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Vulnerability, Trust, and Overdemandingness: Reflections from Løgstrup

Robert Stern

My aim in this paper is to consider whether, by thinking of our ethical relation to one another in terms of vulnerability, we can better resolve the problem of overdemandingness – namely, that certain moral views and theories seem to require more of us than is reasonably acceptable.[1] Of course, this may seem a rather perverse project, as for many people the very point of focusing on our vulnerability to each other is to *increase* our awareness of our moral commitments, not to downplay them. Nonetheless, I will suggest, there is a way in which focusing on vulnerability, rather than merely needs or wants, can help address the issue of overdemandingness, largely because of the relational nature of vulnerability, and how this connects to our power over others.

In arguing this case, I will draw on the work of the Danish philosopher and theologian K. E. Løgstrup. This may seem odd, as "vulnerability" (or *sårbarhed*) is actually not a term he uses.[2] However, many similar terms implying vulnerability are used frequently in his writings, such as "interdependence" (*interdependens*),[3] "entanglement" (*forvikling*) with others, and "delivering (oneself) up" (*udlevere*/*selfudlevere*) to others. As we shall see, for Løgstrup all these relationships involve a fundamental kind of vulnerability to other people, giving rise to a demand or call (*fordring*) on those others to care for the vulnerable.[4] While Løgstrup certainly emphasises that we may find that demand unwelcome, and may try to shirk it given how much it can require of us, he also resists the suggestion that it could become limitless and hence overdemanding. I wish to explore how he tries to strike a balance here, by first showing how this might work in relation to a central form of vulnerability which he emphasises, namely trust (§1). I will then consider an objection, namely that trust is a rather special case of vulnerability, which is less open to the problem of overdemandingness only because it has special features which do not apply to vulnerability more generally (§2). I will then respond to this objection by considering if lessons learnt from the case of trust could still nonetheless be extended more widely to other forms of vulnerability (§3). Doing so, I will suggest, might show how thinking in terms of vulnerability as Løgstrup conceives it can help us with the problem of overdemandingness.[5]

1. Løgstrup on trust and vulnerability

Løgstrup's main text *The Ethical Demand* begins in its introduction by arguing that Jesus's proclamation to love the neighbour must be made sense of in "purely human terms" by understanding it in terms of something in our human existence which explains the importance of this proclamation to us in a way that we can understand. Løgstrup argues that the key feature of our existence which it highlights is our dependence on one another; indeed, Løgstrup suggests (following the German theologian Friedrich Gogarten), Jesus takes this be so significant that in explaining the relation between the commandment to love God and to love the neighbour, Jesus even claims that this is the place at which our relationship to God is decided. This tells us something significant about the nature of the relationship between ourselves, and how much we depend on one another:

> If one's relationship to the other human being is the place where one's relationship to God is decided, it must at the same time be the place where the existence of the other human being is so totally at stake, that one's failure is irreparable. So, it cannot be the case that what I withhold from the other person in one situation, they would be able to recoup either from me or from a third, fourth, or fifth person. If we were so independent of one another, that the words and works of one person were a mere luxury in the existence of the other, so that one's failure could always be made good later, God's relationship to the individual would consist in a looser relationship to the individual's relationship to the other human being than is the case in Jesus's proclamation. (Løgstrup 2020b, 6)

Løgstrup thus begins his investigation by making our vulnerability and interdependence central to the ethical phenomena he wishes to explore – though as noted above, he does not quite put it in those terms.

In order to say more about this vulnerability and interdependence, he then in the first main chapter focuses on trust – making him one of the first modern ethicists to do so.[6] He begins by emphasising the centrality of trust to human life, claiming that if we were compelled by circumstances always to begin with a distrust of others, "We simply could not live; our life would wither away and become stunted, if we were in advance to meet each other in distrust, or assume that the other person is stealing and lying, dissembling and leading us on" (Løgstrup 2020b, 10) – where it is surely reasonable to think that Løgstrup is

reflecting here on his own experience of German-occupied Denmark during the war,[7] and the toll that the resulting distrust between people had on ordinary human relationships. Løgstrup then gives a vivid account of how the "self-surrender" involved in trust generates a fundamental vulnerability in the person who trusts:

> But to show trust is to deliver oneself up. Therefore we react fiercely when our trust is "abused", as we say, even though not much may have been at stake. In real terms, the abuse of trust consists in trust being turned against the person who has shown it. (Løgstrup 2020b, 11)

As this makes clear, Løgstrup's conception of trust is more than the merely "predictive" conception, which involves a reliance on something based on evidence of its reliability – such as my trust that my well serviced car will start this morning. Rather, his conception is one of "affective trust" (as it is often called),[8] where the trusting person expects the person they trust to be *aware* of their vulnerability to the trusted person, and for this to play a role in the motivations of the trusted person to respond to them in a manner that is called for by this vulnerability – rather than just use that vulnerability as a way to exploit the trusting person and hence abuse the trust that has been shown to them. Thus, to take a simple example, if I ask you for directions to the station, I reveal to you my incapacity on this issue and make myself dependent on you, and I expect your awareness of this to motivate you to help me (which would normally mean telling me the right directions),[9] rather than using my dependence to somehow benefit yourself. Because trust has a structure of this sort, if it is indeed abused, we will feel let down on many levels in a way that will then be reflected in our reactive attitudes: we will blame the other person for their lack of care, for their indifference to our needs, and for not even recognizing our vulnerability to them, as in coming forward to trust a person we open ourselves up to them and place ourselves in their hands – to use a metaphor that Løgstrup often uses in this context.[10] We may also feel embarrassment, of the sort that happens when you reveal yourself or open yourself up to someone who then ignores you, or who "blanks" you in this way, as we tellingly say.

