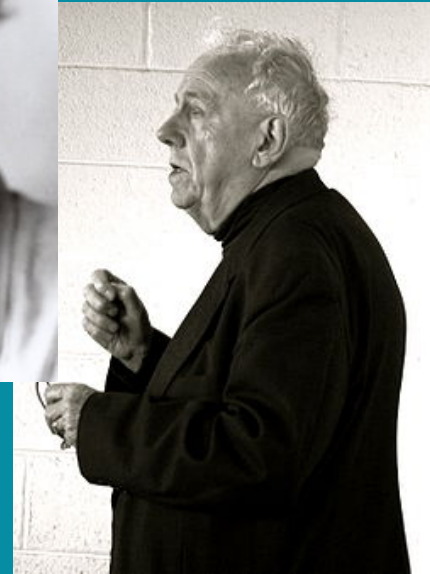
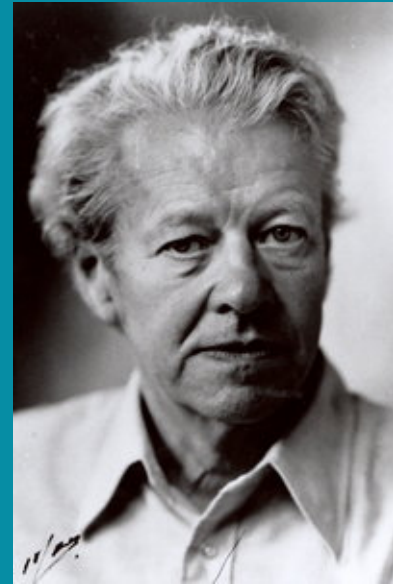


# SPONTANEITY AND PERFECTION

MACINTYRE VS. LØGSTRUP



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# KNUD EJLER LØGSTRUP

1905: Born

1930-1935: studies abroad under Bergson, Heidegger, Lipps, Schlick, Gogarten, Hirsch.

