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To cite this article: Anne-Marie Søndergaard Christensen & Cecilie Eriksen (2021) Each Other's World, Each Other's Fate—Løgstrup's Conception of Basic Trust, *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 29:1, 24-43, DOI: [10.1080/09672559.2021.1885136](https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559.2021.1885136)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672559.2021.1885136>



Published online: 08 Feb 2021.



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Each Other's World, Each Other's Fate—Løgstrup's Conception of Basic Trust

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ABSTRACT

Since the publication of Annette Baier's agenda-setting article entitled 'Trust and Antitrust', trust has become an increasingly popular topic, not only in moral philosophy and epistemology but also in the fields of economics, psychology, anthropology and the social sciences. Yet, the importance of K.E. Løgstrup's highly original work on trust is still not fully recognised. In this article, we try to remedy this oversight by comparing three dominant trends in the broad and varied field of contemporary writings on trust with Løgstrup's conception of the phenomenon of *basic trust*. The three trends are the attempts to develop theories providing *explanations* or *justifications* of trust and the almost all-pervasive *individualism* of contemporary thinking on trust. Our aim is to show how Løgstrup's concept of basic trust, along with his understanding of vulnerability, interdependence, and the relational character of our lives gives us reasons to be critical of these dominant trends. Furthermore, we argue that Løgstrup offers us valuable insights into the fundamental and ubiquitous, but often overlooked phenomenon of basic trust, and that this form of trust is essentially relational in character.

KEYWORDS K.E. Løgstrup; A. Baier; N. Luhmann; R. Hardin; trust; vulnerability; interdependence; relational ethics

'We *are* each other's world and each other's fate. There are, however, many reasons why we usually ignore this fact' (Løgstrup 2020, 16)

Introduction

In 1986, Annette Baier could write about trust that 'few philosophers have written directly on this topic' (1986, 231). However, her biography contained no reference to K.E. Løgstrup whose main work, *The Ethical Demand*, presented a substantial philosophical investigation of trust. It was first published in Danish in 1956 and then translated into English in 1971, but at the time, it was only reviewed in theological journals. It was not until the

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English version was published again in 1997 in a slightly amended version with an introduction by Alasdair MacIntyre and Hans Fink that Løgstrup came to be known by English-speaking philosophers.¹ Aside from MacIntyre, present-day thinkers such as Zygmunt Bauman (2007), Simon Critchley (2007), and Robert Stern (2017, 2019) now engage with his works.²

Since the publication of Baier's agenda-setting work, trust has become an increasingly popular topic, not only in moral philosophy and epistemology but also in the fields of economics, psychology, biology, anthropology, and the social sciences. Nonetheless, the importance of Løgstrup's work is still not fully recognised – something that is reflected in the fact that many introductions to the concept of 'trust' still lack references to Løgstrup.³ We find this very unfortunate, as Løgstrup's moral philosophy, in our view, points to a blind spot in contemporary research on trust: the lack of engagement with and even awareness of the phenomenon of *basic trust*. In the following, we will sketch three dominant trends in the otherwise varied contemporary thinking on trust, namely, the attempts to develop theories providing *explanations* and *justifications* of trust and the *individualism* that pervades this research as well as much of contemporary moral philosophy.⁴ We then demonstrate how Løgstrup's concept of basic trust along with his understanding of vulnerability, interdependence, and a relational view of the phenomenon of trust as well as ethics provide us with reasons to be critical of these dominant trends, and we will further argue that basic trust is the most fundamental form of trust, necessary for other, more complicated forms of trust. In doing so, we hope to demonstrate how Løgstrup offers us much-needed insights into an ubiquitous, but often overlooked form of trust, and how his thinking on interdependence may play an important role in countering the individualism that still pervades contemporary moral philosophy.

Theories of Trust: Explanation and Justification

In contemporary thinking on trust, questions concerning *explanation* and *justification* often take centre stage, such as 'Why is there trust in societies?' and 'When can trust be justified?' Furthermore, discussions of these issues are often connected when researchers use explanations of *why* we trust as part of the justification for why we, all things being equal, *ought* to trust. We will look at both trends in this section.⁵

Given the ongoing violent history of humankind, it may seem as a mystery calling for an explanation that we can ever find such a thing as trust – between two people or between people in a society. According to Ostrom, it has been one of the biggest challenges in the thinking of social science since Hobbes, to figure out 'how groups of individuals gain trust [...] How do individuals gain trust in other individuals?' (Ostrom 2003, 19, 63). Furthermore, researchers have been interested in finding explanations for trust, because it has been proven to play

important roles in societies owing to its correlation with various valued phenomena, such as economic wealth, effective political institutions, low rates of criminality, and high levels of collective happiness and well-being (Rothstein and Uslaner 2005; Hardin 2006, 40, 77; Hosking 2014, 4–8; Faulkner and Simpson 2017, 5–6; Henrich 2020, 48). However, not any explanation of trust will do. As Russell Hardin reminds us, ‘we must want a conception of trust that yields explanations of behaviour and social institutions [...] and] that can be explained in its own right as the outcome of behaviours guided by some central concern or motivation of the relevant actors’ (2006, 16). An explanation of trust must account for the occurrence of trust from a collective as well as an individual perspective, and the explanation must be related to interest or concerns of (at least) the majority of the people involved. Amongst explanations for why trust exists, two especially popular types have emerged, looking at trust as a ‘beneficial social glue’ and as a necessary ‘complexity-reduction’, respectively. We will explain both concepts below.

