with the ethical ideals of loving our neighbour, from each according to their ability, to each according to their needs, etc., but instead human beings act selfishly. Therefore, politics

\textsuperscript{12} Sachsenspiegel was, as Løgstrup’s reports, the medieval record of customary law that was valid at the time of Luther.
should be *realpolitikk* and concentrate on making rules that govern society in an appropriate manner. Policy must, according to the sceptics, therefore be rational and instrumentally justified while paying no attention to ethical ideals.

Løgstrup’s answer is that it is possible to interconnect ethics and politics, without thereby succumbing to ethical enthusiasm or idealism. The love commandment should act as the ethical foundation of social organization. However, it should not behave like an ethical ideal, but as a regulative idea. This is done through transposing the love commandment for use in society. The transformation consists in ‘[...] arranging society in such a manner that the powerful are coerced to use their power as if they had received it in order to serve others’ (p. 43). A social structure where the love commandment must be realized by the citizens, for the functioning of society, is utopian and a fantasy. Instead, the command to love the neighbour must be transformed into an idea that underlies the regulation of the behaviour of the citizens. This means that society must be ordered so that the citizen acts *as if* he or she loves the neighbour – but, as Løgstrup writes, while knowing all too well ‘[...] that the strong gnash their teeth when their income is curtailed in favour of increasing the income of the weak’ (p. 46). [141]

In this example, compassion is transposed to an idea that can be used politically. At the same time, it involves avoiding the illusion that the politician actually educates citizens morally through their legislation. Behind these words lies a veiled criticism of the French Renaissance thinker Jean Bodin, who Løgstrup dealt with in his journals (by all accounts in the early 1940s), where he criticizes Bodin’s idea that the state should educate the citizen morally. Løgstrup holds that that view is both naïve and impermissible: naïve, because it cannot be done, since human beings are and always will be selfish; and impermissible because such a goal is an interference with the individual’s private thoughts and emotions, and the Lutheran-minded Løgstrup (as opposed to Calvin) considers this to be of no business to other people: ‘the soul is of no concern to the worldly authorities’ (p. 85). [13]

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[13] The fact that Løgstrup in the same context criticizes Luther’s distinction between the spiritual and the corporeal as overly simplistic does not change anything in this respect, any more than does the analysis of political change from Luther’s time now (pp. 92-95). Løgstrup’s reading of Bodin can be found in his posthumous papers. This criticism referred to here is from notebook XXV.2.3., p. 126.
This marks a crucial difference between the good Samaritan and the figure who Løgstrup here makes use of, namely the political Samaritan (p. 43f): The good Samaritan [in Danish he is actually called the compassionate Samaritan] realizes compassion in his works, but the political Samaritan realizes no compassion nor any other ethical value. His action is translated into political action, as he makes compassion into an idea. Ethics is rewritten as politics. But we should not be under any illusions about this: ‘If we make political use of the love of the neighbour as an idea, then no one loves the neighbour [...]’ (p. 46), and if ‘[...] when we seek to make it appear as though we want to realise the idea out of love of the neighbour, we end up with massive hypocrisy’ (p. 47).

With the transposition of ethics into politics, society is organized so that it encourages people to take care of his fellow human being. This [142] does not lead to ethically superior citizens, as this caring does not happen through love of the neighbour, but it creates a society where the poor and needy are best safeguarded against destruction and exploitation.

6. Political thoughts on specific topics

The analysis of the relationship between ethics and politics can be said to be political thoughts of a fundamental nature: what should we understand by politics, and what connection does it have to ethics? In Chapter 10, however, Løgstrup deals with more concrete and specific political problems, and perhaps surprisingly (since times have changed since 1971, which was marked by the Vietnam war and the youth uprising of 1968), many of these political considerations are again very relevant. In times of unemployment and recession, Løgstrup’s thoughts on how free time is not an unconditional good and that it creates problems in people’s lives if it is not outweighed by work time, are extremely relevant (p. 91). Here again we see that in Løgstrup’s eyes, the human being is drawn into self-confinement and destruction of life when we are left too much to ourselves.

We also find an argument for why state support for the arts neither needs to lead to government control nor to qualitative deterioration of art. Political control by the government is avoided by letting experts be responsible for the quality review, whereas the notion that state-supported art leads to a loss of quality is dismissed as an inanity which has arisen only through the mentality of competition being erroneously applied to an area where it does not belong:
'What is true for outwardly directed activities is not true for a work that demands immersion' (p. 91), Løgstrup states firmly. People familiar with the developments in the university and in research life today will recognize that Løgstrup’s thoughts here find a renewed relevance.

In his view of art, Løgstrup shows an almost prophetic clarity when he problematizes the possible vulgarization (leveling down) of artistic quality that can be the result of making cultural goods more accessible to the public. ‘Maintaining the level of quality has become a problem’ (p. 92). Where culture before was reserved for a limited educated class, it is now common property. This change is not in itself a bad thing – Løgstrup is not advocating the view that appreciating art should be a matter only for an elite of snobs – but it implies that culture inevitably changes when it is no longer created only for a specific educated class. ‘The demand for quality is reduced, in order to bring everyone in’ (p. 92) Løgstrup writes, and one cannot help wondering if he would regard ‘reality’ entertainment, the worship of certain currents of youth culture, and the rise of easily consumed, humorous television entertainment as proof of his warnings? Here, a contemporary reader must make up their mind whether Løgstrup is speaking as a culturally conservative dinosaur, or, by contrast, whether he has in fact highlighted merely one main problem pertaining to the structure of democratic and classless society, namely that the most easily digested message (whether it is political, cultural or something else) wins greatest resonance and where it therefore quickly becomes the lowest common denominator which sets the agenda.