Having introduced his conception of trust, Løgstrup then uses it to explain how an ethical demand arises for the trusted person to respond accordingly:

> As surely as a human being with the trust that they either show or desire places more or less of their life into the other's hands, so surely is the demand to take care of this person's life integral to our existence such as it simply happens to be. How

> much or how little is at stake for a human being in the trust that they show obviously varies greatly. It depends on many different factors: on the individual's psychological state of mind and condition in that very instant, and upon the situation, which is determined not least of all by who or how the other person is. But in any event, it means that in any meeting between human beings there is an unspoken demand, irrespective of the circumstances in which the meeting takes place and the nature of the meeting. (Løgstrup 2020b, 18)

As this passage makes clear, Løgstrup draws a fundamental connection between trust, vulnerability, and the resulting demand to care for the other person, while also emphasising how extensive this trust is, and how important it is to the proper functioning of our lives together.

On the one hand, therefore, Løgstrup is happy to emphasise how much the vulnerability involved in trust may ask of us, given its significance and ubiquity. He thus goes on to write: "Furthermore, the radicality of the demand consists in not only taking care of the life of the other when the trust they show in me lifts my own courage in life, but also when it is most unpleasant for me because it interferes disturbingly with my existence" (Løgstrup 2020b, 41). According to Løgstrup, we often prefer to be left to our own devices, content in the thought that we form independent worlds from one another (cf. Løgstrup 2020b, 16) – but in being trusted, we have this autonomy and isolation disrupted, as we now feel compelled to do something for the other person, rather than merely focus on ourselves. Furthermore, he argues, even if the other person *distrusts* us, as may well be the case with our enemy, they still remain dependent on us, which then also gives rise to an ethical demand to care for them (Løgstrup 2020b, 41–2). Løgstrup makes clear, therefore, that he does not expect us to see the ethical demand as negligible and requiring little of us – indeed, precisely the opposite, as it might well ask much more of us than the kind of responsibilities which come with mere social norms, where it is partly in this very demandingness that its radicality is said to consist.

At the same time, however, Løgstrup is at pains to emphasise that this radicality is not to be confused with *limitlessness*. At the start of §3.2 he writes: "As has been said, its radicality means that the demand can only be fulfilled through selflessness. However, this does not mean that the individual has limitless responsibility for everything under the sun, regarding things which are none of their concern" (Løgstrup 2020b, 43); and towards the

end of that section, he warns that if "there is no limit to the individual's responsibility", then "we have ended up in a situation which is ethically meaningless" (Løgstrup 2020b, 47). In between these two remarks, Løgstrup makes three points designed to check this tendency to treat the demand as excessively demanding. First, he argues that people may be inclined to exaggerate their responsibilities to others as a way to give content and meaning to their own lives in a way that is obviously not ethically admirable. Second, he raises the concern that this exaggeration can lead to paternalistic encroachment on the lives as others, as we seek to take on more and more responsibility for them, including decisions that they should make for themselves, as can happen with overzealous parents in relation to their children. And thirdly, he suggests that we can easily become confused regarding the extent of our responsibilities, as within democratic societies that have given us more *political* responsibility, we can then think we have increased *ethical* responsibility – but in fact, even our political responsibility is more curtailed than we like to think, and anyway our ethical responsibilities which are individual are not to be directly equated with our political responsibilities, which are shared. Moreover, in a subsequent chapter (Løgstrup 2020b, Chapter 7), Løgstrup warns against a tendency to think that the ethical demand must be "destructive": for, he argues that while the demand is "one-sided" in the sense that one cannot insist on some "payback" for acting on it as a recompense or reward, nonetheless it is a mistake to think it "consists in the demand that a human being is willing to let their life be ruined, to sacrifice it – in every way whatsoever!" (Løgstrup 2020b, 118). If this were the case, Løgstrup argues, the demand would ironically become too easy to fulfil, as rather than having to consider what is best for the other person, one would know one had done the right thing if it is sufficiently bad for oneself. Thus, having warned us against the tendency to *under*estimate the ethical demands that arise out of the dependency on us of other people, Løgstrup now also warns us against the tendency to *over*estimate and exaggerate them.[11] In this way, Løgstrup may seem to offer us an attractive way of avoiding two unpalatable extremes, and so striking a balance that might be appealing to many.

However, while this appears to be Løgstrup's aim, from what has been said so far, it may still not really be clear how he can hope to have achieved it. After all, it could be responded: while of course he is right to warn that we should not use the dependence on us of others to interfere with their lives unnecessarily, and while doing so may be merely a way to give content to our lives, and while our ethical and political responsibilities are different –

nonetheless, the fact remains that Løgstrup is correct to also emphasise our vulnerability to each other, and while this may not mean we have "responsibility for everything under the sun", does it not mean we have responsibility for a good deal more than we are generally prepared to accept, so that the threat of overdemandingness still looms?

Now, of course, one response to this worry might be to say that in fact Løgstrup would not see it as worrisome, as one part of his case is that we should avoid complacency about morality, and the temptation to downplay what it asks of us.[12] Nonetheless, from what we have said so far, it still may be hard to see how Løgstrup might draw the line that is often said to be required, between a morality that asks an appropriately demanding amount, and one that goes too far by becoming "destructive". To do that, it might be said, we need to be given some way to balance our own legitimate interests against the interests of others, and none of the considerations that have yet been introduced seem to do that in a clear enough manner. Until this is spelt out, the suspicion will remain that the radical ethical demand will end up asking much more of us than we can reasonably be expected to do, and hence become overdemanding and hence "meaningless" in the way that Løgstrup warns us against.