One popular type of explanation for trust is that it has provided human beings with benefits from an evolutionary perspective (Axelrod and Hamilton 1981; Ostrom and Walker 2003). ‘Trust and trustworthiness are ubiquitous in our society, which suggests that, in reality, some mechanisms that favour the evolution of trust and trustworthiness must be at play’ (Kumar, Capraro, and Perc 2020, 2). Groups of hunters and gatherers who have been able to show trust in one another have acquired a survival advantage, because they could more easily coordinate hunts, distribute work based on skills and so on. Trust greases the wheels of society in contrast to mistrust and conflicts, which are impractical and expensive for a group that needs to cooperate in order to survive. Furthermore, if we, like Annette Baier, imagine two babies, one suspicious towards the food offered by its parents and reluctant to eat, and the other trustful, eating the offered food, then it is not unreasonable to assume that the child naturally disposed to trusting would have the higher survival rate and the better childhood – at least in the vast majority of cases (1986, 241–43). In this way, naturally trusting babies would to a larger degree be the ones to pass on their trust-disposed genes. Given that trust acts like a ‘beneficial social glue’, evolution has selected for trust, and that is the explanation for why most people today have a biologically grounded disposition to show trust.

In comparison, some thinkers are more radical in their explanation for why trust exists, arguing that trust is not just of some benefit to human life, but outright *necessary* to it. A version of this type of explanation is found in the influential sociologist Niklas Luhmann’s pioneering work, *Trust and Power*, first published in 1979. He notes that, as part of our everyday horizon, we trust the world around us as well as other people; trust is in this way ‘a basic fact of social life’ (2018, 5). We can of course choose not to trust others

in specific situations, but if a person had to live in complete absence of trust, this would have fatal consequences:

He would be prey to a vague sense of dread, to paralyzing fears. He would not even be capable of formulating definite distrust and making that a basis for precautionary measures, since this would presuppose that he trusts in other ways. Anything and everything would be possible. Such abrupt confrontation with the complexity of the world at its most extreme is beyond human endurance. (2018, 5)

According to Luhmann, human beings *have* to trust others and the world in order to be able to live.⁶ We cannot take a stand on all available possibilities of the world, and we cannot do everything ourselves; for instance, we cannot check the proof for everything we believe. Thus, we are *forced* to show trust, and we are also justified in doing so, if our lives are to be manageable (see also Hosking 2014, 24, 43; Hawley 2012, 1–2). As part of our adaptation to the world, humans have developed trust as an effective form of complexity-reduction that is necessary for survival.

What we have presented are two explanations for the existence of trust which revolve around the idea that trust is beneficial, that ‘trust pays’, because it makes human life easier, safer, richer, happier, and so on. However, the uniformly positive approach to trust displayed by many such explanations have worried several thinkers. As Russell Hardin points out, ‘we do not simply want to increase trust per se, because we should not trust the untrustworthy. [...] To trust the untrustworthy can be disastrous’ (2006, 1, 27). Trust can be beneficial, but surely only if one places one’s trust in the *right* things and not in cheating spouses, fraudulent companies, or corrupt institutions. This observation leads us to the second dominant theme in contemporary thinking on trust, the theme of when trust is justified.

Many moral philosophers argue that we should not place our trust blindly in others, and that we should be able to answer a question such as ‘Who should I trust in which way and why?’ (Baier 1986, 231–2). Baier explains that the reason why we do not – like children – place our trust blindly is ‘that not all things that thrive when there is trust between people, and which matter, are things that should be encouraged to thrive. Exploitation and conspiracy, as much as justice and fellowship, thrive better in an atmosphere of trust’ (1986, 231–32). If we are too naïve when placing trust, we risk abuse, disappointment, and betrayal, and these risks make it dangerous, irrational and, in some cases, even immoral to trust without good reasons. Therefore, we need to use our judgement and acquire knowledge and reasons that justify peoples’ and institutions’ trustworthiness before we place our trust in them (see e.g. O’Neill 2002; Hardin 2006, 3, 27; McLeod 2015).⁷

Baier’s suggestion for a solution to the problem concerning the inherent risk of trust is that philosophers work out a test for trust-relations that can

show us which relations we are justified in having and which not (1986, 253–5). In Baier's analysis, trust is a relationship wherein a person trusts another person to take care of something that is of value to him/her (e.g. I trust the day care worker to care for my child or I trust my spouse to manage our shared economy). This analysis demonstrates that to trust is to be *vulnerable*, because in trusting someone, we depend on another person's good will with regard to something that we consider valuable (not just our money, but our health, our loved ones and so on). Baier thus defines trust as 'accepted vulnerability to another's power to harm one, a power inseparable from the power to look after some aspect of one's good' (1991, 113; see also 1986, 235, 2004, 187). In the mere act of trusting, we are vulnerable, and for Baier, this is a form of *accepted* vulnerability that we must try to manage, awarding it only to people who actually deserve to be trusted in this way. In light of this, it makes sense to think that for trust to be justified, one will have to make some form of assessment before placing trust in another person. Baier considers a test that can be used on long-term relations between two people, and which investigates the involved persons' good will against each other. For Baier, the basic premise for the assessment of whether trust is justified is that the continued existence of trust should depend neither on successful threats against one of the trusting parties, nor on successful cover ups of any breaches of trust (1986, 255). If there can be absolute openness about what *motivates* the trusting parties without loss of trust, then the trust relation is in morally good order and thus justified (1986, 257–9).

