

Løgstrup, Levinas and the Mother: Ethics, Love, and the Relationship to the Other

Christensen, Anne-Marie Søndergaard

Published in:
The Monist

DOI:
10.1093/monist/onz024

Publication date:
2020

Document version:
Accepted manuscript

Citation for published version (APA):
Christensen, A-M. S. (2020). Løgstrup, Levinas and the Mother: Ethics, Love, and the Relationship to the Other. *The Monist*, 103(1), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.1093/monist/onz024>

Go to publication entry in University of Southern Denmark's Research Portal

Terms of use

This work is brought to you by the University of Southern Denmark.
Unless otherwise specified it has been shared according to the terms for self-archiving.
If no other license is stated, these terms apply:

- You may download this work for personal use only.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying this open access version

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details and we will investigate your claim.
Please direct all enquiries to puresupport@bib.sdu.dk

Løgstrup, Levinas and the Mother: Ethics, Love, and the Relationship to the Other

Anne-Marie Søndergaard Christensen

Published in: The Monist 103, 1, 2020, p. 1-15.

Abstract

In this article, I investigate the similarities and differences between the ways we relate to the other in ethics and in love through an engagement with the thinking of K.E. Løgstrup and Emmanuel Levinas. My point of departure will be a reading of a novel by Maja Lucas, *Mother* (2016), which brings out the important and complicated nature of the relation between ethics and love. My main concern, however, is to investigate how Løgstrup's and Levinas's different conceptions of natural love point to differences in their understanding of the ethical relationship to the other.

What is the relationship between ethics and love? What are the similarities and differences between the way we relate to the other in ethics and in love? Is natural, inclinational, preferential love a good model for ethics? And, if it is, in what ways? These are the central questions of this article, and I will explore them through an engagement with the thinking of K.E. Løgstrup and Emmanuel Levinas, motivated by a vital parallel between their views of ethics. Both thinkers hold that being ethical is not merely a matter of acting on a law imposed on oneself, or of cultivating one's virtues (as is central to the traditions of Kantianism and virtue ethics respectively) but depends on how the subject relates to the other. Their views of ethics are in this regard second-personal or relational.¹ In the following, I will bring out some of the similarities between Løgstrup's and Levinas's ways of developing the idea of ethics as arising from the meeting with the other.² My main concern,

however, is to investigate how their different conceptions of natural love point to differences in their understanding of ethics and the relationship to the other, following Løgstrup's understanding of natural love as involving inclination and preference and concerning a particular person who is "biologically or socially or in some other manner related to us" (1997, 142).³ To establish the right focus for my investigation, the point of departure will be a reading of a novel by Maja Lucas, *Mother*, which brings out the important and complicated nature of the relation between ethics and love, and I will use the insights of Lucas's novel to guide the discussion of my initial questions in relation to the ethics of Levinas and Løgstrup.

1. The Mother

The relationship between ethics and love and between ethics and the relation to the other is explored in a novel by a Danish writer, Maja Lucas, entitled *Mother: A Story of Blood (Mor: En historie om blodet)*.⁴ Lucas' novel describes the life and thoughts of a woman from the time that she becomes a mother for the first time until her daughter is almost three years old, and at the centre of attention is the mother's struggle to come to love her child; a struggle that is for the most part unsuccessful.⁵ In this way, the portrayal of the protagonist stands in stark contrast to the stereotypical picture of mothers, for example that presented in H.C. Andersen's *The Story of a Mother* (1847), where a mother, after the death of her child, follows ceaselessly in the footsteps of death, suffering immensely along the way, until she gets the chance to reclaim her son.⁶

After giving birth, the mother in Lucas's novel is not struck by love for her baby, but rather feels that the girl is somehow imposed on her, that her presence is in some sense foreign to her life. "The girl feels like an illness that needs to be overcome" (Lucas 2016, 17), as the mother describes it. "It is," the mother reflects, "as if the girl does not belong in her life, as if she is fundamentally not welcome" (2016, 81). Even if the mother is affected by the feel and the touch of the girl, and

even if she sometimes experiences flickers of parental love, she is unable to hold on to these feelings, and she does not develop any constant and lasting love for the girl. She rather experiences the responsibility involved in being a mother as something of a burden, as a limitation and a trap, but also as something extremely important that she is bound by and must live up to. To her, “The girl seems like a power to be obeyed unconditionally. The mother is constantly afraid of causing her sorrow” (2016, 20). In the absence of love, the mother turns to the responsibility for the care of the girl as a task to be solved, and, in doing this, she is left in a permanent state of conflict between the girl’s needs and a sense of responsibility on the one hand, and her own wishes, feelings and needs on the other. The pattern reappears throughout the book. The mother insists on breastfeeding, but feels bored and trapped and jealous of the freedom of the father; she insists on putting the girl to bed at night, but she becomes furious when the girl will not go to sleep; the mother picks up the girl early from day care, but she does not know how to fill their extra hours together and feels no pleasure in the time spent with the girl. Sometimes the mother tries to let go of her own sense of what she ought to do or let the father take over, but in this too, she fails; she cannot relax if she gets some time to herself, and she is often jealous if the girl prefers the father over her.