However, I think Løgstrup may have said relatively little about this problem precisely because of the way that he has started with the issue of trust, and how he conceives of this relationship, which can be used to explain why this problem may not arise. For, I think implicit in his treatment of trust, there are further resources than we have so far discussed, which can help him grapple with this difficulty. To see how, we need to look in more detail at the case of trust as Løgstrup presents it to us.

We have already discussed the way in which the trusting person "delivers themselves up" to the person they trust, putting them in the hands of the trusted person and so making themselves vulnerable to this person – where this, as we have said, then gives rise to a demand on the trusted person to care for the person who trusts. However, in relation to the problem of overdemandingness, it is necessary to focus on two further features of the trust relationship as Løgstrup understands it, and thus what kind of care is involved. A first feature is that for Løgstrup, in delivering themselves up to the other, the trusting person gives the other *power* over them that they did not have before, and the second feature is that the demand to care is a demand on the trusted person to use *this power* for the good of the person who trusts, rather than for their own good. Thus, to use

my simple example, in asking you for directions to the station, you now have a power over me which you did not have before, a power I have given to you by "delivering myself up to you" and "putting myself in your hands" – namely, a power to determine which way I set off to walk. The ethical demand you then face, is to use that power for my good (which for example will usually involve telling me those directions if you know them), rather than your own, by exploiting this power to further your own interests (for example by sending me the wrong way so you can get to the station first, and claim the last seat on the train).

At the end of Chapter 1 of *The Ethical Demand*, Løgstrup makes clear that this point about power is central to his account, arguing that our possession of the power we have over others which arises from their vulnerability can only be justified and warranted if we use that power for their good, rather than exploiting it to further our own interests:

> Using the metaphor, as we have done here, of "having the other human being's life in one's hands" is to use a phrase of some emotional force. The emotional significance of the metaphor stems from the contrast that lies in the relationship to which it refers: that what the individual has the power to turn around is something in the other human being's life, whether it is merely their mood or, in extreme cases, their entire fate. It is entirely fair [*rimeligt*] that we have power over things and animals, and it is fair that the legal authorities should have delegated legal powers over others as defined by law in order to protect third parties against their assaults. But it is entirely unfair [*urimeligt*] that one human being, in a completely immediate way, has power over another human being, as this is neither delegated power, nor defined by valid laws, nor serves to protect third parties. The contrast mentioned above consists in the fact that every human being is an independent and responsible individual—and at the same time that we are inevitably and to a great extent pointed towards one another, so that our relationships to one another are in the most immediate way relations of power, whether what is held in our power is the other person's mood or their fate.
>
> From this fundamental dependence and immediate power, the demand arises that we take care of that in the other person's life which is dependent upon us, and which we have in our power. (Løgstrup 2020b, 26–7)[13]

Starting from the case of trust, Løgstrup has therefore arrived at a conception of our ethical relations as involving power over others; the question now is how this bears on the question

of overdemandingness. That it does can be argued by looking at three features of the power relation involved in trust, which I will now spell out.

First, in the case of trust, the power that we have over others is often in some sense *willed* or *elective*, in the sense that one person *makes themselves* vulnerable to another and so gives them power *by trusting them*. For example, it is through my asking you the way to the station that you now have power over me on this issue, which you did not possess before I asked for directions. Of course, my situation may be such that I have no real option but to trust someone and so make myself vulnerable in this way; but nonetheless, it remains the case that this vulnerability to the trusted person in particular is something I have brought about through that trust, which has thereby given the trusted person power over me.

Secondly, the power a trusting person has given the trusted person is what according to Løgstrup determines the structure and nature of their ethical relationship in two important ways. (a) related to the point above, if the truster had not made themselves vulnerable to the trusted person through trust, there would not *be* any ethical relationship of this sort, as the truster would not have given the trusted person any power over them. For example, until I asked you the way to the station, there was no relation of trust between us on this matter. (b) what that relationship involves is determined *by the power the trusting person has given the trusted person*, as what the trusted person is required to do is use *that power* for the truster's good. For example, I have given you power over my movements in the city, and it is this power that you should use for my benefit and not your own.

Thirdly, whether or not in fact the truster has given the trusted person power depends not just on the truster's attempt to deliver themselves over to the trusted person, but on the latter's own capacities and capabilities – for if in fact they are not in a position to take on the truster's vulnerability because they lack those capacities and capabilities, then they do not really have power over the truster, and the truster's attempt to put themselves in the trusted person's hand will have failed, as they do not really possess such hands (to continue the metaphor). For example, if I ask you the way to the station, and you do not know where it is, then you possess no such power, and so have no corresponding responsibility to use it for my good.

Given these three features of the power relation involved in trust, how do they bear on the question of demandingness? I think they do so in the following way, which can also be related to Løgstrup.

Firstly, it can be argued, insofar as trust is a *willed* vulnerability,[14] this changes the normative features of the situation, as this makes it inappropriate to claim a *right* to have that trust respected – for it seems too strong to insist on a positive right in a situation you have engineered *for* yourself, as in this sense one would be bestowing the right *on* yourself. However, while we can give normative powers to others to require things of us (for example, by making them promises), it seems less clear that we can give normative powers *to ourselves* to require things of others in this manner. For example, it would seem inappropriate to insist that because I have asked you the way to the station, I now have a right to demand that you tell me, as you might reasonably feel that I cannot just lay claim to authority over you to act by instituting a relationship over which you had no prior say. And when it comes to Løgstrup, aspects of this idea may be said to lie behind his own contention that we have no right to make ethical demands of others, as for Løgstrup rights are a contractual matter requiring mutual agreement between the parties before they can come into play (Løgstrup 2020b, 40), which is not what has occurred here.