Certainly, Baier notes that we do not always have the time to make explicit, conscious judgements about whether to trust other people, and that we do not always have a need to do so. However, we are always responsible for having sufficient reasons to trust others, and in cases where such reasons are lacking, we ourselves have some responsibility for possible breaches of trust. As Baier phrases it, '[r]easonable trust will require good grounds for such confidence in another's good will, or at least the absence of good grounds for expecting their ill will or indifference' (1986, 235). With her requirement of reasons and grounds for trusting, Baier is thus describing trust as something which it is in our own power to give and to withhold, and which can be subjected to explicit reasoning and judgement.

Another take on justified trust is that of Russell Hardin who defines trust in terms of self-interest with his 'encapsulated interest theory'. His starting point is that trust is something that we should handle with care, placing it only with those whom we judge to be trustworthy. In this way, we have some power over whom we trust, and our trust is something that we should keep within definable boundaries: 'As a rule, we trust only those with whom we can have a rich enough relationship to judge them trustworthy and even then we trust only over certain ranges of actions' (2006, 18). Hardin does however also acknowledge that we have strong reasons to trust in the trustworthy,

because in general, trusting relationships are mutually beneficial. The question is what gives us reasons to consider others trustworthy? The main source of such reasons is the interest of these others to continue their relationship with us. The relevant person could, for instance, be emotionally tied to us as our parent or our child, or that person could be economically dependent on us as our employee or the owner of a restaurant we frequent. In these cases, it would have negative consequences for that person if he/she did not take our interests into account (2006, 24). According to Hardin, it is rational and well-founded for me to find other people trustworthy if they have encapsulated (some of) my interests in their own interests, that is, if they count (some of) my interests as their own *just because they are my interest*. When we have proof that the other person has encapsulated our interest in their own interest in this way, then it is justified and reasonable to place trust in them (2006, 29, 34).

Ever since Baier raised the question regarding who we can trust and how, many philosophers besides Hardin have worked out theories of how we can justify trust such as other examples of rational choice theories, functional theories, contract theories and communitarian theories (see e.g. McLeod 2015; Faulkner and Simpson 2017; Hardin 2006; Hosking 2014, 34–7). Despite significant internal differences (e.g. disagreement about whether trust is to be understood as an individual or a social phenomenon) most of these theories share certain basic assumptions by presupposing more or less the same framework for how trust should be understood, focusing on such concepts as ‘calculated risk’, ‘rationality’, ‘proof’, ‘guarantees’, ‘expectations’, ‘certainty/uncertainty’, ‘good/bad reasons’, ‘trustworthiness’, ‘justified/unjustified’, ‘reliability’, ‘safety’ and concepts related to Baier’s notion of ‘accepted vulnerability’ (for this analysis, see also Lagerspetz 1996, 2–3).

The framework surrounding contemporary theories of trust is often characterised by a basic assumption of *individualism*. For something to be an explanation or justification of trust it has to refer to the interests of the individual – if nothing else in the minimum sense of being conducive to the survival of the individual’s genes. We could say that Hardin is making a general characterisation of the aim of contemporary theories when we above cited him for advising thinkers to look for a conception where trust is ‘the outcome of behaviours guided by some central concern or motivation of the relevant actors’ (2006, 16). This individualism comes out clearly in the movement from trust to trustworthiness notable in the theories of both Baier and Hardin. In contrast to trust, which is a phenomenon somehow placed *between* persons, trustworthiness is used to characterise individuals and can be assessed by individuals. The focus on trustworthiness is thus a way of cutting the phenomenon of trust into two related phenomena both of which clearly concern individuals namely the phenomena of deserving and judging trust, respectively. The individualism of most contemporary theories of trust

is nourished by the idea that the life of the individual unfolds in the shadow of more or less specific future risks. We could say that these theories, albeit in different ways, correspond with the logic and *telos* of what Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens have coined ‘the risk society’ – a worldview that emerged from the ashes of the Chernobyl accident in 1986, but which is still very much alive today, as shown by the handling of more recent events, such as the 9/11 terror attacks and the COVID-19 pandemic.

If we are to understand how Løgstrup’s conception of trust relates to such theories, it is important to note that he does not share the understanding of the human and human life central to most contemporary theories on trust, that is, he does not accept the premises of individualism and the risk society, but adheres to a very different worldview. To unpack this, we will develop two ideas central to Løgstrup’s thought, first, his concept of ‘basic trust’ understood as ‘sovereign expression of life’, and second, his relational approach to trust and ethics, more generally.

