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How is love of the neighbour possible? A Løgstrupian Response to a Lutheran Critique of Levinas – and Vice Versa

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Abstract: This paper considers how both Levinas and Løgstrup seek to explain how love of the neighbour is possible. It focuses on a criticism of Levinas made by Merold Westphal, which follows Kierkegaard in arguing on Lutheran grounds that such love first requires a relation to God as a "middle term," but that Levinas cannot appeal to this relation to account for neighbour love, as for him the God relation itself arises through love of the neighbour. In response, the paper explores how Løgstrup, while working in a Lutheran tradition, like Levinas also sees neighbour love as arising without any prior God relation, showing how the accounts that each offer of how this is possible serve to complement each other.

How is religion related to ethics? Is it possible to make sense of ethics in a self-standing way, or does it require religious ideas if we are to understand it properly? In this paper, I want to explore the connection between Levinas and Løgstrup in the context of this question. I will do so against the background of an objection made by Merold Westphal which uses Lutheran considerations found in Kierkegaard to criticise Levinas; I will explore whether the Lutheran philosopher Løgstrup might be in a position to answer this criticism on Levinas's behalf. I will also consider a Lutheran critique that might be made of Løgstrup in his turn, and consider whether conversely Levinas might be in a position to answer it on Løgstrup's behalf.

That Løgstrup can be used to engage with debates concerning Levinas and vice versa may be surprising given the lack of contact or collaboration between them; but this can be made less surprising given certain fundamental similarities in their outlook and fundamental concerns.[1] For both of them, at the heart of ethics is an encounter with another vulnerable individual who is in our power, and to whom we need to respond with love[2] – both thus make love of one's neighbour central to ethics.

But how is love of the neighbour possible? As the kind of beings we are, how can we come to love the neighbour? It is here that the Lutheran tradition provides a distinctive answer in which God plays a central role, through our relation to God as both a judge and a source of forgiveness, which dismantles both the pride and the anxiety which prevents us from loving the neighbour.[3] The Lutheran challenge to Levinas is thus that while Levinas does give God a role of his own in his ethics, it does not conform closely enough to the Lutheran model, and thus misfires. The question then arises whether Løgstrup, as a Lutheran himself, is more closely attuned to these sorts of issues than Levinas, and so can offer Levinas a way out, or whether conversely the Lutheran objections to Levinas apply to Løgstrup as well.

I will begin by outlining the Lutheran position which provides the background for the critique of Levinas, a background which includes Kierkegaard (§1), and I will then outline that critique (§2). I will next consider how Løgstrup might provide a way of responding to this critique (§3), and also consider whether resources we find in Levinas might make that response more compelling, in enabling Løgstrup to answer difficulties of his own (§4).

1. Love of the neighbour and love of God

In Matthew 22:34-40, Jesus is challenged by a Pharisee to tell him "which is the greatest commandment in the Law," to which Jesus replies:

> "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it:[4] "Love your neighbour as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

In responding as he does, Jesus clearly connects the two commandments of love of God and love of the neighbour: but how are they to be related more precisely? Is the former a necessary condition for the latter, or vice versa? Or are they two sides of the same coin?

One way of thinking about this question is to ask: what prevents us loving our neighbour, and how might love of God make it possible, by removing the obstacles that stand in our way?

Luther gives a distinctive answer to this question, in terms of his conception of sin as "incurvatus in se,"[5] namely a turning in on ourselves, and so away from others. Reflecting on his own experience as a monk, he saw that one central source for this self-concern was

anxiety concerning his relation to God, and particularly divine judgement for his sinfulness in relation to the law which God commands. He came to believe that the only way to escape this sense of judgement, and thus the anxiety it creates, is to instead see God as merciful and forgiving, in a way which then releases the self from its imprisonment, and enables it to turn from anxious self-inspection to an outward facing loving regard for others. It is thus by loving God, rather than fearing him, that love of the neighbour is made possible. Put slightly simplistically in biographical terms, it was therefore this re-orientation in his relation to God that made it possible for Luther to leave the seclusion of the monastery, and join the world, as the centripetal force of his anxiety, drawing him ever closer into himself, was taken away through his loving relation to a gracious and forgiving God, which then enabled him to love his neighbour.[6] To use a favourite metaphor of Luther's based on Matthew 7:18, our own good works do not make us good, for a bad tree can only bring forth bad fruit; we can only become a good tree by the grace of God, from which good works can then come as the fruit.[7]

It might be wondered, however, whether there is a way of short-cutting this story, as it were: for, if on Luther's account, it is our anxiety in relation to God's command and judgement that is the obstacle to loving the neighbour, then rather than thinking of him as a forgiving judge, might it not be simpler to not think of him as a judge at all? Why wouldn't this be a more efficient way to overcome the anxiety, and so enable us to love the neighbour in a more straightforward way?

To see how this question might be answered, we can now turn to Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard's relation to Luther is a complex matter to which we cannot do justice here,[8] but he arguably develops certain key Lutheran ideas which suggest how this challenge can be met.[9]

Firstly, it can be argued that if we drop the conception of God as a judge at all (albeit a loving and gracious one), we will lose any sense that we are in the wrong, thus generating a kind of pride and self-righteousness which will also get in the way of loving the neighbour. For, to love the neighbour it is necessary that we are blind to their faults, as in seeing these faults we will not love them; but we will not be blind to them if we do not feel judged ourselves for our own faults. However, no fellow human being can stand judgement over us given they are as sinful as we are. If we do not feel God judging *us*, it can therefore be argued, we will then stand in prideful judgement *over others*, in a way that will make love