The language of the novel is neutral and in some sense impersonal, and the characters are referred to only by descriptive terms, as ‘the mother’, ‘the father’, ‘the girl’, but the novel nonetheless provides a detailed portrayal of the mother’s feelings, reactions, motivations and reasonings, and presents her as having a sober and fine-tuned understanding of others, for example of the needs and reactions of the girl. In this way, the novel presents an intimate and essentially personal portrayal of a woman’s struggle to find a way of becoming and being a mother, while at the same time indicating that the story is also representative of something general, of the tensions involved in any attempt to accommodate dominant ideals of motherhood. The mother even considers this, “whether she has been brainwashed by her culture, by the traditions and conventions

of contemporary Denmark” (2016, 51). If we tie these two points together, we can see the novel as tending towards allegory and the mother as a clear example of how we can fail to come to terms with and integrate into our own lives the social norms and expectations of our specific historical and cultural context.

What I am interested in, however, is neither the personal level, the portrait of this particular mother, nor the cultural level, the particular expectations of mothers in contemporary Denmark or western culture more generally. What is of interest to me is how Lucas, at both levels of the novel, presents us with several universally relevant experiences and predicaments concerning the interplay between love and ethics. The mother’s relationship to her daughter is characterised by responsibility, even from the very first night in the maternity ward. “What strikes her about the situation is that she is the last, the decisive authority. Not even the hospital and the nurses are the final persons in charge. Even the father is pushed aside in relation to her” (2016, 14). The mother truly longs for love of the girl, the love she sees slowly developing in the father, but as her love remains absent, she is forced to rely on her sense of responsibility instead. The mother is captivated, but also blinded, by her understanding of what she ought to do and feel, and her uncertain understanding of herself and her needs is further muddled by the fact that “she can rarely digress from the thought of the good action, the thought of the expression of love” (2016, 57). The mother struggles with how to address her responsibility, and there are moments where she suspects that her particular understanding of ethics, in terms of duties and principles, leads her astray in her relation to the girl. “She considers whether her principles elevate her as a human being, make her better, or if she rather becomes more false and less capable of loving sincerely. Is morality of any use, that is, she supposes, what she is asking. Is her self-control of any use, is her sense of duty”? (2016, 78). The mother suspects that there is a conflict between morality and love, but when she fails to live up to her moral standards this failure also seems to be related to her lack of love for the girl. “She feels

like a custodian, a guardian, one who cares for the girl outwardly” (2016, 112). And, as the novel progresses the mother more and more often shies away from the girl and refuse to relate to her directly: “When they have conflicts, she has begun to deny the girl her gaze. As if she wants to close off that humanity between them” (2016, 111).

The mother is determined to do what is right, but it nonetheless becomes more and more impossible for her to live up to her responsibilities, which appear to her as opposed to her freedom and her life, and, in consequence, the mother comes to find her life with the girl almost unbearable. As we approach the end of the novel, the number of situations where the mother simply fails to do anything good in relation to the girl increases, as in one crucial incident, where the girl, once again, refuses to go to sleep and the restraint of the mother collapses:

She shouts at the girl, as loud as she can. ... She hits and hits, again and again, with a fist in the double bed, right next to the girl. ... The whole time she has the feeling that it could be different. She could have chosen another solution to the conflict. But she does not choose the good, the constructive. *She chooses to let herself go.* That choice seems new to her. (2016, 122, italics added)

The mother feels trapped in a conflict between being responsible and being herself, between doing good and living her life, and the conflict develops into tragedy as she slowly ruins her relationship to her daughter and her husband, acting more and more self-destructively along the way. It is as if her resistance to the girl, and her outright failure to welcome her into her life and accept her presence here, make it impossible for her both to make room for her own life and to address the girl with loving attention; in this way, her attempt to replace love with ethics, to address the girl as a responsibility and a duty, seems to be doomed without some connection to love.

2. Levinas on the Command of the Other

What Lucas does is to show us a complicated web of the wish for and failure of love, of ethics and responsibility in the life of the mother, where responsibility turns out to be insufficient as a replacement for love. But how are we to understand this interplay? In the following, I will turn to an investigation of love and the idea that ethical responsibility arises from the meeting with the other to illuminate some of the complexities and difficulties of the mother's situation, first through the work of Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* and related writings, later through that of Løgstrup.

Levinas approaches the fundamentally ethical character of the relation to the other via a phenomenological analysis of this relation, or, more precisely, by identifying what in this relation escapes and precedes the phenomenological analysis; what appears in the confrontation with the face of the other. As with every other phenomenon, a face has specific qualities that can be made an object of knowledge or willing, but when we are confronted with the face, we are also confronted with something that cannot be reduced to such qualities, the *alterity* of the other that “does not depend on any quality that would distinguish him from me” (1967, 194; cf. 1985, 85). The alterity or the ‘more’ that we encounter in the face is not a fact; the face is not just something that exists, it is also a *presence*, and in contrast to other phenomena, it in this way presents itself as something unique or irreplaceable (cf. 1967, 199).