Explanation and Justification Comes to an End: Basic Trust as Sovereign Expression of Life

How does Løgstrup’s conception of trust relate to theories offering explanations or justifications of trust?⁸ To begin answering this question, we can recall how many contemporary theories on trust aim to explain why humans trust with reference to something else, for instance, that biological evolution has selected for natural trust or that trust is necessary to cope with the complexity of life. What is shared among these explanations is that they make trust *conditional* on some other human interest, like survival. Løgstrup agrees wholeheartedly that trust, as a matter of fact, is a general trait of human life, and that trust is both beneficial and necessary for human survival and flourishing.⁹ Where Løgstrup disagrees is that he does not consider such benefit and necessity an explanation for why people generally show trust, and in fact, trust is for Løgstrup not a phenomenon that in its most elementary form stands in any need of explanation. To provide some background for this rejection of the need for general explanations of trust, it is necessary to introduce some key features of Løgstrup’s view of trust. The first feature is that Løgstrup is not investigating all forms of trust, but what he most often terms *basic* trust. According to Løgstrup, there are different forms of trust, and in line with this, he distinguishes between what he sees as forms of advanced, complex trust and fundamental, basic trust (1961, 192–3; see also 2020, 18).¹⁰ Basic trust is for instance the unmediated trust that we may show other people in situations as everyday as starting a conversation with another person or asking for directions in an unfamiliar city, but it is also the general and unmediated trust that we have towards parents and spouses. In his work, Løgstrup is primarily interested in basic trust, especially the way this form of

trust is at stake and unfolds in direct interactions between two people. Even if he mentions more advanced forms of trust (such as the trust we grant restaurant owners or kindergarten employees to take care of our children), he does not share an important interest of modern trust research in the further conditions for the existence of advanced forms of trust, such as those present in and necessary for well-functioning civil societies, democracies, businesses and economic systems.

The second central feature of Løgstrup's work on trust is that, methodologically, he adheres to a phenomenological approach. He is trying to understand the phenomena of trust as it is experienced in human life, and here explanations are of little help. Knowing what causes trust, or what makes it a necessary feature of our lives, does not necessarily help us understand the characteristics of trust as we experience it, and such explanations may even prove to be misleading or distorting when we attempt to describe the lived phenomenon of trust.

The third and final feature is that Løgstrup believes that there are phenomena in human life which are fundamental, and which, for that very reason, cannot be explained, scientifically or otherwise. Love, sincerity and mercy are some examples of such fundamental phenomena of human lives, basic trust is another, and there is simply not anything more fundamental that such phenomena can be understood and explained through. The existence of basic trust is a condition for more advanced forms of trust, but the existence of a fundamental form of trust is not something that can be proven positively (1978, 10, 88, n, 111–3, 266–8). What Løgstrup does instead, is to give phenomenological descriptions of everyday situations that show how our lives are characterised by the presence of basic trust, while stressing that such descriptions can never be *exhaustive* (1961, 204). For this reason, he sees metaphors as heuristically useful tools because they can be used to highlight different aspects of basic traits of life such as trust without misleading us into thinking that we have explained these phenomena (2020, 13, 16).

With these features of Løgstrup's thinking in place, we can understand why he rejects both the possibility of providing explanations of basic trust, and the idea that such explanations can be used to make the phenomenon more understandable. Furthermore, Løgstrup also rejects the related ideas that explanations of trust can be used to justify its presence in human life, and even the idea that we need such a general justification of trust. One of Løgstrup's responses to such a line of thinking is the following:

If a life in trust of what the other says is true, really rested on an inference, then it would be a life in great precariousness when one considers the weak and flimsy foundation on which we infer. Most often, we infer from very few cases, and the cases, from which we infer, and the case to which we infer, are certainly opaque. [...] If we built on such a precarious and fragile foundation, our lives had to be marked by the utmost insecurity. But this is not how it is. (1978, 87–8; translation by the authors)

If all forms of trust were based on inference and proof, then our life would be a life characterised by ‘the utmost insecurity’, because no matter how solid the proof, it would still leave something undetermined. However, even if the level of trust and certainty in human life differs from place to place and from one situation to another, it is nowhere characterised by the greatest possible insecurity and lack of trust. This is so, according to Løgstrup, because basic trust is not the result of reasoning and does not rest on proofs. It has another origin. When we trust, for example, what another person says, then we generally do so as a manifestation of what Løgstrup terms ‘a *sovereign expression of life*’ (1971, 17, 1972, 17).¹¹

Sovereign expressions of life are basic ways of being in the world as human beings that we have not authored ourselves, neither as individuals nor as community. They are not learned, chosen or willed by us, but they express the form of life of beings such as ourselves.¹² To be a human being is, among other things, to show basic trust.¹³ Løgstrup presents us with a view of the human and human life that is different from that found in the majority of research on trust today which, we would argue, tend to over-empathise the role and power of choice, intellect and rationality in human life, and he does so by arguing that at this basic level, trust is not justified *or* unjustified; rather it just *is* (1978, 267, note 1).¹⁴ This is why Løgstrup’s distinction between ‘simple, basic trust’ and ‘advanced, complex’ forms of trust is important; he presents a view of basic trust as something fundamental to human lives, while allowing that investigations of more advanced and less universal forms of trust and trustworthiness may show characteristics very different from that of basic trust. However, he is also claiming that basic trust is the indispensable condition for advanced forms of trust which is why theories of advanced forms of trust cannot account for the full nature of trust – they simply exclude the most fundamental form of trust, basic trust.