for them impossible. Kierkegaard argues that this is why Luther is insistent that 'law' and the sense of sin that this generates through the 'theology of the cross' in striking down our pride is just as fundamental to his picture as the forgiving and justifying grace that then releases us from the anxiety which follows: the former is as important as the latter, if obstacles to love of the neighbour are to be removed.[10] Kierkegaard thus insists on the role of God as a commanding judge as essential to the Lutheran position, in contrast to the Lutheranism of his time, which he thinks moves too easily to God's grace without taking seriously the prior "convicting" use of the law, through which God commands us to act in a way that reveals to us how far we then fall short of what is required. Contemporary "Christendom," he argued, just took from Luther the message that God will forgive people whatever they do, with the result that faith is no longer expressed in works at all, including works of love, which appear to have no value once God sets them aside in his judgement of us. But for Luther himself, Kierkegaard insists,[11] works are not set aside in this way, as his relief in finding God's forgiveness precisely centres on taking seriously God's right to judge us on our failure to act – but contemporary Christendom just helps itself to this forgiveness, and forgets Luther's sense of the requirements to which this forgiveness is dialectically related.[12] Therefore, as Amy Laura Hall has emphasised in particular,[13] without this 'convicting' use of the law, for Kierkegaard we will then be unable to adopt the kind of humility which Kierkegaard thinks is essential to neighbour love. For, along with Luther, Kierkegaard sees pride as a crucial obstacle to such love, which is struck down through the sense of our own inadequacy which this use of the law makes vivid to us. Thus the realisation that without God, "you are able to do nothing at all" (SKS 9: 356/KW 16: 362) which comes with this use of the law and the grace it entails is also crucial for neighbour love, on Kierkegaard's account.

Secondly, it can also be argued that if we do not retain the role of God as a forgiving judge, and just escape our anxiety by dropping any such judge in the first place, we will fail to learn properly what neighbour love really is. For, in this Lutheran tradition, neighbour love is distinctive precisely because it is unmerited and gratuitous, not based on or made fitting by any particular excellences of the beloved (as in erotic or romantic love) or social relations to them (as in family love). But this is precisely the kind of love we learn about when we learn about God's gratuitous love for us, given our sinfulness: if we were not sinful, but beyond criticism, then his love for us would be merited instead, and would make

neighbour love look curious, maybe even absurd. Once again, therefore, on the Lutheran account, there are good reasons to keep both parts of the picture – command *and* failure, judgement *and* forgiveness – if we are to understand how neighbour love might be possible for creatures like us, prone as we are to both anxiety and pride. Kierkegaard thus sees in God's forgiveness – and in his sacrifice of his son as part of that process of forgiveness, who himself in love takes on and dies for our sins such that we may be forgiven – a crucial expression of what love truly is, namely an unmerited concern for the other. While the point should not be exaggerated, this is one important respect in which Kierkegaard stands in the agapistic tradition identified by Anders Nygren (Nygren 1953). For example, in defending the view that "Love for the neighbour has, namely, the perfections of eternity," Kierkegaard writes: "Have you never thought about God's love? If it were love's excellence to love the extraordinary, then God would be, if I dare so, in an awkward position, since for him the extraordinary does not exist at all… Erotic love [*Elskov*] is defined by the object; friendship is defined by the object; only love for the neighbour is defined by love [*Kjerlighed*]… Is this not the highest perfection?" (SKS 9: 72-3/KW 16: 65-66).

Thirdly, it can be argued that this Lutheran picture provides an important way of understanding that love of the neighbour is made possible by God's love for us; it is thus something given to us for which we should feel gratitude rather than pride, as this love for the neighbour is not really an achievement of our own.[14] Rather, if it is made possible at all, it is through God's relation to us, and the way in which the structures outlined above free us from our inturnedness. Unless we view love for others in this way, in the context of our indebtedness to God, we will view that love with a kind of pridefulness which will set us above the neighbour and hence undermine it. Kierkegaard thus argues that because in this Lutheran framework, it is God's love for us that makes it possible for us to love others, we must see love for others not as a way of paying off a debt to him or to them, but as making us more and more indebted. Once one realises that in this Christian (and Lutheran) context that one's capacity for love itself is given to you by God, then the more one loves the other, the more one owes God, making the debt infinite: "What beautiful, what sacred modesty love brings along with it! Not only does it not dare to persuade itself to become conscious of its deed as something meritorious, but it is even ashamed to become conscious of its deed as a part-payment on the debt. It becomes conscious of its giving as an infinite debt that

cannot possibly be paid, since to give is continually to run into debt" (SKS 9: 177/KW 16: 177).

Putting these points together, we can thus see why Kierkegaard claims that on this view, God operates as a kind of "middle-term" between individuals who stand in a genuine love relationship:[15] for it is only when the one who loves also stands in the right relation to God, that then love for the neighbour becomes possible, where this God relation is essentially Lutheran in structure. As Hall nicely puts it: 'The lover who would abide must acknowledge that true love involves God as well as the two individuals (WL, 304). God is the source, hope, guardian, and confidant without which the originally and perpetually fallen individual could not begin to remain committed to the fragile, flawed, difficult to forgive and easy to forget others with whom we are called to love' (Hall, 2002, 35).

Having sketched what I hope is a recognizably Lutheran position as it is articulated in Kierkegaard, I will now show how in Merold Westphal's work, it is taken as the basis of a Lutheran critique of Levinas.

2. A Lutheran critique of Levinas

Now that we have seen how Kierkegaard's position can be understood in a broadly Lutheran way, we can now consider how Westphal uses Kierkegaard to critique Levinas. He summarizes his view of the difference between them as follows: "while Kierkegaard insists that it is God who is always the middle term between me and my neighbour," on the other hand "Levinas insists that the neighbour is always the middle term between me and God" – adding that "[t]his is their fundamental disagreement; perhaps, in the final analysis, their only one" (Westphal 2008, 5).[16]

In taking this view of Levinas, Westphal clearly has in mind passages such as the following well-known discussion from *Totality and Infinity* (which Westphal partially cites on Westphal 2008, 50):

> Hence metaphysics is enacted where the social relation is enacted – in our relationship with men. There can be no 'knowledge' of God separated from the relationship with men. The Other is the very locus of metaphysical truth, and is indispensable for my relation with God. He does not play the role of mediator. The Other is not the incarnation of God, but precisely by his face, in which he is disincarnate, is the manifestation of the height in which God is revealed.[17] It is our

> relations with men…that give to theological concepts the sole signification they admit of… Everything that cannot be reduced to an interhuman relation represents not the superior form but the forever primitive form of religion. (Levinas 1969, 78-9)

As Westphal notes, this strongly suggests that while for Levinas there is an intimate relation between the religious and the ethical, the latter is nonetheless prior, and it is in this relation between self and other that God comes to be revealed – which then of course means that he does not have to be present at the outset, to make the relation between self and other possible in the first place.