According to Levinas, the face is what signifies, not anything other than itself, but simply itself. Its significance has a dual character. In one sense, the face is naked, frail, and defenceless, it stands before us without any characterisations behind which to hide. Levinas describes this by saying that the face is exposed, exposed to its own doom in terms of fatigue, illness, and death, but also exposed to other human beings and the threat of violence they represent (1985, 86-7). In another sense, the face is, as Levinas puts it, so weak that it *demands* (1988, 170), it is “entirely

command and authority” (1967, 291). It may seem paradoxical that the presence of utter defencelessness is also the presence of a command, but for Levinas, the encounter with the other is ethical precisely because, as unique, the face is what we are prohibited from “abandoning” (1998, 146). The others create an ethical obligation for the self that is justified by their need; in Robert Stern’s words, “it is precisely through their destitution that they have this authority to command, in a way that is then not merely coercive as it is legitimated in this way” (2019a, 307).⁷

In this sense, the face also presents us with the most fundamental ethical command, “you shall not commit murder” (1967, 199; cf. 1982, 104), that is, “access to the face is straightaway ethical” (1985, 85). Importantly, even if Levinas works to show how the presence of the other establishes our ethical responsibility, he is not trying to develop a normative ethics in any traditional sense; the concrete content of the command is always settled by attention to the need of the other. In Stephen Minister’s words, “ethical responsibility is never simply a matter of rule following or personal virtue, but requires ongoing attention to the good for another as it emerges in particular contexts” (2008, 234).

All of this may make it seem as if, in being confronted with the other, I am confronted with a responsibility that restricts and curbs my freedom. This is true in one sense, as responsibility on Levinas’ view is something that *befalls* me, not something to which I freely and willingly consent. In another sense, however, my responsibility does not restrict my freedom because by calling me to responsibility, the encounter with the other rather establishes the very possibility of freedom. According to Levinas, the human being is not yet an ‘I’ without the relation to the other, because it would then be completely absorbed in its own self-sustainment; a being constituted as enjoyment or happiness (see e.g. 1967, 299). Such a being would be unable to distinguish itself from its surroundings and would therefore – even if conscious – be fundamentally unthinking. This changes only with the meeting with the other.

To think a freedom exterior to my own is the first thought. It marks my very presence in the world. [...] Hence, the relationship between the I and the totality is a relationship with humans whose faces I recognize. Before them, I am guilty or innocent. The condition of thought is a moral consciousness. (1954, 17)

By establishing a real difference in the world, by introducing something that I cannot accommodate or integrate, the confrontation with other singles me out. “The coinciding of freedom with responsibility constitutes the I” (1967, 271), or, as John Llewelyn puts it, “The self owes itself to being addressed, even accused and persecuted by the other” (2004, 106). My individuation is conditioned by the encounter with the other because it identifies me and makes me irreplaceable by giving me a responsibility that cannot be taken over by someone else, and it establishes my freedom by confronting me with a real choice concerning how I will meet this responsibility. For Levinas, there is no way of being an ‘I’ without being subject to ethical responsibility.

Levinas’ description of the connection between the subject and the confrontation with the other illuminates the mother’s experience of the girl’s presence in her life. Of course, this relationship is not the mother’s first confrontation with the alterity of the other, but we can see it as the experience of *being held fast* in this confrontation. When she describes her other relationships, the mother admits that she has been evasive and compliant, that she has, as it says in the book, “managed with the intellect as her driving force, analysis and distance. Never decisions, responsibility, action, courage” (Lucas 2016, 32). With the father, for instance, she has “cultivated a relationship free of conflict” (2016, 33). The mother has tried to avoid the fundamental address of the other, but with the arrival of the girl she is confronted with a presence that cannot be mastered by intellect but can rightly be described by the Levinasian terms of extreme defencelessness and

command, constantly calling for the mother's responsibility and action. Through the situation of the mother, Lucas shows the almost unbearable nature of the responsibility for the other, and of the connected demand to become a defined subject by deciding how to respond to this responsibility. What Levinas allows us to see is that the mother's avoidance is twofold: it is an avoidance of the girl insofar as the girl transcends the boundaries of her understanding and will, and it is an avoidance of acknowledging herself in the confrontation with ethical responsibility. Because of this double avoidance, the mother is unable to care for herself as well as for the girl, and she is instead left at the mercy of the movements of her inner life, her pleasure in the touch of the girl, her rage at the girl's refusal to sleep. In the face of unrelenting ethical responsibility, she becomes an unstable subject, she falters and breaks.

3. Levinas: Natural Love as Intimacy and Exclusivity

There are however also aspects of the mother's situation that cannot be clarified by a Levinasian interpretation, most importantly the intricate interplay between the mother's hope and wish for love on the one side, and her ethical failure on the other. According to Levinas, these two aspects must be unrelated, because there are two important differences between natural love and the ethical relation to other. First, in natural love, we single out a particular other and make that person's life and frailty our own concern, and we become interested in assisting the other because she is crucial to our own life (cf. 1967, 256). According to Levinas, we hereby extend our own search for pleasure and fundamental egoism to include the needs and concerns of the other: "to love is also to love oneself in love, and thus to return to oneself. Love does not transcend unequivocally – it is complacent, it is pleasure and dual egoism" (1967, 266). Love is, in other words, a form of self-love, it is "intimacy, dual solitude" (1967, 265). Second, we are in love preoccupied with the loved one; love involves, in Troy Jollimore's words, "a species of *special* attention and concern and so

cannot be directed equally toward all” (2011, 29). For Levinas, this means that natural love involves an element of exclusion, so that “To love is to exist as if the lover and the loved one were alone in the world” (1954, 20). In this way, love makes us ignorant of and negligent towards the ones not loved, towards the third party, the other of the ethical encounter. Levinas does not mean to say that love is unethical; it is simply *not ethical*, and it can thus be disrupted or arrested by ethics like anything else.⁸