Løgstrup is also sceptical of the idea that we are in general required to justify individual ascriptions of trust; an idea central to the theories of justification discussed above. An assumption shared by many of these theories is that morally commendable trust is, or ideally ought to be, the result of some form of reasoned inference from proofs of trustworthiness, so that our trust is reasonable and justified. In Løgstrup’s work we find reasons to challenge this assumption and the related view of trust. The problem with the idea of justifying trust is that when we introduce reasons to trust, the phenomenon of basic trust, of simply meeting the other person in trust, *dissolves*. ‘If a person in distress is helped, because too many people in distress would shake society to its core, it is no longer compassion. If one has an intention with one’s trust, then the trust is fake, not to be regarded as something other than mistrust’ (1978, 111; translation by the authors). In many situations wherein we trust there is no motive or reason behind our trust, and the introduction of such a reason will in fact counter or eliminate the trust it is trying to support. If I trust you because it will make our collaboration more effective, or

because I judge that you have made my interests your own, then my trust in you is already contaminated. Something has led me to consider whether I will be safe or justified in trusting you, and this means that my primary attitude of basic trust is already compromised by an element of mistrust, calling for reassurance. What I have is no longer basic trust, but something more complicated and less fundamental. In this way, Løgstrup's phenomenological investigations show that the nature of basic trust excludes the possibility of an underlying intention or reason. Basic trust is *unconditional* and as such it excludes the possibility of external justifications (Løgstrup 1978, 86–90, 111–3, 266–7; Fink 2017, 66; Stern 2017, 289–90).¹⁵

The Løgstrupian objection that contemporary discussion of trust is really talking about a different phenomenon than trust is related to that critical point often raised against Baier's conception of trust that she mistakes trust for a species of reliance. Lars Hertzberg has raised this issue by unfolding a fundamental difference between trust and reliance, that the question of whether a person is reliable and can be depended on is a question that we ask with a specific purpose, but the same point does not apply in the case of trust (1988), and Niker and Sullivan further note that much of the discussion on trust 'has maintained Baier's initial focus on trust as a species of reliance' (2018, 175).¹⁶ In our view, Løgstrup would agree with both critical points and argue that one way out of this predicament would be to turn to a more detailed investigation of basic trust. So, to this task we now turn.

Against Individualism: Interdependence and the Relational Character of Trust and Ethics

Above, we argue that Løgstrup demonstrates the impossibility of explaining and justifying basic trust, but we also want to argue that he diverges most radically from mainstream Western thinking on trust by challenging the individualism underlying much of this thinking. To see how, we need to understand the unique way that Løgstrup ties together the concepts of *trust* and *vulnerability*, and to do this, we approach his thinking through another idea central to his philosophy that one human being is always 'delivered up [*udleveret*] to another' (2020, 15 and *passim*). This idea illuminates how Løgstrup in his writings connects trust and another fundamental phenomenon, or as he would phrase it, fact of human life: The fact that we are always (at least partly) vulnerable to other people. Løgstrup's most illuminating analysis of how our lives are essentially and irreducibly intertwined with one another can be found in the opening of his main work, *The Ethical Demand*. As he writes in a later commentary, one of the main themes of this work is the analysis of 'how the life of one person is interwoven with the life of another' (2007, 10), of the interdependence and vulnerability of human beings.

Løgstrup highlights that it is impossible for two people to have something do with each other without the one having a direct relationship to and possible

control over the other. From a first-person perspective, I expose myself to the responses of the other and the other's influence on my life, and this means that we can best characterise our basic relation to other people by 'using the metaphors of "having something of a human being's life in one's hands," and "that something of the other human being's life is delivered up to us"' (2020, 23). Løgstrup is aware that the ways in which that we are delivered up to each other, that is, the ways in which our lives are intertwined, differs enormously. As he notes, '[i]t can be a very small matter, a passing mood, a dampening or quickening of spirit, a disgust one deepens or takes away. But it may also be of tremendous significance, so that it is simply up to the individual whether the other person's life flourishes or not' (15). Our influence over others 'can range from their most passing mood to their entire fate' (24). What is important, is that this variation should not be used to hide the fundamental fact that to be a human being is to be interdependent and thus to be constantly exposed or vulnerable to other people's influence over one's life. Løgstrup thus takes as his starting point the observation that 'we *are* each other's world, and each other's fate' (16). We may be prone to overlook this fact because it is so basic to and ingrained in our lives that it may be almost impossible to discern, but also because, in many cases, we find it highly disturbing that we are so exposed to others and that others are so exposed to us. However this may be, that this fact is inconvenient, does not make it less of a fact and does not mean that we can avoid it.