This is where Westphal thinks Kierkegaard would disagree with Levinas, for while both hold that "[t]he God relation is not separable from the neighbour relation," for Kierkegaard as opposed to Levinas "it is distinct and it is first" (Westphal 2008, 55). Westphal gives three reasons for Kierkegaard's position here, which relate closely to what we have said above: (1) "ontologically speaking, God is the source and the origin of love;" (2) through my awareness of God's love for me, I can be motivated to love the neighbour out of gratitude; and given my awareness of God's love for others, I can be motivated to love them too; (3) because God loves me, I can also come to find a proper self-love which is not egoism. Thus, Westphal argues, for Kierkegaard the God relation comes first because it is only then that the individual can see how to stand in the right relation to the neighbour.

It might be said in response, however, that Levinas has no need to adopt this Kierkegaardian approach, as Levinas himself offers an account of how love of the neighbour comes about in his presentation of the face-to-face encounter between individuals that forms the centrepiece of *Totality and Infinity*, an encounter between individuals through which the divine is then revealed. Here, the other issues a command to love and judges me accordingly, and thus assumes an authoritative "height" which pierces through my egoism and self-concern and turns me towards the other, in whom the "height" of the divine is also to be seen.

However, Westphal implicitly considers a response of this sort, and expresses himself still dissatisfied, again on Kierkegaardian and thus ultimately Lutheran grounds. For, he argues, in adopting this approach, Levinas in effect gives us "a 'theology' of law without grace," whereas "Kierkegaard, like Luther, Augustine, and Paul before him, links law and grace, commandment and enablement" so that once again "[o]ntologically speaking,

neighbour love is grounded in the mysterious God relation without which it would be impossible" (Westphal 2008, 56; cf. also p. 71).

I take it that the difficulty Westphal is raising for Levinas is the following: While the encounter with another person who has authority over me might lead me to focus on that authority, and thus interrupt my egoistic enjoyment of the world, this cannot explain how I can come to *love* the other, which is (in effect) the content of the command. That is, it might lead me to fear them, respect them, or simply follow them – but it cannot explain how I could come to love them. For this, the essential Lutheran claim which Westphal finds in Kierkegaard is that we must have "grace" as well as "law", for the reasons given above.[18]

However, perhaps Levinas could reply to this critique by arguing that some notion of grace is still possible within his framework – which is not grace given by God, but gracious forgiveness given by the other person who commands. If grace as well as law are needed, could Levinas not offer what is required in this way?

This may not be so clear, however. For to offer grace as forgiveness in this manner, the other person would have to be in a position to forgive; but in so far as the other human being is as fallen and sinful as me, it is not clear they are in a position to blame, and thus in a position to forgive. How can one offer gracious forgiveness to another, who one cannot blame; and how can one blame, if one is no better than the person one purports to forgive?[19] This sinfulness may not take away my ability to command, in the sense of making it the case that some action is now required; but it does seem to take away my ability to blame and hence forgive. From a Lutheran perspective, in which we are all equally sinners, it is not clear how Levinas can bring grace into his picture.

Westphal's argument can therefore be summarized as follows: Levinas claims that the neighbour relation comes first, in which God is found; but this approach cannot explain what makes the neighbour relation possible in the first place, for which the God relation is required. Westphal thus feels able to agree with Kierkegaard and against Levinas, that God is the middle term between a person and their neighbour, rather than the other way around.

3. A Løgstrupian response to the Lutheran critique of Levinas

In this section, I now want to turn to Løgstrup, to see how his position might be used to respond to the Lutheran critique of Levinas outlined above. As a practising Lutheran, and as

a theologian familiar with the Lutheran tradition, Løgstrup's work can be interestingly related to Lutheran themes, while he also departs from Luther in certain important respects. As regards the issue that concerns us here, I will now suggest that Løgstrup fundamentally shares Luther's conception of sin as 'incurvatus in se' and thus as an obstacle to our ethical relation to others; however, while Luther and Kierkegaard put the God relation as prior to the neighbour relation, as it is only through our relation to God that this obstacle can be overcome, Løgstrup is closer to Levinas in agreeing that the neighbour relation can be achieved without the God relation coming first, as the two are established together, so that he can perhaps provide grounds on which Levinas's position can be further elaborated and defended against the objection articulated in §3.

If (as we shall see) Løgstrup departs from Luther in his understanding of how our sinfulness is to be overcome, he nonetheless stays close to Luther in his conviction that we *are* sinful, and in his understanding of the nature of that sinfulness. Løgstrup makes clear that he accepts a Lutheran assessment of the extent of our sin when he writes as follows in Chapter 7 of *The Ethical Demand*:

> [I]t 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.
>
> But there is nothing to subtract from human wickedness. The self brings everything under the power of its selfishness. The human will is bound in this. (Løgstrup 2010, 161/1997, 140-1)

Following the Lutheran tradition, Løgstrup is arguing that left to itself the human will is wicked, as it is unable on its own to free itself from wickedness, and is thus unable to claim any credit for the good. Moreover, the form that this wickedness takes is a self-absorption of a Lutheran kind, as the person focuses in on themselves and their interests, at the expense of their neighbour.[20] To overcome this wickedness, the self needs to be transformed from outside, thereby making it capable of a love which points it away from itself towards others and the world, as "the purity of love is its outward directedness" (Løgstrup 2010, 150/1997, 131).