In “The ‘I’ and the Totality” from 1954, Levinas makes similar points concerning Christian love and argues that it is therefore also opposed to ethics. Levinas considers the fundamental Christian demand to love our neighbour, but he rejects this as ethical because neighbour love is “determined by chance proximity, [...] always privilege, even if it is not preference” (1954, 20-1):

Love establishes an intimacy, where the third party has no place. [...] The crisis of religion in contemporary spiritual life stems from the awareness that society goes beyond love, that a third party listens, wounded, to the amorous dialogue, and that with regard to him, the society of love is in the wrong. (1954, 21)

In Elizabeth Thomas’ words, “For Levinas, the love of the neighbour, as it is conceived by traditional religion, is modelled on a private relation to God, which is blind to the existence of third parties—is blind to ‘earthly morality’” (2004, 91).⁹ Because the Christian ideal of neighbour love is a form of love, a “society of love” (1954, 21), it relies on intimacy and exclusivity that leaves out the third party and is thus in opposition to the ethical relation to the other. Levinas’ understanding of love is however made more complicated by the fact that he in later texts establishes a distinction between natural love, Eros, and neighbour love, Agape, which he characterises as “love without Eros, [...] love without concupiscence” and identifies this with “the responsibility for my

neighbour” (1982, 104). Agape is thus related to ethical responsibility, but Levinas also argues that Agape and Eros are two *essentially different forms of love*, because Eros *presupposes* alterity and significance that is established in the ethical relation to the other. Agape is therefore constitutively prior to and independent of Eros.

For Levinas, all forms of natural love rely on proximity and intimacy that excludes the one who we do not love, the truly other, and because of this, natural love is opposed to ethics; “it is not the emotion of love that constitutes [ethics]” (1954, 23). Or, as he puts in *Totality and Infinity*, Eros “does not simply lead, by a more detoured or more direct way, toward the Thou. It is bent in another direction” (1967, 264). We could say that Levinas is in line with a common-sense view of the relationship between natural love and ethics, here phrased by J. David Velleman, that “Love and morality [...] differ in spirit. The moral point of view is impartial and favors no particular individual, whereas favoring someone seems like the very essence of love” (1999, 338). For Levinas, there is a fundamental contrast between the intimacy involved in natural love and ethics as a confrontation with the absolutely other that commands us to transcend what we have ourselves taken to heart.

4. Løgstrup on Love and the Ethical Demand

Løgstrup’s ethics also revolves around the ideas that ethical responsibility is connected to our relation to the other and that the subject is partly constituted by this responsibility, but the way he develops these ideas is somewhat different from that of Levinas. Løgstrup takes as his starting point our *interdependence*. He claims that the most fundamental feature of our existence is that we are creatures who are utterly dependent on each other and that this places us in a mutual and fundamental form of trust, prior to judgements of warrant and appropriateness: “We do not deliberately choose to trust, and thereby deliver ourselves over to another. We constantly live in a

state of being delivered” (1997, 54).¹⁰ For Løgstrup, this means that “our mutual relationships are always relationships of power, the one person being more or less in the power of the other” (1997, 53). No one can live without the help of others and without achieving power over other peoples’ lives, and this aspect of our existence has distinct normative implications, giving rise to our ethical responsibility, because the “power that follows from interdependency, you should use in the other human being’s best interest” (1996, 23, my translation).

Løgstrup terms this *the ethical demand*. “The radical demand says that we are to care for the other person in a way that best serves his or her interest. It says that but nothing more” (1997, 55). The demand is radical because it says one thing and one thing only, namely that my primary responsibility is to take care of the other (Løgstrup here understands ‘interest’ in the sense of what would truly benefit the other); in this way, it is a demand for absolute selflessness.¹¹ This is, however, *all* the ethical demand says, it does not provide any specification of *how* we are best to meet her interests, and, in this way, the demand is silent or unspoken, as Løgstrup puts it. Any specification of the demand must instead come from selfless and fine-tuned attention to the other, our own imagination and understanding of life. According to Løgstrup, we must accept that “the circumstances of the situation determine what will best serve another person. In advance it is not possible to say wherein care of the other person’s life will consist” (1997, 117). Metaphorically, we can see the ethical demand as an arrow pointing to or a light shining on the other,¹² but what is to be done from there, simply consists in whatever I, motivated by concern for the other, come to see as the best way to meet her needs.

This is what lies at the heart of Løgstrup’s position in *The Ethical Demand*, even if somewhat briefly presented. If we then compare his position with that of Levinas, we see that they share several features: that ethics arises from the relation to the other, that this relation is also constitutive of our own existence, and that there is no way to determine what is entailed in ethical responsibility

by using laws or principles. There are, however, also differences between Løgstrup's and Levinas's positions and this becomes apparent if we return to the question, already considered from Levinas's perspective, of whether there are similarities between ethical responsibility and natural love. In contrast to Levinas, Løgstrup answers this question in the affirmative.