We can get a better grasp of the phenomena of being delivered up to the other, if we examine a couple of examples illustrating this notion. Løgstrup often uses examples of infants and children because 'the child, unlike an adult, cannot display a merely reserved form of trust. In order to do so, one must have learnt to hold oneself in reserve' (15). In the case of children, we therefore also see the possibly devastating consequences of disappointed trust as well as the insecurity and the wearing down of life that breaches of trust can ultimately result in. However, for Løgstrup, interdependence is just as fundamental in the life of a well-functioning adult as in the life of a child:

But even though the relationship between the child and the adult is the place where an individual is delivered up to another in the most far-reaching and fateful sense—which is also why it is here that science has been able to observe it—it nonetheless holds, in various degrees, of all the relationships which we have to one another. (15)

If we look closely, the fact of our being delivered up to one another shows in many of the activities most fundamental to human life such as in the most ordinary cases of communication. 'In mere conversation, one delivers oneself up. This can be seen by the way in which, through the very act of addressing another person, a particular demand is made on them' (14), Løgstrup notes, adding some pages later that no matter the form of communication, 'it always consists in daring to come forward to be met by the other. This is at the root of it,

and is the basic phenomenon of ethical life' (17). We also see the interdependence embedded in social institutions, notably in the institution of marriage, where people, in a very direct way, hold another person's life in their hands as it is up to them 'whether their spouse's life flourishes or not: one kind of inconsiderateness or another can make marriage into a form of lifelong suffering for the spouse' (24). What the examples show is that being delivered over to the other is an inescapable aspect of human life.

To Løgstrup, our fundamental interdependence and vulnerability is what make trust a central phenomenon in our relations to each other, and this shows how trust is not something handed over from one person to another; rather, trust is one of the forms that our most basic relationships takes, and it is built into the very fabric of our lives together. As Løgstrup writes, 'life is simply created over our heads, such that it cannot be lived in any other way than that one human being, through trust that is either shown or desired, delivers themselves up to the other human being' (18).¹⁷ This starting point means that Løgstrup's view of trust differs radically from the views of trust presented above, because he sees basic trust not as something that individuals can bestow and be awarded, but as *given*. We are as human beings placed in relations of trust before any possibility of choice, reasoning and assessment, which means that trust is characterised by an element of uncertainty that cannot be eliminated. To be human is to trust, and to trust is to be vulnerable.

Løgstrup's view of trust differs from the dominant views in contemporary trust research and moral philosophy insofar as he does not consider basic trust to be an individual attribute, such as an attitude, action, feeling or belief.¹⁸ In fact, he does not think that basic trust can be accounted for as something 'attached to' an individual; rather, he sees trust as *relational* – something that belongs to what lies in *between* people. This means that basic trust cannot be understood exclusively from the perspective of individuals as the parties involved in trust does not create trust; instead trust must be approached as one of the forms our basic relationships takes, and what characterises trust must be ascribed to the relationship, not the individuals involved.

In contemporary discussions, we find only a few writers who are also trying to develop relational understandings of trust. Such authors include Niker and Sullivan, who suggest that, for ongoing relationships where the people involved share a common history, 'trust is better understood as a property of the relationship itself than as an attitude that one party has towards another (with respect to some specific good)' (2018, 174). However, Løgstrup makes a more radical point: the relational nature of trust is not simply a matter of finding the right approach or perspective for an understanding of trust, it is a matter of the nature of human life. That trust is relational means that it is one of the ways in which human beings *are given in relation to other people*, whether we want to or not. 'We do not show trust and deliver ourselves up to others as a result of any decision, *but we always already live this way*' (Løgstrup 2020, 47; italics added).

Basic trust is not something we can create, unlike more advanced forms of trust, where we can have a say in the matter (Løgstrup 1978, 112, 157, 2020, 119). Moreover, it is not a social practice that can be established (like money or marriage); rather, basic trust is an empirical fact about human life which is connected to the fact that we are delivered up to others and thus interdependent and vulnerable, and which may be promoted or undermined, but never eliminated as a condition of human life. Løgstrup's view of the human is that of an entangled, interdependent being, and not a singular, independent atom.

Furthermore, Løgstrup sees human vulnerability and the ways that we are given in basic relations to each other as a fundamental *ethical* phenomena of human life. Our lives together are also *ethical lives*, because we are always already delivered up to and thus dependent on each other. In Løgstrup's words, 'there is an unspoken, and one might say anonymous, demand on us that we take care of the life that trust puts in our hands' (2020, 18). Here, we are introduced to what is arguably Løgstrup's most significant contribution to moral philosophy: the idea of the ethical demand, that is, the demand raised in relation to the other to take care of that other for the sake of that other.¹⁹ This demand is unspoken, according to Løgstrup, because it does not come with any definite content. It simply says that we should take care of the other, and not how we are to do so. Still, the demand does not leave us completely without resources when we try to live up to it, because the core understanding of how to respond appropriately – of how to care for the other – is given in the fundamental facts and experiences of our life. In Løgstrup's words: 'What is good and what is evil we know from our bare facticity in so far as the good sustains and promotes our lives and what is evil destroys them' (1968, 23, translation by the authors). Ethics, and the roughest outline of good and evil, are given with our unavoidable and indispensable relationships with one another.

In our view, a consequence of this is that not just trust, but also ethics is fundamentally relational in character.²⁰ In a comparison of Wittgenstein and Løgstrup, Rupert Read develops a similar point, emphasising that for 'Wittgenstein and Løgstrup, though *not* for most of the tradition, it is the *relation* between self and other that is primary' (Read 2019, 371).²¹ In this way, the two philosophers are alike in working towards a relational ethics.²² Central to the notion of a relational ethics is the idea that ethical responsibility is not raised by individuals, instead it arises because of the way that we in our lives always already stand in relationships to one another. According to Løgstrup, this also means that ethics does not raise demands for reciprocity or mutuality; I am responsible for the other not just because the other is delivered up to me, but because my life is given in the form of such relationships. To live is to stand in relations to other and being confronted with the demands arising from these relationships, but this does not provide me with grounds to demand anything in return from the other. Ethics is thus connected to an understanding of life where 'life and all that this

involves is given to the individual. For this reason, a human being has no basis in their existence on which to make a counterdemand to another human being' (2020, 100). Our lives are given among others in the form of trusting relationships; such relationships are one of the basic forms that our lives take, not something that are first to be established during the course of our lives.