However, despite this deep and fundamental convergence between Løgstrup and Luther, I now want to suggest that there is a significant divergence when it comes to their accounts of how it is this transformation can take place, and thus how this "outward directedness" is to be achieved. For Luther, as we have seen, the crucial vehicle for this transformation is grace, and thus a gift from God to an undeserving sinner; but for Løgstrup, it is a gift from life, which is good while we are wicked. This is reflected in the title of the relevant sub-section from Chapter 7: "The wickedness of human beings and the goodness of human life;" it can also be seen clearly if we put the passage cited above in context:

> To show trust and to deliver ourselves up, to entertain a natural love, is goodness. In this sense, goodness is integral 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.
>
> But there is nothing to subtract from human wickedness. The self brings everything under the power of its selfishness. The human will is bound in this. The demand to love, that as a demand is addressed to our will, is unfulfillable.
>
> Nor can anything be added to the goodness of human life. It is there, and is there in completeness, but beforehand—always beforehand, among other things in the realities of trust and love. (Løgstrup 2010, 161/1997, 140-1)

For Løgstrup, therefore, what makes it possible for our wickedness to be overcome is the goodness that attaches to life, which makes phenomena such as trust and love possible despite the wickedness that afflicts the human will, and the centripetal pull of the self. Løgstrup can thus be characterised as an "anthropological pessimist" but an "ontological optimist,"[21] in holding that we are wicked, but life is good, and so can overcome our wickedness, but not in a way for which we can claim any credit.

Moreover, this sense of distance is reinforced if we now ask: how does life overcome our wickedness? What is the mechanism by which we are enabled to escape from our sinful

natures, according to Løgstrup? His key claim is that this is achieved through the encounter with *other people*,[22] who allow us to escape from ourselves and our inturnedness, and thus from the centripetal power of the self. This basic picture is something Løgstrup seems to have arrived at very early in his thinking, as it is found already in a passage from one of his notebooks probably written in 1938-39:

> 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 other. (Løgstrup 1938-39?, 34)

This, then, is what the "goodness of human life" can be said to consist in: namely, it is so structured that despite our self-concern, the cage in which we find ourselves can be broken open through the ethical encounter with another person, who from the outside frees us from our imprisonment within ourselves.

How can this be achieved? Løgstrup seems to suggest the following: the person who is called upon to serve the other individual, by having the latter's vulnerability made evident to them, is equally freed from their own imprisonment, as this encounter draws them outward in having to deal with the other person and their needs. As Løgstrup's reference to Luther in the passage above makes clear, in some important respects this is a Lutheran picture, as Løgstrup accepts the view that it is impossible to free *ourselves* from this imprisonment. However, where Løgstrup seems to differ from Luther, is in treating our encounter with other human being as sufficient in itself to free us from our inturnedness, without appealing to God's grace and hence the God relation to make this possible – instead, Løgstrup appears to treat it as adequate on its own. Given this account of Løgstrup's position, it can therefore be argued that in his conception of 'life', and more particularly in his conception of our encounter with the other individual, we find a secular

analogue of grace: namely, something that serves the same function of drawing us away from ourselves in a way that makes love of the neighbour possible, but where this is not explained by appeal to our prior relation to God.

Now, by this point, it should thus be clear how Løgstrup's position parallels Levinas's in certain important respects, and why I argued earlier than it makes sense to put them together. However, before we consider how far Løgstrup might thus be used to offer a defence of Levinas's approach, we must first note an important *difference* between them, as this difference may make it easier to defend Løgstrup's position than Levinas's.

The difference concerns how, more precisely, each characterises the encounter with the other person. For Levinas, as we have seen, one important feature of that encounter appears to be the command issued from one person to another; but Løgstrup is explicit in rejecting any such command account, for reasons that cannot be gone into fully here.[23] Nor can we consider here the full complexities of Levinas's position.[24] This difference is nonetheless relevant, because as we saw above, Westphal can accuse Levinas of having "a 'theology' of law without grace" precisely because he sees in Levinas a role for the *command* to love which makes it into a law, but without the corresponding aspect of grace which accompanies the law on the Lutheran picture; but Westphal holds that grace is required to make this law work, as in its "convicting" sense it opens us up in our despair to the possibility of grace, which in turn opens us up to the neighbour. Clearly, however, if Løgstrup's position does not incorporate this Levinasian aspect of command and hence of law as command in the first place, then Westphal's criticism of Levinas for having law without grace cannot apply to Løgstrup, as he avoids incorporating the former in his ethics, and so cannot be accused on these grounds of needing the latter. For Løgstrup, we can experience our relation to others as a law or obligation: but only as a demand and not a command, and (more importantly here) only when love has failed, so that this cannot be the vehicle for enabling such love in the first place.[25]

However, this response might seem to open Løgstrup up to a yet deeper difficulty, which is more serious than the one raised by Westphal against Levinas: namely, that for the reasons given above in §2, without the experience that our engagement with the law provides, love of the neighbour will be impossible for us to achieve, as on the Lutheran account, it is only through this engagement and the grace which follows that we can make intelligible how we can come to love the neighbour. If this is right, then there is a dilemma

for the Levinasian: either continue to retain their conception of law, but then face Westphal's challenge that this requires a corresponding conception of grace that they have not provided; or follow Løgstrup in rejecting a role for law in bringing about love in the encounter with the other person, but then lose the explanation which this role is meant to have on the Lutheran picture, in explaining how love of the neighbour is possible.

The question is, therefore, whether Løgstrup can find a way of resolving this dilemma for the Levinasian by showing how the second horn is not so threatening as it appears; but to do this, he needs to show how we can be made capable of love without needing to go via the God relation and the kind of law and grace which the Lutheran incorporates into this prior theological framework. I will now argue that this is indeed something Løgstrup sets out to do, by again finding secular analogues for aspects of the theological framework which is employed by the Lutheran, and which are said to make love of the neighbour possible.