Løgstrup takes the ethical demand to express in human terms the demand for neighbourly love (cf. 1997, 2). He therefore finds it important to consider whether it is "an unimportant linguistic accident that the word 'love' is applied both to the human relationship determined by inclination and passion and to the [...] demand" (1997, 124). According to him, it is not. The ethical demand arises because our lives and the interdependence that characterises them are not of our own making; in this sense, because our lives are, as Løgstrup phrases it, "an ongoing gift" (1997, 123). In many cases, the fact that our lives are not of our own making may not be obvious to us or we may not be inclined to accept it, but when we love another person, we come to realise that the other and the love which we share are not our achievements, and we come to see both our own life and the life of the other as indeed gifts. Furthermore, what characterises our relationship to the other in genuine, uncorrupted love (Løgstrup of course acknowledges that there are many ways of corrupting love)¹³ is that the other person and that person's welfare are vital parts of our own life. Here the motives "that one's own life and that of the other may flourish—belong together" (1997, 125). When we succeed in simply loving our spouses, partners, children, parents, and friends, however rare this may be, their best interest is already at the centre of our concern, and in this way, love helps us understand what is entailed in the demand to care for other people. The crucial connection between love and the demand is, in Løgstrup's words, that "love alone corresponds to the fact that some of the other person's life is delivered over to us" (1997, 143). The ethical demand is thus a demand for the form of care that we award the other in love.

The crucial difference between natural love and ethics is that in love, there is no call for the ethical demand, because when we love, we are already (at least to some extent) motivated to do towards the other what is required by love. The demand is superfluous because we have, as Levinas also notes, made the interest of the other our own. For Løgstrup, however, this does not mean that love is a form of self-love, rather, we are genuinely concerned for the loved one (we will return to this question below). This is in fact also what is ethically demanded of us: Not just that we should take care of the other, but that we should not have to be reminded of this through the intervention of the demand. In Løgstrup's words, "what is demanded is that the demand should not have been necessary. This is demand's radical character" (1997, 146).¹⁴ However, in cases where we do not love, where we are not fully motivated by concern for the other and resist that person's intrusion into our life and our responsibility for her, the demand must let itself be heard as a demand to care for the other 'as if' we did indeed love and to do "the deed which love would have us do, albeit for all sorts of other motives" (1997, 143). To listen to the demand is, however, what Løgstrup calls "Making Compromises with the Demand" (1997, Chapter 8), because then we have already failed to be motivated by concern for the other in simple and unmediated care. In such compromises, we fail the demand by replacing loving concern for the other with ethical responsibility.¹⁵

Løgstrup sums up the similarities between natural love and the ethical demand by saying that they share a common understanding of life (cf. 1997, 127), because both love and ethics involves "an understanding of the fact that our life and the person who is the object of our love have been given us as gifts" (1997, 139). The parallel uses of the word "love" in connection to natural love and in connection to the ethical demand are not accidental because both revolve around the concern for the other.

5. Love and Ethics

What we have seen is that there is a real difference between Løgstrup's and Levinas's understandings of the relationship between ethics and natural love, the form of love that concerns a particular person and involves inclination and partiality as for example romantic love and love for our children. For Levinas, we find forms of intimacy and exclusivity at the core of natural love that conflicts with the universality of the ethical encounter with the other, and this makes it love as a form of self-love that is incompatible with ethical responsibility. This view of natural love is in line with the view of Søren Kierkegaard in *Works of Love*. Kierkegaard notes that because natural or romantic love is love of a particular person, it is dependent on the preferences and the contingencies of the lover. In this respect, natural love is a form of *preferential* love, "Forkjerlighed" (1847, 65), or, indeed, a form of self-love. In contrast to this, we in neighbour love let go of all forms of preference and reject anything contingent that may interfere with our love, which means that the distinction between natural love and neighbour love is a distinction between preferential and non-preferential love, or, for Kierkegaard, a distinction between improper and proper love (1847, 66-70). According to Kierkegaard, the only way to eliminate the element of self-love or preferentiality in natural love is to "love your beloved faithfully and tenderly, but let love to your neighbour be the sanctifier in your covenant of union with God" (1847, 74). Alone, without the connection to neighbour love, natural love is for Kierkegaard, as for Levinas, essentially self-centred.

Løgstrup criticises Kierkegaard's view of love on two accounts. Løgstrup argues first that his view of neighbour love is too narrow, consisting "only in the proclamation of Christianity" (1968, 56),¹⁶ and second that Kierkegaard fails to see the good in natural love when he "declares romantic love and friendship for self-love" (1968, 62), a point that also applies to Levinas's view of natural love as dual egoism. In contrast to the views of both Levinas and Kierkegaard, Løgstrup holds that natural love has something in common with both neighbour love and ethics, because they all three depend on and bring out our delivered-ness and the idea of life as a gift, and they all revolve around

our need for care and our ability to care for the other. Natural love is thus related to both neighbour love and ethics. We see this for example in the fact that the more we open ourselves for love and engagement with other people, the more we live in a way that makes the ethical demand superfluous. As Velleman notes, “Love disarms our emotional defenses; it makes us vulnerable to the other”, but it also unlocks insights for us as love “exposes our sympathy to the needs of the other” (1999, 361).¹⁷ Because of this, Løgstrup holds that “to entertain natural love is goodness. In this sense goodness belongs to our human existence” (1997, 140).