A relational conception of ethics is different from mainstream conceptions of ethics, because it allows for ethical re-orientation away from the individual and towards the relation between the self and the other as the primary source of ethics, thereby overcoming the need to introduce or justify ethics from a first- or a third-person perspective. Relational ethics makes *ethics and trust something that essentially exist in between humans*. When thinking about the most basic forms of ethics, we should not begin with individuals and develop an understanding of ethical responsibility from there; the right approach is to begin with basic human relationships and investigate the way these relationships always already place individuals in positions of responsibility.

A Trust in Life Itself

Compared with contemporary theories, Løgstrup's conception of trust may seem naïve. However, the interpretation of Løgstrup's view of trust and ethics as relational does not entail the claim that ethics is without conflict; quite the contrary. In Løgstrup's writings, the reason why basic trust gives rise to an ethical demand is that relations of trust, and human relations in general, are always *power* relations (cf. Løgstrup 2020, 46–7). Such power relations are sometimes symmetrical, most often asymmetrical, but they are always in danger of being misused and they are a general aspect of trusting relationships. 'Our dependence upon each other means that we are the subject of the exercise of power and that we ourselves exercise power. We are never in a space entirely free of power', Løgstrup writes and continues, 'This makes our existence dangerous, and it is a danger that cannot be removed' (1972, 117; translation by the authors). One way of understanding contemporary theories of trust is to see them as attempts to get rid of the dangerous by building frameworks that will enable us to master situations of trust and vulnerability and in this way get these basic aspects of human existence under control (cf. Løgstrup 2020, 101–5). What makes Løgstrup's thinking stand out is that he makes no such attempts to gain control of life by devising trustworthiness tests or other safety measures to help us avoid the confrontation with the possibilities of pain, risk and betrayal. His answer to the dangers involved in human vulnerability and interdependence is to accept these aspects of life as inevitable (1972, 13–4, 1961, 204). Vulnerability and power, along with the ethical and political dangers and problems they lead to, cannot be extinguished, not in philosophy and not in life. Løgstrup is therefore very critical of philosophical attempts to obscure the dangers of human coexistence, even if he

does think that power can and should be tamed. He believes this is the role of good social norms, laws and institutions: to protect us from the unmediated exposure to the other (2020, 17–9, 46–8).

In Løgstrup's work, we find both a deep pessimism about human nature rounded by a Lutheran worldview and experiences of World War II, but also a strong current of trust in and devotion to life, which is rather rare in Western philosophy. Løgstrup's writings display a 'trust in life itself, a trust in its ongoing renewal' (2020, 14). As we see it, Løgstrup's conception of basic trust and his focus on the relational character of ethics and human life can serve as an antidote to a number of trends in research on trust and in moral philosophy such as the anxious obsession with control and security of the present over-rationalistic conceptions of human life and the almost all-pervasive individualism of contemporary Western thinking on trust in particular and contemporary moral philosophy in general.

Notes

1. Oxford University Press has by now published a new and much improved translation of Løgstrup *The Ethical Demand* (2020) by Bjørn Rabjerg and Robert Stern.
2. For other writings on Løgstrup in English, see e.g. Lagerspetz (1996), Andersen and van Kooten Niekerk (2007), Fink and Stern (2017), Fink (2017), MacIntyre (2007, 2017), Darwall (2017), Faulkner (2017), Meinert (2018), O'Hara (2018).
3. See e.g. introductions such as Hardin (2006), Hawley (2012), Hosking (2014) and McLeod (2015).
4. There are several discussions of trust that we will not address, the most prominent of which are 1) classical discussions of trust in connection with game-theory and trust-games like the Prisoner's Dilemma, 2) discussions of the biological and psychological research into trust, 3) the epistemological discussions of trust and 4) discussions of the relations between social capital, trust and the so-called 'trust crisis' (see e.g. Putnam and Goss 2002).
5. In the literature, trust is defined and described in many ways, e.g. as an attitude, action, feeling, conviction, disposition, strategy; as a way of understanding oneself and one's life, a chosen risk, a form of knowledge, a belief such as the belief that others will be trustworthy, a state of mind, an accepted vulnerability and a relation, just to name a few (see e.g. Baier 1986; Hosking 2014, 27; Faulkner and Simpson 2017; Hardin 2006, 1, 16, 33; Hawley 2012; McLeod 2015; Pedersen 2018, 108; Lagerspetz 1996, 10, 72, 126–267). It is important to note that besides the last suggestion that trust takes the form of a certain relation between people, all of these definitions relate to individuals. We return to this point in the last section.
6. The problems involved in living without trust intensify if trust also concerns the way we relate to features of reality and our surroundings, such as the way we relate to the solidity of e.g. floors. It is debated whether it make sense to use the term trust in this context. Some thinkers prefer to distinguish between 'mere reliance' and 'trust' wherein the first is what normal adults have in the

solidity of floors and that the sun will rise again tomorrow, while ‘trust’ has a moral connotation that ‘reliance’ lacks (see e.g. Baier 1986, 234–5, 254; Hertzberg 1988; Lagerspetz 1996, 27; Hardin 2006, 27; Nussbaum 2018, 7; Hawley 2012, 1–13;; O’Neill 2002, 13–4, 24). We only discuss the question of the role of trust in our relations to other people and will therefore not address this question.