However, even if this point about rights is accepted, this in itself does not resolve the issue of overdemandingness, as for Løgstrup one way in which the ethical demand is radical is precisely that it holds even though it *not* based on rights, so that for him there can be obligations without rights. Thus, even if I do not have a right to demand that you tell me the directions to the station just because I trust you to do so, for Løgstrup you may still be under just as much of an obligation to tell me, arising out of your power and my vulnerability in the way we have discussed. To address the issue of demandingness, the two other features of the trusting relationship outlined above must therefore be brought into play.

The second feature concerns how the power involved in trust determines the ethical relationship itself, both in terms of putting the relationship in place, and in terms of what the relationship requires. This then bears on the issue of overdemandingness in two ways.

(a) the responsibilities only fall on particular others who form part of that relationship of vulnerability, not on others in a more general way, or on you prior to that relationship: by asking you the way to the station, *you* then have a responsibility to help me, which you did not have until I asked, and which others do not have who have not been

asked. The ethical requirements involved in trust thus only hold when that particular relationship obtains, and so are less widespread than cases of want or need: I might need to get to the station, but until I have trusted you to tell me by asking for directions, I have not given you power over me or delivered myself into your hands, and so no requirement of trust applies to you. In virtue of being relational in this manner, the ethical demands of trust are thus less widespread and prolific than the ethical demands of need, thereby reducing their demandingness.

(b) what that relationship requires of the trusted person is determined *by the power the truster has given the trusted person through the trust the former has shown*, as what the trusted person is required to do is use *that power* for the truster's good. Thus, if I trust you to tell me the way to the station, and make myself vulnerable to you in this respect, it is the power that I thereby confer on you regarding this issue that you are required to use for my good, for example by giving me the right directions. But of course, that is also more limited than being required to do anything and everything for my good – for example, also giving me money to get to the station, or taking me there yourself. To paraphrase Løgstrup, you are not required to do everything for me under the sun – you are just required to use for my good and not for yours the power *I have given you* through my trust, which is a more circumscribed notion than being required to do whatever is in your power to make my life go well.

The third and final feature of the power relation is also relevant to the question of overdemandingness: namely, that if I lack certain capacities, then there is no such power relation and so there is no such demand.[15] In our simple example, I said previously that this power might be lacking if you do not know the way to the station. But it seems plausible to argue that this power could be lacking in other ways. For example, given limited resources of time, if you are already helping someone else, you may not have the power to help me. Moreover, if I ask you for some information, but to give it would be at great cost to yourself, then once again it could be said that you lack the relevant power; for if exercising a capacity becomes too costly for an agent, it is arguably not really in their power to do so, just as a car that explodes or is greatly damaged when it reaches 120mph could be said not to have this speed in its power, even though this is a speed it can attain. Of course, setting precise criteria for when a person really lacks such power and when they do not may not be

possible, and we may well be inclined to exaggerate our powerlessness to get ourselves off the moral hook: nonetheless, the idea does seem to have some applicability here.

Løgstrup himself gives some weight to these points when he discusses the relation between ethical and political responsibility – a discussion we mentioned briefly above, but which can now be considered in a little more detail. As we said previously, one reason Løgstrup gives for why we might mistakenly think that we have “limitless responsibility for everything under the sun” is that we confuse ethical and political responsibility. But we can now add to that, that one central reason why Løgstrup takes this to be problematic, is that democratic political structures lead us to exaggerate our sense of political power, which then leads us to exaggerate our sense of power in ethical situations, and so to thinking that we have greater responsibility for others than in fact we do. Løgstrup thus seeks to counter this tendency, by reminding us that even in democracies, for most of us who are simply democratic citizens, our real political power over others is pretty limited, and our ethical power is likely to be even less (see Løgstrup 2020b, 45–8).

Thus, it can be argued, the really fundamental way in which Løgstrup himself addresses the issue of ethical limitlessness and hence overdemandingness, is to focus on the nature of the power involved in our ethical relationships, in a way that is exemplified in his treatment of trust. The key points of that treatment may be summarised as follows. First, because trust is a willed and elective relationship of vulnerability, it does not involve rights on the part of the truster. Second, because trust is a relationship between the individuals involved in that relationship, and only relates to the use of the powers thereby conferred, it is circumscribed regarding who is involved and what is required of them. Third, because it involves power, whether or not these requirements arise depend on the capacities and capabilities of the person on whom the requirements are said to fall, thereby limiting the extent of the demand involved. Given these features that can be brought out through Løgstrup’s analysis of the vulnerabilities involved in trust, it seems plausible to argue that there is a reasonable check on how much such vulnerabilities might ask of us, thereby preventing overdemandingness becoming an issue with this account.

At the same time, Løgstrup arguably avoids the problem of *under*demandingness, because he does not merely say that we have the negative obligation not to use our power over others to our own benefit, which may seem an obviously wrongful form of exploitation; he also says that we have positive obligation to use that power for their good,

and thus to care for them. Some of his reasoning for this positive obligation can be seen in the long passage cited above – namely, that unless used in this way, the power we have over others is possessed “unfairly” or “unreasonably” [*urimeligt*], in the sense that it is without justification or warrant. By helping me, and so in making me less vulnerable to you, you do what you can to correct this power imbalance between us, whereas if you do not help, you keep me subordinate to your power, and so exploit me in a different way. On the other hand, I have suggested, at least when it comes to the trust case, Løgstrup has the resources to prevent this positive obligation becoming overdemanding.