We can develop the assessment of the views of Levinas and Løgstrup by returning to the story of the mother. On Levinas’ view, love and ethics are incompatible phenomena, and this means that the mother’s failure of love must be unrelated to her ethical failures. If the mother had been fortunate enough to come to love her child, this would have been a much happier state of affairs, allowing the two to dwell in “dual solitude” (1967, 265), but it would not have been related to her ethical responsibility for the girl because her love would be “bent in another direction” (1967, 264). According to Levinas, the questions of whether the mother feels love for the girl and whether she is able to live up to her responsibility are fundamentally unconnected; the mother rather faces two distinct possibilities: to relate to the girl lovingly, or to do so ethically (or both, of course). The question is, however, whether this is the best description of the mother’s predicament. I think not; the mother’s lack of love and her ethical failure appear to be connected, and to miss this is in a sense to miss the full tragedy of her situation.

If we are to understand the suggested connection between the mother’s inability to love the girl and her subsequent struggle to live up to her ethical responsibility, we must turn to the work of Løgstrup. The connection is illuminated by Løgstrup’s view that the ethical demand becomes necessary when we do not see the other as a valuable and integrated part of our life, that is, when we do not see the possibility of love for the other. In these cases, we make compromises with the

demand, because even if we do what we would have done out of love if we had indeed loved, we do it, not because we love but because it is demanded of us. Of course, Løgstrup also thinks that there is a second and even worse way to fail, namely to reject the demand entirely, to act badly or unethically, to put it bluntly. This form of failure arises from a different source than natural love, the ethical demand and the compromise, namely from that of selfishness, of putting oneself before the other, of letting oneself go, to paraphrase Lucas. In the novel, we see the failures of love, of compromise, and of rejection of the demand in the change from the mother's hope for, but failure of love, her replacing love with responsibility, and her subsequent failure to meet this responsibility. *What Løgstrup shows us is that these failures are indeed connected.*

The fundamental difference between Levinas's and Løgstrup's understandings of the relationship between ethics and love arises from their different views of natural love, the fact that Levinas identifies love with intimacy, while Løgstrup sees love as leading to a genuine concern for the other. Furthermore, it is possible to raise a critical point in relation to Levinas's view of love as intimacy. When we love a person romantically or as a parent or a friend, and that person loves us back, we will (hopefully) have experiences of intimacy, where we are fully submersed in our mutual love, without conflict between our needs. However, we also come to learn that such experiences are essentially momentary; they may last for a short or long time, be frequent or rare, but we cannot and do not continuously stay in the experience of exclusive intimacy of love, because we will need to and want to attend to other aspects of our lives, to projects or people outside of love, and we will want that the loved one is able to do the same. In this way, natural love seems to be essentially open to other aspects of life such as for example ethical responsibilities. The point is that Levinas's view of love as intimacy does not offer us the resources to account for this, the openness of love.

Løgstrup considers this issue. At the beginning of *The Ethical Demand*, he discusses the concept of love in D.H. Lawrence's novels, especially the way the main character of the novel *The Rainbow*, Will Brangwen, experiences his passionate love for his wife as if they were the only two people left in a world of their own. Because of this, Brangwen comes to see the essence of love as this solitary and intimate relation, and he expects his wife to stand in relation only to him, to be in that sense without any other world. The problem is that by wanting to keep her, the loved one, for himself, he leaves no room for her and her own life, and when she attends to parts of her life that reach outside of their love, his love for her becomes unstable, without duration, and is in danger of turning into hate. Lawrence portrays the instability and destructiveness of this view of love, but he sees no way out of the dilemma, because he, in Løgstrup's words, "sets love's intimacy and love's openness over against one another" (1997, 34).

What Lawrence—and we can add: Levinas—fails to see, according to Løgstrup, is that "to the degree that the love experience is found to be compatible with an understanding of life as something given to the individual, to that degree love must necessarily manifest itself in openness" (1997, 35-6). What Løgstrup calls "the real love relationship" (1997, 70), and what we may call his ideal of love, depends on an understanding of the other as a gift, which in turn makes the lover love not only intimacy with the loved one, but the other's self. Natural love is thus also "a mediated relationship to another person's free development of self in a world of their own" (1997, 34);¹⁸ it is essentially open to the life of the loved one. The openness of love arises from love itself, from the concern that the other person will be herself in love which is a necessary condition for fulfilment of the lover's hope that the loved one, as herself, will return this love.

As a form of openness, natural love is a concrete concern for *this* particular person, for her self and all that she needs to do and be in the world. What Løgstrup brings out is the simple and important insight that if I love, I love *you*, in a way that teaches me what it is to care for *you* in all

your particularity, and if I do not care in this way, it is possible to challenge whether what I feel for you truly is love. Moreover, in natural love, I am concerned with the care of the loved one in a way that shows me *the possibility* of being concerned with the care of other people in a similar way.