We saw above that there are three main elements to that framework. First, love of the neighbour requires humility, for otherwise we will find fault in the neighbour that sets us apart from them, and justifies us in rejecting their claims on us. On the theological account, this humility is brought about through the convicting use of the law, which strikes down our pride. Second, love of the neighbour requires the experience of a forgiving love that is gratuitous and unearned, not based on any particular excellence or merit on the part of the beloved. On the theological account, this is an experience we have in our awareness of the grace of God in relation to his law. Thirdly, in seeing that this forgiving love is gratuitous, we can feel a gratitude that motivates us to love others. On the theological account, this gratitude can only arise in relation to God, as he is the source of the gift of forgiveness which is the object of this gratitude, and as it is this gift that makes love of the neighbour possible, it is a debt that cannot be repaid by this love, as in exercising this love we are incurring more indebtedness. I now want to suggest that (doubtless given his Lutheran background and thus his familiarity with this framework), Løgstrup's work can be understood in the light of these challenges, but as providing secular analogues of these points in order to answer them, in a way that avoids the need to put the God relation prior to the neighbour relation, as a grounding for it in the way that the Lutheran position suggests. The question essentially is, therefore, whether Løgstrup's appeal to our relation to "life" might do the work that the Lutheran attributes to our relation to God.

At the heart of Løgstrup's conception here, I will argue, is his claim that life is a "gift." What precisely Løgstrup means by this is a complex issue, which cannot be analysed in detail here;[26] but I only wish to bring out how it might be used by Løgstrup to respond to the challenges above.

First, Løgstrup fully recognises the Lutheran concern that pride can get in the way of our love for the neighbour, as we saw in the passage from his notebooks mentioned above, where the "bondage and reflection and self-absorption" that imprisons us is characterised "in short" as "pride." However, the mechanism through which our pride is taken away, on Løgstrup's account, is not through the sense that (as Kierkegaard puts it) "without God, we are nothing," as this would again make the God relation prior. Rather, we lose our sense of pride by seeing that insofar as we are capable of doing what is required of us, and coming to love the neighbour, this is not due to our own efforts but is in fact given to us by the other themselves, who awakens such love in us. As a result, we cannot make any counter-demand for managing to care for the neighbour, but nor can we claim that we possess as something we have bestowed on ourselves anything that makes us superior to the other, and so able to set ourselves above them.[27] Likewise, we cannot set ourselves up in judgement over our neighbour, as left to our own devices without the intervention of the "goodness of life," we would be as sinful as them.[28]

Second, Løgstrup holds that just as we must see our capacities to love as a gift from life, likewise we must see the love we receive from others as an unearned gift, so we do not have to view that love as coming through the God relation to make this possible. This is the case, Løgstrup argues, even in the case of "natural" love, where we find ourselves being romantically loved by another person, and so feel ourselves as the recipient of this love, as a great good in our lives. To think that such love is my "due," something which I am entitled to demand of the other because of my special qualities or "excellences" which make me intrinsically more entitled to be loved by them over anyone else, would be to destroy this love. Thus, in finding myself in love with another person (in the romantic sense), and in finding this love reciprocated if it is, I must treat this love as gratuitous good both in the sense that my love for the other is given to me, and that they return it. Natural love is hence a gift in that sense,[29] and so from the experience of this love, I can learn about the gratuitous nature of neighbour love as well – I do not need the God relation to acquire this understanding.[30]

Thirdly, by treating love as a gift we are given, Løgstrup also thinks of it as a debt we cannot repay by loving the other person, as if we can love them, this is only as a result of the gift, so he can agree with Kierkegaard that in this case, the more one pays back the more one owes, as it were; Løgstrup thus calls the gift "ongoing" (*vedvarende*) (Løgstrup 1997, 123). However, he is careful not to identify the giver of this gift as God. Løgstrup might seem to get closer to the theological approach when he asks rhetorically whether, as "[w]e have not called ourselves into life," then "this is to say that it is a gift, so that our life is to be lived in gratitude for it?" (Løgstrup 210, 135/1997, 117). However, Løgstrup does not argue that this sense of gratitude is to be used to motivate us to care for others, as it is on the theological account outlined above; rather, he responds to his question by saying that part of what the ethical demand requires is that we do not take away this sense of gratitude from other people, for then they would no longer come to see value in life, and treat it as a good (Løgstrup 2010, 135/1997, 117-8). And from Løgstrup's perspective, it is easy to see why he might be wary of using gratitude to God as a motivation for caring for others, as this would seem to make this love too mediated: for Løgstrup, the reason to care for the other person is their needs and vulnerability, not gratitude one may feel to God for his loving forgiveness. Løgstrup thus does not treat gratitude to God as the motivation for love of the neighbour, and so has reasons for rejecting this part of the theological picture.

We have seen, therefore, how Løgstrup can be read as offering resources that can be used against Westphal's Lutheran challenge to Levinas; for on Løgstrup's account, there are secular analogues for the ways in which a Lutheran like Kierkegaard connects love of the neighbour to the love of God, which the Levinasian could use to explain how the former can come prior to the latter.

At the same time, like Levinas, while Løgstrup does not ground the neighbour relation on the God relation, he nonetheless wants to allow that our relation to the neighbour can be a place where it is appropriate to see ourselves as also standing in a relation to God. Following the German theologian Friedrich Gogarten, Løgstrup argues that the right way to see Jesus's proclamation of the two love commandments and their relation with which we began, is that "the individual's relationship to God is decided nowhere else than through the individual's relationship to the other human being" (Løgstrup 1997, 4). Moreover, while he offers a secularized version of the Lutheran picture, for Løgstrup this remains compatible with a theological conception, at the level of creation if not grace – or

to use a formulation from Løgstrup's later work, it may well "suggest a religious interpretation" (Løgstrup 1982, 117/2007, 139). For example, it is certainly possible to think that God makes "life" such that it has this capacity to transform us, and to think that any forgiveness for our failure to be so transformed comes from God (which is the focus of Chapter 12 of *The Ethical Demand*). Indeed, in adopting this view of life, Løgstrup took himself to be following Luther's own conception of creation.[31] Løgstrup can thus agree with Levinas that theologically speaking, "[t]he Other…is indispensable for my relation with God," while also agreeing with Levinas and against Luther, Kierkegaard and Westphal, that this relation to God is not what makes our ethical relation to the other person possible, but rather arises in the light of it.