2. Vulnerability that does not involve trust

However, I now wish to consider an objection to this approach: namely, even if what has been said about trust is correct, and thus that this relationship can be kept within bounds, the vulnerability involved in trust is only one type of vulnerability, with special features of its own – but if we consider other types of vulnerability, those features no longer apply, and so cannot be used to the resolve the demandingness issue that arises in these other cases. Thus, even if Løgstrup is right about trust, the challenge is that he is not right about vulnerability in general, so that the problem of overdemandingness is not really avoided by adopting his approach.

This challenge can be pressed by thinking about another case, which also concerned Løgstrup very much: namely the case of the Good Samaritan.[16] On the one hand, it seems clear that the injured Jewish traveller is vulnerable, and that the Good Samaritan does what is required by helping him, while the priest and the Levite who pass by shirk their obligations.[17] On the other hand, this does not seem to be a case of *trust*, as characterised above: the traveller does not *choose* to make himself vulnerable to the Good Samaritan or *put himself* in the latter’s hands – he just *is* vulnerable; he thus does not confer power on the Good Samaritan in this way; therefore nor is the nature of that power thereby determined through any act of conferral. Rather, the traveller is made vulnerable to the Good Samaritan by the unfortunate circumstances in which the former finds himself, and so while he may feel resentment and blame if the Good Samaritan fails to help him, this is not because his trust in the Good Samaritan has been betrayed.

To see what difference this might make with respect to the issue of overdemandingness, we can now contrast the trust case with the Good Samaritan case in

this respect. In the trust case, we argued, what the trusted person is required to do regarding the vulnerability of the trusting person is limited by the fact that the requirements on them apply only to the power they have been given by the trusting person, to use that power for the good of the latter and not for themselves. For example, by trusting you for directions to the station, I have made myself vulnerable to you by giving you power over where I walk next, and you should use that power for my good, rather than exploit it for your own. But in the Good Samaritan case, the vulnerability of the traveller to the Samaritan arises not from trust, but from the needs of the traveller and the fact that he cannot satisfy those needs without help from the Samaritan. So now, it could be argued, what the Samaritan is required to do is whatever is necessary to satisfy those needs – so he is required not just to avoid exploiting power he has been given by the other, as in the trust case, which seems relatively circumscribed, but to do whatever is required to satisfy the needs of the other, which is not. Put simply: "do not exploit power over the other" seems likely to be less demanding and more manageable than "do whatever is required to satisfy the needs of the other", and while the former applies to the vulnerability involved in the trust case, it has been suggested the latter more naturally applies to the different kind of vulnerability involved in the case of the Good Samaritan – what might be called "vulnerability through need" rather than "vulnerability through trust". It may therefore seem that even if trust cases can avoid overdemandingness based on Løgstrup's account of the nature of the vulnerabilities involved, it is less clear than the same analysis can be applied to other cases vulnerability through need, and so the problem of overdemandingness remains.

I now want to consider ways in which this worry could be addressed, arguing that even though it is correct that the trust cases and the Good Samaritan cases are different, there are still lessons to be learned from thinking about the trust cases, in ways that could still help us address the problem of overdemandingness more generally.

3. Vulnerability, trust and need: lessons learned

While for reasons given above, cases of vulnerability through trust and cases of vulnerability through need are different, I would suggest there is still something to be learned from the way in which Løgstrup brings considerations of *power* into the former, which can then also be applied to the latter – where it is this focus on power that can help with the problem of

overdemandingness even in cases of need, as then the requirements on us can still centre on what we do with that power, rather than need satisfaction in general.

As we have discussed, in the trust case, power is conferred on the trusted person by the trusting person in an elective manner – I put myself into your hands and give you power over me by trusting you to tell me the way to the station. In the Good Samaritan case, there is no such process of conferral. Thus, it may seem, the Good Samaritan is instead simply required to respond to the traveller's needs, so that nothing said above about how power considerations can circumscribe demandingness can apply to this case.

However, I would suggest, the situation may not be quite so clear. For, even in the Good Samaritan case, the situation can be thought of in terms of power: not power that is consciously conferred by one agent on another through trust, but power that arises out of the vulnerability to which the need gives rise, as in this case it is the neediness of the traveller that confers power on the Good Samaritan, through the way that this need makes the former vulnerable to the latter. Thus, the fact that his injuries render him defenceless, that he cannot heal those injuries on his own without help, that the Good Samaritan is in the circumstances the only one who can provide that help, all serve to confer power on the Good Samaritan – power he would not have if he was walking past a healthy individual who is not vulnerable to him in these ways.

If this is right, it then also seems plausible to suggest that focusing on this power relation can help address the issue of overdemandingness even in cases of vulnerability through need. For, as in the trust cases, we can argue that what the Good Samaritan is required to do is not exploit this power for their own good but to use it for the good of the other person, even though the power in this case is not conferred on them by the trusting person, but by the needs of the injured person. Thus, just as in the case of trust, in which you cannot mislead me about the whereabouts of the station in order to benefit yourself, but must use this power for my good instead, so in the Good Samaritan case he must not use the fact the traveller is injured to benefit himself (for example, by demanding money before he will do anything, or stealing the traveller's belongings while he can), but instead must use the power he has been given in this situation to help the traveller, as he does. It thus seems that despite their differences, in the Good Samaritan type cases as much as in the trust cases, we can characterise the moral situation in terms of power, and so present

the requirement in the same terms: “do not exploit the other with your power, but use that power for their good, and thus care for them instead”.[18]

It would then follow, I would suggest, that again despite differences between the two cases, similar moves as before can nonetheless be made to place limits on the demandingness involved in the vulnerability through need cases, for the same relevant elements apply as in the trust cases. To see this, let us compare the three features of the power relation we said were involved in trust, with the power relation involved in cases like that of the Good Samaritan.