Løgstrup's view of love as openness has important consequences for how we are to understand the exclusivity of love. Natural love is exclusive because it concerns people who are in some "manner related to us" (1997, 142), as it is stated in the initial definition by Løgstrup. When I love someone, I foreclose the possibility of loving everyone else the same way, and I stand in a relation to those I love that is characterised by specific forms of trust and exclusivity; they depend on me to be concerned with their intimate life in a way that they do not expect of others, and vice versa. However, the call for care that is involved in love's openness is not exclusive. It is a call for care that we may, at least in principle, come to see as relevant in relation to *anyone*. Through natural love we become aware of how any human being is dependent on care from others—this is what our delivered-ness amounts to. The crucial point is that natural love does not resist universality, as Levinas claims. It rather opens for the possibility of universality as we through love's openness come to see a universal human need for care and concern.

Natural love and neighbour love are similar because both involve a call for genuine care for the other. It may seem impossible to care for everyone in this way, but that is for Løgstrup not an objection against neighbour love, it simply shows how hard it is to realise. If we turn to ethics, the same points apply. Natural love and the ethical demand are similar because both involve a call for genuine care for the other, and ethically it may also seem just as impossible to live up to this call. The important insight of Løgstrup's treatment of natural love is that the role of the ethical demand is to remind us of a call for care that we already experience in relation to those whom we love. What characterises ethics is not that the relation to the other is radically different from our other relations or that the form of care called for is different. The difference between love and ethics is

simply that in ethics we must be demanded to care in this way, because we do not love, and because the care of the other may conflict with our own concerns and interests.

Why does the mother of Lucas' story get lost in her relation to the girl? Maybe, because she gets lost in a picture of the girl as a third party commanding her to care, as "a power that must be obeyed unconditionally" (Lucas 2016, 20). Maybe the mother's focus on the command of the girl is part of what fuels her experience of a conflict between her own life and the life of the girl. If she had been able to embrace another view of the ethical relation to the other, what the mother could have done instead, in the absence of love, was to strive to come to see the girl, not as someone who must be obeyed, but simply as someone who is in need of care, given not in response to a command or a responsibility, but in response to *her*, to who she is. This, I take it, would be Løgstrup's suggestion, and rightly so.¹⁹

Reference list

Andersen, H.C. 1847. *The Story of a Mother*, Odense: The Hans Christian Andersen Centre 2015.

Baier, Anette 1986. "Trust and Antitrust". *Ethics* 96 (2): 231-260.

---. 1991. *Trust*. Princeton University: The Tanner Lectures on Human Values.

Bernasconi, Robert and David Wood, eds. (1988). *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, London: Routledge.

Christensen, Anne-Marie Søndergaard 2015. "Relational Views of Ethical Obligation in Wittgenstein, Levinas and Løgstrup," *Ethical Perspectives* 22 (1): 15–38.

Critchley, Simon and Robert Bernasconi, eds. (2002), *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dews, Peter 2017. "The Configuration of the Ethical Demand in Løgstrup and Levinas" in Fink and Stern, eds. (2017, 102-129).

- Fink, Hans 2017. "Løgstrup's Point: The Complementarity between the Ethical Demand and All Other Moral Demands" in Fink and Stern, eds. (2017, 54-79).
- Fink, Hans and Robert Stern, eds. 2017. *What is Ethically Demanded?: K.E. Løgstrup's Philosophy of Moral Life*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Grøn, Arne 2017. "The Ethical Demand: Kierkegaard, Løgstrup, and Levinas", in Fink and Stern, eds. (2017, 130-150).
- Jegstrup, Elsebet, ed. 2004. *The New Kierkegaard*, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Jollimore, Troy 2011. *Love's Vision*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, Søren 1847. *Works of Love*, trans. by H.V. Hong & E.H. Hong, New York: Harper 2009.
- Kjølbye, Marie Louise 2016. "Når mor er vred," *Information*, February 26.
- Kronqvist, Camilla 2011. "The Promise That Love Will Last," *Inquiry*, 54 (6): 650-668.
- Lagerspetz, Olli 1996. *Trust: The Tacit Demand*, Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Levinas, Emmanuel 1954. "The I and the Totality," reprinted in (1998, 13-38).
- . 1967. *Totality and Infinity: An Essays in Exteriority*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- . 1982. "Philosophy, Justice, and Love," reprinted in (1998, 103-212).
- . 1985. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- . 1988. "The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas" in Bernasconi and Wood, eds. (1988, 169–180).
- . 1998. *Entre Nous: Thinking of the Other*, London: The Athlone Press.
- Llewelyn, John 2004. "On the Borderline of Madness" in Jegstrup, ed. (2004, 88-110).
- Lucas, Maja 2016. *Mor: En historie om blodet*, Copenhagen: C&K.