4. A Levinasian response to a Lutheran critique of Løgstrup

We have thus considered how Løgstrup might provide resources with which Levinas could respond to a Lutheran challenge to the latter's position. However, it could also be argued from a Lutheran perspective that Løgstrup's position has problems of its own. In the face of this challenge, in this section I will consider whether now it is Levinas that can be used to come to the aid of Løgstrup.

The difficulty I have in mind is the following, which may be put as a problem of explanation: As we have seen, all the sides in this debate agree that human beings can easily come to be "inturned" on themselves, in a way that prevents us from being able to love the neighbour, and to make this love possible this inturnedness needs to be overcome. However, on the theological account, this happens in two steps, as it were: first the God relation of law and grace dispels the pride and anxiety that generates this inturnedness, which once this happens leaves us open to the neighbour who we can now attend to in love. On the theological account, there is thus an explanation of how we are moved from inturnedness to neighbour love, via our relation to God. On Løgstrup's account, however, there is no such middle step, as the neighbour *themselves* is said to break through our inturnedness directly, without going via the God relation. But this might be said to raise a difficulty for Løgstrup, because it could seem mysterious how this can happen, without the mediating step. If we are really so sinful and inturned as Løgstrup takes us to be, what could enable the other person to break through to us? Won't we precisely be impervious to this encounter with the needy other, in a way that looks problematic without the further step

which the Lutheran account introduces? In several places in his later work, Løgstrup insists that life can and does manifest itself in "sovereign expressions" which precisely serve to take away our self-concern and open us up to the other in this way;[32] but the Lutheran might think that this is merely to insist *that* love of the neighbour happens despite our "inturnedness," but without satisfactorily explaining *how*. It may well be that once we see the other person as a needy individual, we will no longer dwell on our own concerns; but how can it be that as we dwell on our own concerns, we can come to see the other as a needy individual in the first place?

Now, I have considered elsewhere possible responses that Løgstrup might give to this challenge, and I will not rehearse them again here.[33] But now I want to consider whether Levinas might give Løgstrup a somewhat different way to respond to a problem which, if I am right in the argument above concerning their shared approach, might then seem to apply to Levinas as much as Løgstrup.

One answer a Levinasian might give, could be basically methodological: namely, it could be argued that both Levinas and Løgstrup are doing phenomenology not psychology, and so as such they are just attending to *what* happens when we are moved by the other, and how this takes us out of ourselves, but qua phenomenologists they do not have to be concerned with *how* this happens, and what mechanism is involved in making it psychologically possible. Rather, it could be argued, both provide us with a rich phenomenologically account of *what it is like* to be transformed by our encounter with others in this way, and they do not need to explain how it is that this transformation takes place, and what makes it possible.

However, while this is a response that is perhaps open to the Levinasian, it could be rejected as rather unsatisfying, and also as rather downplaying the resources that Levinas does offer us to understand how this process might work.[34] For, such resources seem to be offered by Levinas in his discussion of desire and transcendence in the opening sections of *Totality and Infinity*.[35] Of course, this discussion is notoriously opaque, and I cannot hope to deal with it fully here. But a key aspect of Levinas's treatment of how the self is led from the egoism of enjoyment to the ethical relation is precisely to suggest that it is the sheer *otherness* of the other then means the self is moved beyond itself: in seeing that the other individual qua individual cannot be grasped within my conceptions of them, or incorporated into my scheme of thinking, or reduced to my expectations or assumptions about them, I

am drawn away from myself by what is *not* myself, in a deeper sense of "not" than that my car and desk are not me either.[36] This could thus provide a form of explanation which Løgstrup too might adopt, and which could even be said to fit some of his own remarks, though he makes less of this "otherness" than Levinas does.[37]

It might be wondered, however, that even if this is correct, and explains why I cannot just incorporate the other within my world, so that in seeing the other *as* other my self-absorption is taken away, why this in itself should lead to any sort of loving or caring response to the other? What call for love or care does otherness as such have on us, simply qua otherness?

One reply which could be attributed to Levinas, is that it corresponds to a kind of metaphysical desire for transcendence, which is why we are then drawn to the other. If this is Levinas's view, however, it may not be satisfying to Løgstrup, as it would then seem to make our concern for the other into a form of egoism itself, as we are drawn to the other to satisfy this desire, rather than out of loving concern for them in themselves. Levinas may seem to resist this implication by the way in which he distinguishes between the desire he has in mind, and a kind of lack that we try to fill in order to achieve satisfaction and complete ourselves, such as the desire for food.[38] However, while this means that the desire Levinas is speaking about is a desire that seeks to be deepened rather than sated and which draws the self towards what is other, it is not clear that this is sufficient to escape the concern about egoism, though this is a complex issue which cannot be explored fully here.

But Levinas could perhaps be understood in a different way: namely, that the experience of otherness gives us a first step in what is a process with two aspects, where the first is a breaking down of our inturnedness through the experience of otherness as sketched above, which then makes possible a second stage as an awareness of the care required by the other once this inturnedness is broken down, an awareness which then provides us with our motivation to act in a properly other-centered way, and not merely to satisfy the desire we feel for transcendence. Thus, like the theological account, this Levinasian explanation involves two elements, but the first is very different from the one offered by that account, as it just involves the experience of otherness in an individual, rather than the experience of God's grace. In this way, Levinas might purport to fill the explanatory deficit in Løgstrup's account, and thus return the favour that we have said that

Løgstrup can offer to him, thereby enabling both to address the Lutheran concerns that have been the focus of this paper.[39]

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Abbreviations

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KW *Kierkegaard's Writings*, edited by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978-2000.

LW *Luther's Works*, American edition, 55 vols, St Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress Press, 1958-86.

SKS *Søren Kierkegaards Skrifter*, vols 1-28 and K1-28, edited by Niels Jørgen Cappelørn et al. Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1997-2013.

WA *Martin Luthers Werke: Kritiksche Gesamtausgabe*, 65 vols in 127, Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883-1993.

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[1] For further discussion of the relation between the two thinkers, see Stern 2019b, Chapter 9.