The first feature of the power relation involved in trust was that this relation is willed or elective, as it arises through some sort of decision to trust. Clearly this is not so in vulnerability through need cases, and indeed this is one important difference between the two types of cases – so the argument used to claim that there is no right to demand care when it comes to trust because it is a willed vulnerability does not apply in the same way to vulnerability based on needs. Of course, Løgstrup might use other more general arguments to suggest that rights are not appropriate even in need cases, which he seems to do by arguing that talk about rights only make sense in a contractual situation (cf. Løgstrup 2020b, 42). But in fact, such issues need not concern us here, for as we have discussed, Løgstrup also accepts that a demand or obligation can exist without any corresponding right, so that this issue in itself does not reduce the potential demandingness of that obligation.

The second feature of the power relation involved in trust concerned how this power determines the ethical relationship itself, both in terms of putting the relationship in place, and in terms of what the relationship requires. When applied to the Good Samaritan cases, this would firstly mean that there is no ethical relationship between two people unless the needs of the vulnerable person put the other person in a relation of power over them, as it is only power generated through vulnerability to the individual concerned that establishes this relation in both cases. This therefore does some work in circumscribing the demand even beyond just cases of trust. On the one hand, when it comes to power, it would imply that if I have greater power than you but in a way that is *not* a power *over you* generated by your vulnerability to me, I am not required to use that power for your good and not mine, because in this case I would not be exploiting your vulnerability in doing so. Thus, I might have the power to go to France on holiday and you don’t, because you lack the finances required – but as this is not a power I have over you generated by your

vulnerability to me, there is no demand on me to use my power to go to France for your benefit and not mine. Of course, that does not mean I may not be required to do something to make our society more equal for other reasons, but still the demands of vulnerability are limited in this way, on this account. And on the other hand, when it comes to needs, the demand would only arise where the needs generate power over the particular person (or persons) in need. For example, many people in the world are in need, but not in such a way as to give me power over them as this need does not make them vulnerable *to me*, so that the ethical relationship in question that requires me to care for them does not apply. One reason that this is the case (to be discussed further below) is that I might lack the requisite power. But another reason is the relational nature of vulnerability, as opposed to need simplicter: to be vulnerable to a person, as Løgstrup emphasises, is to be vulnerable to them *in particular*,[19] so that my needs do not make me vulnerable *to you*, if someone else can satisfy my needs just as well, as then power resides not just in my hands, but in yours or ours too. I have argued elsewhere that this difference is significant, as (using Kantian terminology) it can turn a perfect duty into an imperfect one (see Stern 2019, 54–55): if I am the only source of help, then the duty is perfect in the sense that I have no option but to act in this case, while if others can help, it is imperfect, in the sense that while I am required to help on some occasions, I have latitude whether to help in this one in particular.[20] It is this, I have suggested, that makes it possible for Løgstrup to challenge Peter Singer's famous "pond analogy" regarding distant others (Singer 1972), as the analogy does not in fact hold, as in the pond case only I can help the drowning child, while in the case of the distant others this is not the case, so the cases are not to be compared in a way that seems to generate problems of overdemandingness for Singer's view.[21] By focusing on the way that only in some cases of need does vulnerability give me as an individual power over you, and basing the ethical requirements on this power, Løgstrup can thus apply lessons learned from thinking about the power involved in trust to even the cases of vulnerability through need.

If this second aspect of the power relation involved in trust helps to firstly limit the number of instances in which the ethical relationship itself arises even in cases of need, it may secondly also limit what the relationship requires of us when it obtains. For, we argued, in the trust case, what the requirement involves is how one uses the power conferred on you by the trust that is displayed – so I am required to tell you the way to the station as this is the power I have been given, but I am not hereby required to do things for you that have

nothing to do with this power and its proper use. The question now is whether something similar can be said of the power involved in cases of vulnerability through need. We argued above that this vulnerability does involve the giving of power, even if not in an elective way: for example, because of his injuries, the Good Samaritan now has power over the traveller that he would not possess if the traveller were in full health, which now includes the power to assuage his wounds. If, then, the demand relates to the use of this power, it would seem that even in the needs case, what the Good Samaritan is required to do is more circumscribed than if the requirement on him was to maximise the good, or to make this person's life better in general: the traveller's vulnerability gives the Samaritan power over elements of the traveller's life that are more limited than this, and so again do not threaten to become overdemanding, because the power relation makes them more pre-defined in their scope. For example, maybe it would make you much happier than you are to have an expensive car, and I can easily afford to buy you one. But the lack of this car in this case does not make you vulnerable to me, let us suppose.[22] In that case, even though giving you the car would make you happier, on Løgstrup's account I am not required to buy one for you, for as no vulnerability to me is generated through this lack, I therefore have no corresponding power over you, and so the ethical demand does not arise. For, power is only held by one person over another in cases where what is at stake has a non-trivial bearing on their needs, not just wants, so the capability involved in power has to hold sway over interests that are sufficiently important. By contrast, on moral theories that hold that we are required to act in such a way as to maximise happiness or desire satisfaction, then it would seem a demand would arise, thereby making them more susceptible to the concern about overdemandingness.