1936-43: priest in Sandager-Holevad

1943: Doctorate (on neo-Kantian epistemology) accepted after several attempts

1943: appointed professor of ethics & philosophy of religion, Aarhus University

1944: Forced underground due to resistance work

1956: *Den Etske Fording (The Ethical Demand)*



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# KNUD EJLER LØGSTRUP

1961: *Kunst og Etik (Art and Ethics)*

1968: *Opgør med Kierkegaard  
(Confronting Kierkegaard)*

1972: *Norm og Spontaneitet (Norm and  
Spontaneity)*

1975: retires

1976: *Vidde og prægnans (Breadth and  
Concision) [Metafysik I]*

1978: *Skabelse og tilintetgørelse  
(Creation and Annihilation) [Metafysik IV]*

1981: Dies suddenly

1983: *Kunst og erkendelse (Art and  
Knowledge) [Metafysik II]*

1984: *Ophav og omgivelse (Source and  
Surroundings) [Metafysik III]*

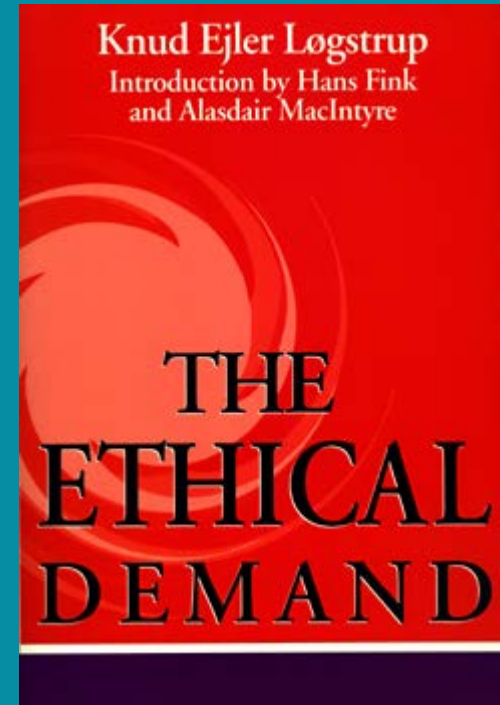


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# THE ETHICAL DEMAND

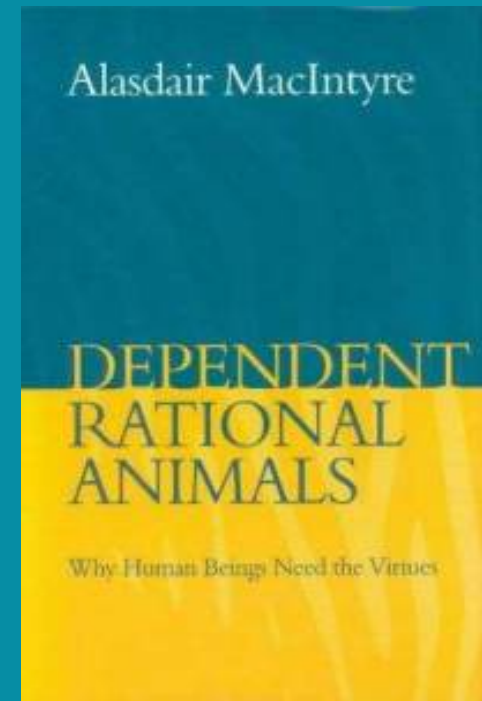
“Trust is not of our own making; it is given. Our life is so constituted that it cannot be lived except as one person lays him or herself open to another person and puts him or herself into that person’s hands either by showing or claiming trust.

By our very attitude to another we help to shape that person’s world. By our attitude to the other person we help to determine the scope and hue of his or her world; we make it large or small, bright or drab, rich or dull, threatening or secure. We help to shape his or her world not by theories and views but by our very attitude towards him or her. Herein lies the unarticulated and one might say anonymous demand that we take care of the life which trust has placed in our hands.”  
*(The Ethical Demand p.18)*



# MACINTYRE ON DEPENDENCY

- Dependence is a crucial, but underexplored, feature of moral life.
- Yields Thomistic virtue of *miser cordia*: responsiveness to the need of the other without regard to communal ties etc.
- Agrees trust is primary to distrust, but must be educated: trust is a mean between credulity and excessive suspicion



# SOVEREIGN EXPRESSIONS OF LIFE

- Not to be credited *to* the agent
- If compromised, they instantly turn into their opposites: incomplete sincerity is insincerity, incomplete trust is distrust etc.
- “...the least interruption, the least calculation, the least dilution of it in the service of something else destroys it entirely, indeed turns it into the opposite of what it is.” (*Norm og Spontaneitet*, in *Beyond the Ethical Demand* p.85)

## *Suværene livsytringer*

- = “sovereign expressions, utterances, manifestations”
- Includes trust, mercy (but not pity), openness/sincerity



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# SOVEREIGN EXPRESSIONS OF LIFE

## Objections

- Løgstrup seems to think SELs are self-underwriting, but leaves this underdeveloped.
- Takes SELs to be spontaneous, while evil is “obsessive,” reflective etc – but aren’t there also spontaneous evils?