7. We accept the idea that trust can be placed between persons and institutions, but we will not discuss this possibility here.
8. In this article, we draw on material from both *The Ethical Demand* as well as Løgstrup’s later writings. Similarly to the work of for instance Heidegger and Wittgenstein, there are advanced scholarly debates as to how Løgstrup’s ‘earlier’ and ‘later’ ideas can and cannot be related; debates we do not enter in this article. Furthermore, we read Løgstrup’s work from the perspective of moral philosophy which means that we will not engage with theological aspects and discussions of his work (see e.g. Critchley 2007, 53–5; Darwall 2017; Bugge 2011; Rabjerg and Stern 2018). In interpreting Løgstrup this way, we follow his own suggestion in *The Ethical Demand* (see Løgstrup 2020, 3–8, 15). However, the question whether one should – or even can – do this is subject to further debates (see e.g. Løgstrup 1961, 195–231, 1978, 10, 198–202, 212–225; Fink 2010, 301–6, 2017, 63; Fink and Stern 2017, 2–3).
9. According to Løgstrup, trust is even an *inherently positive* phenomenon (see e.g. Løgstrup 1961, 193–5, 1972, 48–9; Bugge 2011, 172); a claim that many thinkers working with trust would reject (see e.g. Baier 1986, 231–2; Hardin 2006, 32–5; Pedersen 2009, 63–5).
10. To complicate matters further, even though Løgstrup distinguishes between simple, basic or fundamental trust and more complicated or advanced forms of trust, he often calls all these forms of trust for ‘trust’. This has created some confusion and misunderstanding amongst his readership because what is true for basic trust is not always true for advanced forms of trust and *vice versa*. There are also critics who argue that not all the phenomena that Løgstrup calls ‘trust’ ought to be called so, see e.g. Pedersen (2018, 115).
11. Løgstrup elaborates on this concept among others in the following places (1971, 13–29, 1972, 17–24, 67, 257, 1978, 86–92, 110–4, 156–7).
12. Here, Løgstrup’s thinking differs from other views, such as O’Neill’s, who in her famous BBC Lectures from 2002, says that we ‘all first *learn* to trust [...] as small children, from family, friends and neighbours’ (O’Neill 2002, 23, our italics).
13. A similar line of thinking about the human form of life can be found in the work of the later Wittgenstein (see e.g. Wittgenstein 2009, §§ 19–25, 217, 241, 485, 2016, §§ 10, 150, 159–60, 162, 166, 192, 509). Among the writers who have made comparisons between Løgstrup and Wittgenstein are Lagerspetz (1996), Christensen (2015), O’Hara (2018), Read (2019) and Eriksen (2020a, 2020b). The comparison was pioneered by Lars Hertzberg’s writings on trust (1988).
14. For a similar analysis of trust see Lagerspetz (1996, 27–30, 35)
15. Our interpretation at this point differs from Faulkner’s, when he writes about Løgstrup’s view of trust that the “logic” of trusting is then to trust because one presumes that the trusted party will think about things in this way [e.g. give me my book back because I need it]’ (Faulkner 2017, 244).
16. But note that Niker and Sullivan further remarks that ‘trust is generally taken to differ from reliance in so far as the former, but not the latter, involves the

expectation that the trusted party will see the truster's dependence as a reason to do what the truster expects' (2018, 176).

17. In a similar way, Robert Stern (2017) also highlights the intimate connection between Løgstrup's notion of basic trust and his understanding of human life as partly delivered up to the other (273).
18. See also note 5 above.
19. For insightful presentation and discussion of the ethical demand, see e.g. Fink and Alasdair (1997), Fink (2010, 2017) and Stern (2019).
20. For an in-depth discussion of the idea of relational ethics, see Christensen (2015).
21. A central concern for Read is to show that skepticism and distance towards others is not a general, philosophical challenge, rather, there are real distances that may arise in actual relationships. This leads Read to say that as relational, ethics becomes 'a project. It has continually to be made and remade' (Read 2019, 371). We disagree and follow Løgstrup in thinking that it is the other way around, that relationships are not something that need to be continually made and remade, but rather something that we need continually *not to destroy* (cf. Løgstrup 1978, 110).
22. A third thinker who could be seen as working in a similar direction is Emmanuel Levinas. However, both Read (2019) and Christensen (2015) argue that Levinas' central idea of the alterity of the other works against understanding his view of ethics as relational.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank our two anonymous reviewers for very constructive feedback as well as Hans Fink, David Bugge, Peter Aabo Sørensen and Anne Marie Pahuus for comments on parts of an early draft of this article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

Part of this research was supported by Independent Research Fund Denmark – Humanities, grant nr. 7013-00068B.

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