A further feature of the power relationship itself and the vulnerabilities involved may also be significant here: namely how those vulnerabilities which gave rise to that relationship have come about. For, as we saw above, for Løgstrup our positive duty to care is partly defended on the grounds that it is "unfair" or "unreasonable" that others have power over us due to our vulnerability to them, on the basis that this power imbalance is unjustified and arbitrary. However, it can be argued that there could be some ways for this imbalance to have occurred, which take away the requirement on us to correct it. A clear case might be where I have acted in some way *in order* to make myself vulnerable to you as a way to secure your assistance, for here I can hardly claim that the power imbalance lacks

any grounds; and it might include other cases where my neediness and vulnerability have been brought about through some fault of my own. It could thus be argued that just as the luck egalitarian holds that there are only obligations to secure equality where inequalities come about through no fault of the agent concerned, so the obligation to care for others requires the relevant power imbalance to have occurred in similar ways – if it has not, the agent could claim that the relationship between them and the other person is not one where they are required to "make good" the power imbalance by caring for the other (though of course we may still have supererogatory reasons to do so) . Thus, just as "luck" egalitarianism is less demanding than general welfare egalitarianism which says all inequalities should be removed regardless of how they have come about, so this account could be said to be less demanding in similar ways.[23]

Finally, we can turn to the third feature of the power relation that is also relevant to the question of overdemandingness: namely, that if a person lack certain capacities, then there is no such power relation and so there is no such demand. In the trust example, we saw that power might be lacking if you do not know the way to the station, but also if you are already helping someone else in a way that means you do not have the power to help me, or because to give this information would be at great cost to yourself. Given that we have established that Good Samaritan cases also involve calls on our power, then similar considerations would seem to apply: if I cannot help with your wounds, or if my resources to help are being used elsewhere, or if helping would be at great cost to myself, then again it would seem there is reason to say that the demand does not apply, as the relevant power is lacking because the capacities to fulfil the demand are not available to me. Of course, other moral theories can also appeal to the principle that "ought implies can" to block demandingness in such cases. But nonetheless, Løgstrup's focus on power can arguably achieve more, because a bare appeal to "ought implies can" does not tell us what is covered under "can". For example, I can save your life by jumping in front of the train, even if doing so would kill me – nothing is preventing me doing so. But if we put this situation in terms of power, and ask whether I really have the power to help you given the great risk to myself, it becomes more plausible to argue that I do not – just as a car does not have the power to drive at 120mph, if doing so were to lead to its destruction. Nor does the Løgstrupian view have to appeal to the idea of "duties to self" to resolve these cases, as again it is just my lack

of power than means the demand does not arise in the first place, not that it has to be overridden by a countervailing demand to look after myself.

4. Conclusion

I have argued, therefore, that (contrary to initial expectations perhaps), if we focus on the idea of vulnerability, and then understand it in a Løgstrupian manner as involving relations of power over others, we can avoid the problem of overdemandingness. At the same time, I have also suggested that Løgstrup gives reasons to think his account is not underdemanding. The suggestion is, therefore, that at least on this measure, Løgstrup's approach to the fundamental fact of our vulnerability gets things just right.[24]

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[1] Reasons of space preclude any detailed elaboration of the nature of this problem: for further discussion see Chappell 2009 and van Ackeren and Kühler 2016.

[2] But cf. the title of the well-known Danish study of Løgstrup Jensen 1994, in English translation reads: *Vulnerable Invulnerability: Løgstrup and the Return of Religion in Philosophy*. For further discussion, see Pahuus 2005.

[3] Løgstrup does not actually use the term "interdependence" until 1961, where he adopts it in Løgstrup 1961 with reference to Theodor Geiger: see p. 137.

[4] One complication, which I will not dwell on in what follows, is that for Løgstrup this care should in fact not be felt *as* demanded, as to feel it in this way is to have failed to care, so that ideally this relationship should not be expressed in deontological terms at all; but as Løgstrup himself continues to talk in terms of a demand, as he thinks this is often how we do experience this relationship, I will also use this terminology in the rest of the paper. For further discussion of this issue, see Stern 2019, 105–8.

[5] To some readers of Løgstrup, this may be surprising, as they precisely take Løgstrup's ethics to be characterised by its "exorbitancy" – cf. Critchley 2007, 40. While such readings are right to stress that Løgstrup's ethics is intentionally challenging in key respects, they tend to ignore way this is balanced by more moderating claims, of the sort I will discuss, while in my view they also misinterpret what Løgstrup means by key terms such as "unfulfillability".

[6] It was not until the work of Annette Baier and Lars Hertzberg in the 1980s that trust became acknowledged as an issue in the literature of Anglo-American philosophy, and then started to be widely discussed. See Baier 1986 and Hertzberg 1988.

[7] Løgstrup makes implicit reference to those circumstances earlier in the same paragraph.

[8] I am here following Paul Faulkner's terminology, which is itself partly drawing on Martin Hollis. See e.g. Faulkner 2014, 1977–8, where he makes the distinction as follows: "To say that A trusts S to φ on this [predictive] understanding is just to say that A depends on S φ-ing and expects S to φ . . . [But on the affective] understanding to say that A trusts S to φ is to say that A depends on S φ-ing and expects this to motivate S to φ". Cf. also Hollis 1998.