[2] While Løgstrup speaks widely of his ethics in terms of love, at various places Levinas expresses some concern about using the term, as is in his view it is often reduced to the idea of "concupiscence;" but as he makes clear, it is still appropriate to think of his work as centred round the issue of neighbour love: "The other is unique, unique to such an extent that in speaking of the responsibility for the unique, I use the word 'love.'. That which I call responsibility is a love, because love is the only attitude where there is encounter with the unique. What is a loved one? He is unique in the world. In *Totality and Infinity* I do not often use the word 'love' because by love is often understood what Pascal called love with concupiscence" (Levinas 1986, 173).

[3] Of course, that Lutheran tradition itself has roots going back beyond Luther, particularly to Augustine – but Luther will provide the focus for the discussion here.

[4] The Greek here is "ὁμοία" (homoia), which is arguably stronger than the "like" which is used in most translations, being closer to "of the same kind as."

[5] Cf. Luther *Lectures on Romans*, WA 56: 304, 356, 357, 363/LW 25: 291, 345, 346, 351-2.

[6] This is a reference to Luther's so-called "Tower experience" of 1519, where the shift in his thinking which this brought about is retrospectively characterised most clearly in the Preface to the *Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Works* (1545): see WA 54: 179-87/LW 34: 323-38. One way in which my sketch above may be said to be simplistic is that, as Brad Gregory has noted, Luther's life in his Augustinian monastery was not one of seclusion from the world (see Gregory 2017: 16-17); but Luther's later rejection of the monastic ideal still suggests he saw it in these terms.

[7] See, for example, Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian*, WA 7: 61/LW 31: 361. Cf. also WA 7: 66/LW 31: 367. "Behold, from faith thus flow love and joy in the Lord, and from love a joyful, willing, and free mind that serves one's neighbour willingly and takes no account of gratitude or ingratitude, or praise or blame, of gain or loss."

[8] For further discussion of this issue, see: Hampson 2001, Chapter 7; Hall 2002, Chapter 1; Yoon-Jung Kim and Rasmussen 2009; Barrett 2015.

[9] Cf. Kierkegaard SKS 24: 124/JP 2: 1489 (1852), p. 177:

> The situation is like that of a child who has been made so anxious he cannot do anything—the wiser teacher will perhaps say: It is anxiety which makes him incapable, take that away and you will see that he can do it, all right, at least a good share of it.

It is the same with Christianity and grace. Take away this anxiety for the salvation of his soul—this is what makes him incapable. This is removed by grace—you are saved by grace, by grace through faith. Take this anxiety away, and you will see that he can do it, all right.

Christianity's intention is: now as never before under the law we shall see what a man can achieve.

[10] Cf. Kierkegaard, SKS 24: 164/JP 1: 994 (1851), p. 101: "You must go through this 'You shall;' this is the condition for *unconditional* respect. And behind this "You shall" lies grace, and there everything smiles, there all is gentleness."

[11] Cf. Kierkegaard, *For Self-Examination*, SKS 13: 34/KW 21: 16: "At that time there appeared a man from God and with faith, Martin Luther; with faith (for truly this required faith) or by faith he established faith in its rights. His life expressed works – let us never forget that – but he said: A person is saved by faith alone… But what happened? There is always a secular mentality that no doubt wants to have the name of being Christian but wants to become Christian as cheaply as possible… [I]t said, 'Excellent! This is something for us. Luther says, It depends on faith alone. He himself does not say that his life expresses works, and since he is now dead it is no longer an actuality. So we take his words, his doctrine – and we are free from all works – long live Luther!...'."

[12] Cf. Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, SKS 9: 397/KW 16: 385: "Ah, the first thing you learn when you relate yourself to God in everything is that you have no merit whatever. Just test this out and say to eternity, "I have deserved"; then eternity answers, 'You have deserved…'. If you want to have merit and want to have deserved something, punishment is the only thing…"

[13] See Hall 2002, particularly Chapter 1.

[14] As M. Jamie Ferreira notes (Ferreira 2001, 18), Kierkegaard characterises Christianity as "grace, and then a striving born of gratitude" (SKS 24: 164/JP 1: 993 (1851), p. 434), where she goes on to comment: "Kierkegaard is assuming here the importance of a distinction between what I call *deserving* something from someone else in the sense of having a right or entitlement to it and what I call being *gratefully receptive* to I; that is, we may not have deserved or merited some good thing given to us, but we can do something to prepare ourselves for an appropriate reception of the gift, to embrace it gratefully, or to appropriately express our gratitude through the exercise of love".

[15] See in particular Chapter IIIA of Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, on "Love Is the Fulfilling of the Law'" See for example SKS 9: 116/KW 16: 113: "Therefore it is not the wife who is to teach the husband how he is to love her, or the husband the wife, or the friend the friend, or the contemporaries the contemporary, but it is God who is to teach each individual how he is to love if his love is to stand in even the slightest relation to the Law the apostle refers to when he says 'Love is the fulfilling of the Law'." For further discussion of this chapter and the issues it raises, see Ferreira 2001, 71–5.

[16] Cf. also Westphal 2008, 37: "For Levinas, recognizing the infinity of the neighbour is an essential prior condition to recognizing the infinity of God, while for Kierkegaard it seems to be the other way around (WL [KW 16:] 26-27). Whereas Kierkegaard would repeat Jesus' summary of the Torah, that the first commandment is to love God and the second is to love one's neighbour as oneself (Mark 12:28-34), Levinas reverses the order. For him ethics is first, then religion, and the neighbour always stands between me and God, while for Kierkegaard religion is first, then ethics, and God always stands between me and my neighbour." Cf. also ibid, p. 70. As we will see below, Løgstrup also considers the relation between the two commandments, and is closer to the Levinasian ordering.

[17] Cf. Levinas 1986, 169: "There are these two strange things in the face: its extreme frailty – the fact of being without means and, on the other hand, there is authority. It is as if God spoke through the face."