One last, current issue should be highlighted. Løgstrup identifies a latent weakness in democracy, namely that it ‘[...] builds on the judgment of both the voters and the elected. If this fails democracy turns into demagogy’ (p. 109). How does one make sure that good judgment prevails, so that democracy does not turn into demagogy in the form of political spin? It requires that ‘[...] a certain standard of debate is constantly upheld’ (p. 109). If we now dismiss any talk of setting up a standard for judgment and thus for the education of the citizens with the objection that it is ‘conservative’, ‘reactionary’ or bourgeois, then ‘[...] we have given free reign to demagoguery’ (p. 109). The problem lies in the fact that setting the right standard cannot be ensured democratically. Here Løgstrup points to the necessity of the establishment of so-called ‘expert committees’ – i.e. committees of specialists who ensure that debate and practice are
at a high level. In Løgstrup’s view, such groups of what critics have called ‘the tyranny of experts’ [144] and 'arbiters of taste', are the only counterweight to ensure that the level is kept up, so that the power of judgment is developed through which democracy can be kept free from lapsing into demagoguery. Only the preservation of judgement is capable of safeguarding democracy against the seduction of voters and ‘a policy of empty words’ – otherwise, we get the politicians we deserve, through our naïvety. Løgstrup argues that a compromise between experts and politicians is necessary.

Resistance to 'the tyranny of experts' and a political ambition to reduce this can of course be justified in concrete cases, but seen as an overall goal that aims for the reduction of expert commissions is according to Løgstrup in effect a step on the way to demagoguery on the way to demagoguery. A political agenda to clear out the number of professional commissions is therefore a direct contradiction of Løgstrup’s view, because as he writes in Ethical Concepts and Problems ‘[…] the more we democratize, the more we need authorities that have no other mission but to demand quality and set standards, and to do this in in all areas’ (p. 110). For Løgstrup, these authoritative bodies are experts within their field. The abolition of expert committees (or just experts) thus just paves the way for democracy’s decline into demagogy, and the abolition of expert committees is linked to a development where populism and what we now call spin have better and better conditions in which to thrive.

7. Is the line of thought of Ethical Concepts and Problems new in Løgstrup’s works?

At first glance Ethical Concepts and Problems seems to be a text that marks a new period in Løgstrup’s thinking. It is based on the introduction of the sovereign expressions of life – a concept Løgstrup uses for the first time in 1966 – and, compared to the rest of his published writings, the specific political thoughts we find here are more extensive.

Upon closer inspection, however, the situation is rather the opposite. Many of the political thoughts we already find in Løgstrup’s [145] notebooks from the early 1940s. For example, here we come across, often in verbatim form, thoughts concerning the right of resistance, and likewise a comprehensive reading of Luther’s political thinking dates from the same period, which is clearly drawn on in Ethical Concepts and Problems.
The analysis of the concept of the will in Luther also dates from the same time and we can find it – just more developed – in an article from 1940. In the same way we find the entire conception of the sovereign expressions of life and their opposition to the human being’s own circling thoughts and emotions when we read Løgstrup’s sermons and notes from the last half of the 1930s; the terminology is different, and he is not yet setting things out systematically, but still the connection is obvious. Certainly, the criticism of Kant's formalism and his duty ethics is anything but new, since it is an echo of Max Scheler’s critique of Kant’s ethics – Max Scheler who Løgstrup dealt with extensively in his first known scientific work: a prize essay from 1932. Løgstrup formulates the criticism of Kant explicitly in an article from 1947.

Thus, if we adopt a ‘text-archaeological’ approach, we discover that in Ethical Concepts and Problems Løgstrup here, to a highly unusual extent, takes up early thoughts and texts and gathers them together. At the same time, he sets a course forward for his subsequent works, which is evident in the book’s very last sentence:

To be sure, expertise is indispensable, and increasingly so, but expertise alone cannot do it; time and again – and this applies to all vital questions – there is a remainder that can only be dealt with and clarified through a form of thinking that differs from that of the expert. (p. 119)

With this, his thoughts concerning connection between the pre-cultural order and the cultural, under which we find both of the book’s main themes (ontological ethics and the relationship between ethics and politics), are framed within the project that characterizes Løgstrup’s late authorship: to elucidate the cognitive potential that lies hidden within the phenomena we know [146] of, but often overlook, in our daily life. This is, as we have seen, no new thought for Løgstrup: in the 1930s, he is highly preoccupied with the relationship between life as created and life's sensuality, and the dissertation from 1942 revolves around the thought of creation and the possibility for having knowledge of God, in the shape of a hidden layer within all knowledge; but in Ethical Concepts and Problems these themes are brought together. Thus, Ethical Concepts and Problems is an important preparatory work not only to Norm and

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14 In his notebooks from the late 1930s, Løgstrup writes in several places on the relationship between sensory cognition, the work of art (especially paintings), and the understanding of created life. Among other things, he planned a series of feature articles under the overall title of ‘The World is Sensuous’. Cf. Notebook XXV.3.2., P. 13.
Spontaneity, which comes out one year later, in 1972, but also to the whole of Løgstrup’s four-volume metaphysics, while, at the same time, the book points backwards and gathers together important thoughts from his previous writings.

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