[9] As Løgstrup goes on to note, it may be the case that the best thing the trusted person can do is *not* what the trusting person is expecting and hoping for, as this might not be in their interests in some circumstances – for example, if you are trusting me to give you the drugs that I know will kill you. This is an aspect of what Løgstrup calls the "silence" of the demand, which is not given content simply from what the person says they want. See Løgstrup 2020b, 20–22.

[10] See e.g. Løgstrup 2020b, 16.

[11] Though in certain ways distinctive, aspects of Løgstrup's position can be compared to other writers who have raised worries about the tendency of some accounts of morality to become overdemanding – for example, to Susan Wolf's objections to the over-zealous self-righteousness of "moral saints", and to Bernard Williams's warnings about the impact on the lives of individuals, though while Williams is thinking of utilitarianism, Løgstrup is thinking of Kierkegaard. See Wolf 1982 and Williams 1973.

[12] See for example Løgstrup 2020b Chapters 8 and 9, where Løgstrup's criticises various ways in which we attempt to wriggle out of our responsibilities, while seeking to "camouflage" this from ourselves.

[13] Cf. also Løgstrup 2020b, 48: “That our lives with and against one another consist in the fact that one person is delivered up to the other, means that our mutual relationships are always relationships of power: one individual has more or less of the other individual’s life in their power”; and p. 49: “Because there is power in every human relationship, we are always constrained in advance—in the decision whether we will use our power over the other person for their good or our own… [W]hatever the situation, in deciding to act, the demand asserts itself, namely the demand to use our power over the other person in such a way as to serve them… [I]nsofar as the demand is disregarded, the other person’s life is not delivered up into care, but into exploitation”. Cf. also Løgstrup 2020a, 11: “The love commandment arises from the interdependence and the power, that due to this interdependence, we cannot avoid having over each other. Therefore, we could also formulate the commandment as follows: the power that the interdependence gives you over another human being, you must use in their best interests.” And Løgstrup 2020a, 50: “[The relation of responsibility] involves the responsible person having power over the person for whom they are responsible. It is then just the case that responsibility relations consist in the fact that with this power the responsible person shall serve the person for whom they are responsible”. And Løgstrup 2020a, 105: “Power is not only a public phenomenon. One person’s life is so entangled with the life of another that, in an immediate way, all relationships between human beings are relations of power. For this reason, there are many areas in our lives together where law and order do not reach and should not reach, but which, nevertheless, are relations of power.”

[14] The idea that all cases of trust involve willed vulnerability might be challenged in two ways, either by pointing to cases where we have no choice but to trust, or to cases where trust is just presumed rather than willed. The former will be close to cases of needs discussed below, as our lack of choice will be based on the underlying need, because trusting you is my only way to get that need fulfilled; and cases where trust is presumed are unlikely to raise issues of overdemandingness, as the fact we can presume such trust implies the trusted person is being expected to act within normal and implicitly mutually agreed parameters – as in Løgstrup’s own case, of where you trust someone who talks to you in conversation on a train (see Løgstrup 2020b, 9).

[15] Cf. Løgstrup 2020a, 43: “A duty can only be what we are capable of doing”.

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[16] While Løgstrup does not discuss this case explicitly in Løgstrup 2020b, it of course lies in the background of his discussion of Jesus's account of the love commandment, while it is discussed explicitly elsewhere: see e.g. Løgstrup 2007, 76.

[17] As noted above, Løgstrup would add that insofar as the Good Samaritan *loves* his neighbour, he would not see these *as* requirements or demands on him, as he acts out of love not duty or obligation: see Løgstrup 2007, 76. And in treating them as obligations, I am assuming assistance here is not supererogatory: if such cases were, then the issue of overdemandingness would not even arise.

[18] Recall note 13 above.

[19] Cf. Løgstrup 2020b, 6: "If one's relationship to the other human being is the place where one's relationship to God is decided, it must at the same time be the place where the existence of the other person is so totally at stake, that one's failure is irreparable. So, it cannot be the case that what I withhold from the other person in one situation, they would be able to recoup either from me or from a third, fourth, or fifth person"; and cf. also Løgstrup 2020b, 25: "Whatever happens, the whole weight of the situation is focused on the individual. It is up to them which way the situation goes and is determined in the end. Whatever transpires, what happens or does not happen, will come back to them as a consequence of what they do or fail to do".

[20] A more complicated situation is where others *can* help, but I know they *will* not, perhaps for what seem like bad reasons. Considerations of fairness might lead me to think the duty to help here is imperfect, as I now face a burden through the fault of others; but on Løgstrup's conception of the ethical situation involving power, the fact that I am the only one with this power would I think suggest that the duty remains perfect, even if the reason I have that power reflects badly on the others who are available.

[21] Cf. Greenspan 2010, 196–7: "Now note that, in cases involving nearby emergencies, we seem to have a *perfect* duty of mutual aid, or what might be distinguished as a duty of rescue. I do not have moral leeway, say, to pass by an accident victim whom no one else is available to help, on the ground that I have given or plan to give enough aid elsewhere", where Greenspan draws a contrast with Singer in an accompanying note (p. 197 note 22).

[22] Of course, I do not deny that examples could be cooked up in which it did make you vulnerable – but I am not interested in those examples here, as the contrast is with moral theories that would seem to imply there is a requirement on me to give you this car even if

there is no such vulnerability. By easily being able to escape those implications, I am suggesting, Løgstrup's position is to be preferred to those that would find it harder to do so.

[23] While I think Løgstrup's position could be developed in these ways, it is more complicated to say that this would be the approach Løgstrup himself would take, as aspects of his view arguably suggest he would be unwilling to press too hard on the idea of "fault" involved, given his own Lutheran sense that in one way or another, we are all "at fault".

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