- Lucas, Maja 2018. *Mother: A Story of Blood*, (excerpt), translation by Steve Schein,
<http://majalucas.dk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Mother-Oversættelse-af-Maja-Lucas-Mor-ENDELIG-VERSION.pdf>.
- Løgstrup, K.E. 1938. "Duty or Responsibility", translation of "Pligt eller ansvar" by Hans Fink and Robert Stern, <https://ethicaldemand.files.wordpress.com/2016/05/logstrup-pligt-eller-ansvar-translation.pdf>.
- . 1968. *Opgør med Kierkegaard*, Aarhus: Klim 2013.
- . 1996. *Ethiske begreber og problemer*, Aarhus: Klim 2014.
- . 1997. *The Ethical Demand*, translated by Theodor I. Jensen and Gary Puckering, Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair 2010. "Danish Ethical Demands and French Common Goods: Two Moral Philosophies", *European Journal of Philosophy* 18(1): 1–16.
- Minister, Stephen 2008. "Works of Justice, Works of Love: Kierkegaard, Levinas, and an Ethics Beyond Difference" in Simmons and Wood, eds. (2008, 229-243).
- Morgan, Michael L., ed. 2019. *The Oxford Handbook of Levinas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sandford, Stella 2002. "Levinas, Feminism, and the Feminine" in Critchley and Bernasconi, eds. (2002, 139-160).
- Simmons, J. Aaron and David Wood, eds. 2008. *Kierkegaard and Levinas: Ethics, Politics, and Religion*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Stern, Robert 2019a. "Levinas, Darwall, and Løgstrup on Second-Personal Ethics: Command or Responsibility?" in Morgan, ed. (2019, 303-20).
- . 2019b. *The Radical Demand in Løgstrup's Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Thomas, Elizabeth 2004. *Emmanuel Levinas. Ethics, Justice, and the Human Beyond Being*, New York: Routledge.

Velleman, J. David 1999. "Love as a Moral Emotion", *Ethics*, 109 (2): 338-374.

Williams, Bernard 1981. *Moral Luck*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹ For an argument for why and how the ethics of both Løgstrup and Levinas can be considered second-personal, see Stern 2019a. For an argument that they can be considered relational, see Christensen 2015.

² This similarity is also reflected in a steady increase in the number of articles comparing the ethics of Levinas and Løgstrup, see e.g. MacIntyre 2010, Christensen 2015, Dews 2017, Grøn 2017 and Stern 2019a; see also Stern 2019b, Chapter 9.

³ In the following, I will use Løgstrup's expression 'natural love' for romantic love as well as love for family and friends.

⁴ Translation of the title and all translations of quotes from *Mother* are my own. The first chapter of the book is translated into English by Steve Schein (Lucas 2018).

⁵ The controversial character of this subject was mentioned in several reviews; one critic noted that Lucas "breaks new ground for narratives about women's lives with her shocking story about a young mother that cannot stand her child" (Kjølbye, 2016, 6; my translation).

⁶ The mother of Andersen's story only gives up her quest when Death challenges her to choose another child, another loved one, to deliver into the hands of God in the place of her son.

⁷ Stern argues that 'command' is a better description of the call of the face than responsibility. For support of this argument, see also 1985, 89 and Dews 2017.

⁸ In his early writings, Levinas considers the feminine as the model of alterity *par excellence*, but he gives up this idea from the time of "The 'I' and the Totality", where he, in line with the later *Totality and Infinity*, sees a contrast between *eros* and ethics. As I focus on this contrast, I will not discuss his earlier understanding of the feminine; for critical discussion see Sandford 2002 and Thomas 2004, Chapter 5.

⁹ As we will see below, Løgstrup rejects the Levinasian idea that neighbour love depends on proximity and exclusion.

¹⁰ In this way, Løgstrup's notion of trust is more radical than that of Anette Baier, who defines trust as "accepted vulnerability to another's possible but not expected ill will [...] toward one" (Baier 1986, 235; see also 1991, 113).

According to Løgstrup, we do not accept vulnerability, it is a fact of life. For a work that treats both views of trust, see Lagerspetz 1996.

¹¹ The implied demand for selflessness is similar to the form of responsibility for the other identified in Levinas's ethics; in both cases, the needs of the other always come first. Løgstrup is however not saying that I cannot have concerns and projects of my own, because this would be to disregard my own life.

¹² I owe this metaphor to Hans Fink. For an exemplary exposition of the main elements of the ethical demand, see Fink 2017.

¹³ See e.g. 1997 section 7.4.

¹⁴ This point is related to Bernard Williams's idea that if a person refers to impersonal and impartial standards of morality in order to justify an action (for example that of saving her wife instead of a total stranger) this is in fact "one thought too many" (1981, 18). However, while Williams aims to show the essentially *personal* character of ethical thought, Løgstrup aims to show how our care for the other ought to be *unmediated*.

¹⁵ According to Løgstrup, taking on responsibility is the least of compromises available to us, because responsibility is the form of morality that comes closest to "the common life, for whose sake morality exists" (1996, 41) and establishes the right aim for ethics, "namely, for the other's sake!" (1938, 6). Acting out of duty is a worse form of compromise because it cuts us off from the direct relation to the other.

¹⁶ All translations of quotes from *Controverting Kierkegaard (Opgør med Kierkegaard, 1968)* are my own.

¹⁷ Camilla Kronqvist makes the related point that "[c]oming to see people as vulnerable to fortune is itself an expression of love" adding that "loving someone also means understanding the ones we love as vulnerable in respects they would not be if it were not for our love" (2011, 665).

¹⁸ Translation amended.

¹⁹ I want to express my gratitude for valuable feedback to Maja Lucas, Patrick Fessenbecker as well as the editors, Irene McMullin and Robert Stern. I would also like to thank Christian Benne and Rita Felski for the opportunities to present my ideas at research groups at University of Copenhagen and University of Southern Denmark, respectively. Work on the article was supported by the Danish National Research Foundation, grant no. DNRF127.