# ONTOLOGY AND MERCY

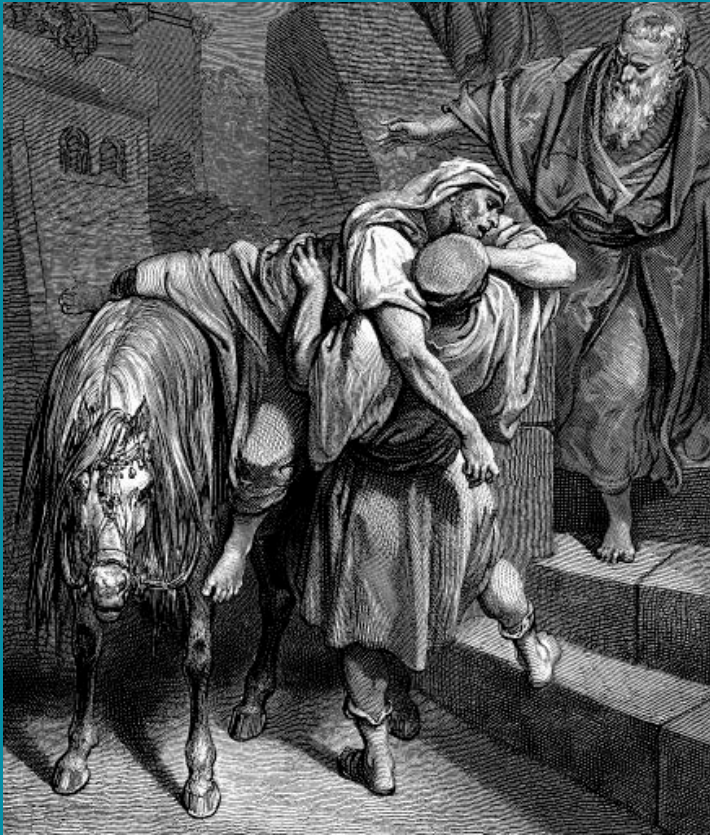


- MacIntyre: Løgstrup's contemporaries saw the ethical demand as intelligible because it is a vestige of an earlier Lutheran worldview in which the virtue of *misericordia* played a role in light of the Orders of Creation/*lex natura*
- Hence the ethical demand is *not* the wellspring of morality – it's a mere residue of a collapsed norm-giving form of life.
- Mightn't Løgstrup say it's precisely the other way around?



# SOVEREIGN EXPRESSIONS OF LIFE

## Moral Samaritans



Gustav Dore, *Arrival of the Good Samaritan at the Inn*

- The *Good Samaritan* is occupied *solely* with the needs of the person he helps
- The *Kantian Samaritan* is occupied with the thought of fulfilling his *duty*
- The *Political Samaritan* operates with the idea of neighbourly love but does not realize it.

# REFLECTION IN MORALITY

- Moral philosophy treats moral life as:
  1. Highly reflective; about
  2. the application of principles; which are
  3. of increasing generality/universality
- Løgstrup rejects this picture: “What happens in the process of generalisation is that morality comes to exist for its own sake. In other words, it becomes moralism, which is morality’s way of being immoral. [...] The other route open to ethical reasoning proceeds via what might be called an explication of moral experience or an interpretation of the moral situation, a route distinguished by the fact that one stays with the concrete experience.” (*Norm og Spontaneitet*, in *Beyond the Ethical Demand* p.103)

# SPONTANEOUS MERCY

“...there is no slippage between their thought and action even though they are risking their lives [...] While detesting Jimmy Wait, they display all the character traits and realize the sovereign expressions of life that correspond to the morality to which they are committed: daring, solidarity, self- forgetfulness, but, not, not for the sake of morality but on account of their absorption in on of the tasks for which morality is needed and from which it springs.”  
*(Norm og Spontaneitet, in Beyond the Ethical Demand p.93)*



# SUBSTITUTE DISPOSITIONS

## Virtues vs. Character Traits

### Virtues

- Reified character traits
- Valued for their own sake
- Lead to 'moral introversion'

### Character Traits

- Focused on tasks of communal enterprise
- Hence belong to realm of moral norms

# MACINTYREAN SPONTANEITY



- Thomism regards spontaneity as the *outcome* of a long process of moral habituation; it's how we act *at our best*, but it takes considerable self-conscious aretaic development to get there.
- Løgstrup's implicit claim is that character formation may arrive in (what looks like) the same place but it has to get there by travelling in precisely the opposite direction.

# MACINTYRE'S LØGSTRUP



“Løgstrup’s account is flawed. The notion that we can be required to respond to a demand that is always and inevitably unfulfillable is incoherent. If I say to you “this cannot be done; do it,” you will necessarily be baffled. [...] Løgstrup then goes on to say that “if our life is, ethically speaking, a contradiction, it is important not to remove the contradiction theoretically.” To this it must be said, parodying Gertrude Stein, that “a contradiction is a contradiction is a contradiction...” A contradiction is a sentence in which nothing is asserted. It has no substantive content, whether in theoretical or practical contexts.”

(MacIntyre “Human Nature and Human Dependence” in Niekerk and Andersen (eds) *Concern for the Other* (Notre Dame, 2007) p.164

# CAN WE BE MORAL?

- Morality (norm-based reasoning) is always-already *failed* spontaneous ethical action.
- Realizing a sovereign expression of life cannot be credited to us
- But this seems to imply that such realization is not a result of our *agency* – it seems we can only be ‘good’ by accident!
- Does this mean any fulfilment of the ethical demand would thereby *not be ethical at all?*



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# PERFECTION AS NOTHINGNESS

- Basic egoism of humans means spontaneous goodness can only be a regulative idea
- Implies a very different kind of perfectionism and character-formation from that endorsed by MacIntyre: learning to *remove* selfish tendencies that impede ontological goodness operating *through* the agent – becoming a frictionless conduit



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