[18] Cf. Westphal 2008, 71-2:

> There is a psychological and motivational issue here. Levinas and Kierkegaard agree in emphasizing that neighbour love runs counter to our natural self-love. But if it is indeed a heteronomous call to self-denial and self-sacrifice, if it overrides our spontaneous preferences, if it is contrary to our *conatus essendi*, how, if at all, is it possible, even imperfectly?
>
> Our psychological knowledge, both formal and informal, gives a clear answer. Only by being loved do we develop the capacity to love, and Kierkegaard's God is fully personal enough for his answer to be "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). He gives us a moral transcription of God as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. God is *mysterium* by remaining hidden even within the piety of hidden inwardness, *tremendum* by commanding the subordination of self-love to neighbour love, and *fascinans* by being the fountain of forgiving love that gives us both our own

sense of worth and our capacity to love others. Levinas's God is the *mysterium tremendum*; but where is the *fascinans* in the Good that gives no goods but only compels to goodness? When the command to love is unaccompanied by the love than enables obedience to the command, is this not a recipe for despair and even cynicism?

[19] For Løgstrup's way of putting this Lutheran point, see Løgstrup 2010, 232/1997, 207: "It is a fundamental principle, which we all accept, that it is a dirty business to demand something of another human being, to admonish, or (uninvited) to urge them to do something, which we who do the admonishing or urging have not done and cannot do ourselves." Note that translations from *The Ethical Demand* have been modified in line with the new translation in Løgstrup forthcoming.

[20] "We lock ourselves up, because we think of ourselves. We lock ourselves up within ourselves. As if inside a house with the curtains closed. And in this house of ours with curtains closed and doors locked, we find—as we do in all houses—different rooms for different uses. And we walk through these rooms, from the room of pride to the comfortable sitting room of convenience—onwards through the chamber of resentment to the living room of self-satisfaction. Back and forth through many other rooms. For in this house there can be a great number of rooms, and they are all small and narrow. And all the walls are made up of mirrors in which we continuously see ourselves, in one room as proud, in the next as comfortable, in the next again as offended, and then as pleased with ourselves . . . But it is here we all reside. For we do not escape from our own house" (Løgstrup 1995, 77–8).

[21] Cf. Rabjerg 2014; 2016, 19-25; 2017.

[22] In later work, Løgstrup included encounters with nature and with art as having the same capability, though the encounter with other people remains central.

[23] For further discussion, see Stern 2019b, 212-3.

[24] Cf. Stern 2019b, Chapter 9, and also Stern 2019a and Lewis and Stern forthcoming. For a response, which questions the role of command in Levinas's ethics, see Morgan's paper in this issue of the journal: Morgan 2020.

[25] Cf. Løgstrup 2010, 164/1997, 143: "Where natural love was once present, but has subsequently vanished, the demand cannot re-create it. And where there never was love, the demand cannot create it. As mentioned previously, indeed what is demanded is nothing

less than that love is created not by the demand, but by the mere fact that the life of another human being is given into my hands, a life which is not part of my existence by virtue of passion, kinship, or friendship. We do not have such love. And not having it, we cannot create it. The one-sided demand glances off us." Here Løgstrup is speaking about natural love rather than neighbour love, which in *The Ethical Demand* he claims is just a hypostasized ideal (see Løgstrup 2010, 158/1997, 138). However, he was later to agree that this is going too far, and that such love is possible (as in the case of the Good Samaritan) – but still in a way that cannot be created through the demand to love. For further details on Løgstrup's change of mind, see Stern 2019b, 90-91.

[26] For further discussion see Stern 2019b, 72-84.

[27] Cf. Løgstrup 2010, 135/1997, 117: "But from the question whether the demand is one-sided or reciprocal, we are thereby led back to another question. We ourselves are not the basis for our lives. The only thing that has been entrusted to us is to take it on by taking responsibility for what we are and what we have. We have not called ourselves into life. Is this due to the fact that our life has been given to us? Is this to say that it is a gift, so that our life is to be lived in gratitude for it? That is the question."

[28] Cf. Løgstrup 2010, 232/1997, 207: "It is a fundamental principle, which we all accept, that it is a dirty business to demand something of another human being, to admonish, or (uninvited) to urge them to do something, which we who do the admonishing or urging have not done and cannot do ourselves."

[29] Cf. Løgstrup 2010, 145/1997, 127: "The understanding of life…that the life of the individual is an on-going gift – is never more evident than in natural love. Indeed it is when in natural love another human being is integral to one's life, that the understanding that life is given is nearest at hand."

[30] Cf. Løgstrup 2010, 162/1997, 142, where Løgstrup writes: "natural love teaches us something about love of the neighbour. It is no coincidence that the word is the same, that in both cases we speak about 'love'."

[31] For a helpful discussion of Løgstrup against the background of Lutheran creation theology, see Gregersen 2017.

[32] Cf. Løgstrup 2013, 118/2007, 69, where Løgstrup speaks of "our inability to prevent the sovereign expressions of life from forcing their way through and realizing themselves," and calls this "the grace of existence [tilværelsens nåde]" – where the "grace of the gospel"

instead becomes a matter of forgiveness when "we persist in living closed in on ourselves [indesluttede] and doing as we please in our freedom."

[33] See Rabjerg and Stern 2018.

[34] Another resource the Levinasian might use, is to appeal to the commanding authority of the other person, where that authority might be said to break through our self-concern – but for reasons given above in §3, this could be said to be problematic from Løgstrup's point of view, as he is suspicious about any role for command, so I will not consider this option further here where we are looking for common ground between the two thinkers.

[35] Levinas 1969, 33-5; cf. also pp. 304-5.

[36] Cf. Murdoch 1997, 215: "Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real."

[37] Cf. Løgstrup 2010, 22-23/1997, 13-14, where Løgstrup speaks of our encounter with another person breaking down any prior picture we may have of them: "their personal presence annihilates it…the presence of the other leaves no space for my picture of them; their presence and my picture of them are incompatible. Each excludes the other, and it is the picture that must give way".

[38] Cf. Levinas 1969, 34: "Desire is desire for the absolutely other. Besides the hunger one satisfies, the thirst one quenches, and the senses one allays, metaphysics desires the other beyond satisfactions, where no gesture by the body to diminish the aspiration is possible…"

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