<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

Positivism in the Northern Peripheries : Generations of Positivist Philosophers in Sweden and its Neighboring Countries

Strang, Johan

Palgrave Macmillan
2018

Strang , J 2018 , Positivism in the Northern Peripheries : Generations of Positivist
Philosophers in Sweden and its Neighboring Countries . in J Feichtinger , F L Fillafer & J
Surman (eds) , The Worlds of Positivism : A Global Intellectual History, 1770-1930 .
Palgrave Macmillan , pp. 295-320 . <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65762-2>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/308618>

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-65762-2>

acceptedVersion

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.

This is an electronic reprint of the original article.

This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Please cite the original version.

Chapter 10

Positivism in the Northern Peripheries

Generations of Positivist Philosophers in Sweden and its Neighbours

Johan Strang

“Scandinavian philosophy, generally speaking, has had an empiristical bias of a rather moderate and compromising character which perhaps is not as wise as it looks, but which on the other hand might have saved us from the metaphysical flights which have made some philosophers in other countries a little mad.”¹

In his talk on “The Development of Empiricism in Scandinavia” at the First Congress for the Unity of Science in Paris 1935,² the Danish logical empiricist Jørgen Jørgensen (1894-1969) argued that even if there were very few internationally renowned names in the history of Scandinavian positivism, Nordic philosophy and science was marked by a general and modest inclination towards empiricism. According to Jørgensen intellectual life in small peripheral countries like the Nordic ones is by

¹ Jørgen Jørgensen (1936) ‘The Development of Empiricism in Scandinavia’, in: *Actes du congrès international de philosophie scientifique, Sorbonne Paris 1935, VIII. Histoire de la logique et de la philosophie scientifique* (Paris: Hermann), 66-67.

² These congresses, which were arranged annually in the period 1935-41 (except in 1940), were one of the ways in which the Vienna Circle of logical empiricists (or “logical positivists”) sought to internationalise their movement during the late 1930s.

necessity dependent on ideas and theories developed abroad, but this dependence tends to result in a more practical and open-minded attitude among the scholars. When intellectual life is constantly cultivated in relation to ideas and theories in countries and cultures that are understood as more advanced or central, it is very seldom that an intellectual school or tradition obtains a dominant or hegemonic status. In the peripheries the possibility of making outstanding scientific discoveries by “developing really sharp lines of thought” is sacrificed on behalf of an eclecticism which might be bland, but which also means great freedom for the individual intellectual as the “dogmatism of extremists” is avoided.³

Looking at the history of Nordic positivism after Jørgensen’s statement in 1935, it would perhaps difficult to argue that strong schools and traditions are unlikely to develop and thrive in small countries. To the contrary, logical empiricism and analytic philosophy became very dominant at the philosophical departments all over the Nordic countries, especially in Sweden, during the latter half of the 20th century. In this chapter I will show how this dominance came about, and how these latter generations of “positivists” related their ideas to previous generations of like-minded scholars. This is a story of distinct local adaptations of foreign ideas and of the various political purposes for which positivism was harnessed in different periods.

Positivism was introduced to the Nordic countries in the late 19th century by scholars such as the Danish philosopher Harald Høffding (1843-1931), the Finnish anthropologist/philosopher Edvard Westermarck (1862-1939), and the Norwegian psychologists/philosopher Anathon Aall (1867-1943). This first generation of Nordic positivists revolted against the idealistic-Hegelian dominance of Nordic intellectual life in the 19th century and launched a “modernisation of the philosophical

³ Jørgensen, ‘The Development of Empiricism in Scandinavia’, 62-63. I have developed the idea of peripheral eclecticism in Stefan Nygård and Johan Strang (2016) ‘Facing Asymmetry: Nordic Intellectuals and Center-periphery Dynamics in European Cultural Space’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 77, 1, 75-97.

discipline”.⁴ Jørgensen himself was a close associate of the Vienna Circle, and as such a representative of logical empiricism (or positivism), which had a huge impact in the Nordic countries during the 1930s. Logical empiricism was introduced to Finland by Eino Kaila (1890-1958) and to Norway by Arne Næss (1912-2009), who, like Jørgensen, were extremely influential in their respective national environments. Through their positions as professors of philosophy at the main universities Jørgensen, Kaila and Næss, lay the foundations for the analytic school in philosophy, which through internationally renowned names as Dagfinn Føllesdal (b. 1932), Justus Hartnack (1912-2005), Jaakko Hintikka (1929-2015) and Georg Henrik von Wright (1916-2003) dominated Nordic philosophy during the latter half of the 20th century.

But even if there seem to be good reasons to talk about a strong positivistic tradition in the Nordic countries, the intellectual history of northern Europe is certainly not one of a gradual progress of positivism, from the Nordic representatives of Spencer and Mill during the late 19th century, through the logical empiricists of the 1930s, to the analytic philosophers of the post war era. To the contrary, there were many breaks and ruptures, and the relations between the different generations of positivists were far from uncomplicated.⁵ More often than not, the individual philosophers had to play a difficult game where domestic traditions and international influences were pulling in different directions.

⁴ The main representative of Hegelianism in Finland was Johan W. Snellman (1806-1881), in Norway Marcus Jacob Monrad (1816-1897), and in Denmark Rasmus Nielsen (1809-1884). For an overview of the history of Nordic philosophy, see especially Carl-Göran Heidegren (2004) *Det moderna genombrottet i nordisk universitetsfilosofi 1960-1915* (Göteborg: Daidalos). See also Heidegren’s article ‘Positivism before logical positivism’ and all the other articles collected in Friedrich Stadler and Juha Manninen (eds.) (2010) *The Vienna Circle and the Nordic countries – Networks and Transformations of Logical Empiricism* (Dordrecht: Springer).

⁵ By “generation” I do not mean that the thoughts and ideas of the intellectuals are determined by the year in which they were born, but rather, in a Mannheimian sense, that the different generations share different formative experiences that are fundamental to the way in which they look upon the world. See Karl Mannheim (1993 [1927]) ‘The Problem of Generations’, in Kurt Wolff (ed.) *From Karl Mannheim* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers), 351-438.

Indeed, one of the main assertions of this article is that a philosophical/intellectual movement or tradition such as “analytic philosophy” or “positivism” cannot be understood or defined as a set of theoretical ideas or tenets, but that they are consciously produced, reproduced and redescribed by philosophers and intellectuals who, for different reasons (intellectual, political, social or meritocratic), want to distinguish between friends and enemies.⁶ In some cases the younger generation continued on the foundation that had been created by their predecessors; in other cases they did not want to be associated with the older positivists and tried instead to frame themselves as representatives of something completely new.

In Sweden, which despite – or perhaps because of – its central and shielded geographical location in many ways is the most exceptional Nordic country, the history of philosophical positivism is even more remarkable. Although there was no prominent Swedish representative of the first (late 19th century) or of the second (logical empiricist) generation of positivists, it was in Sweden that the analytic dominance in philosophy was the strongest and most persistent after the Second World War. I will argue that this Swedish paradox is understandable against the background of a series of successful “moves” or “rhetorical re-descriptions”⁷ by a group of younger intellectuals and philosophers during the 1940s and 50s. They succeeded in monopolising the legacy of their predecessors, the so called Uppsala philosophers, which they re-described as “pre-analytic” and as a “parallel movement to logical positivism.” In this way, analytic philosophy in Sweden was furnished with firm national roots and presented as part of the Swedish philosophical tradition. An important

⁶ See also my dissertation Johan Strang (2010) *History, Transfer, Politics – Five Studies on the Legacy of Uppsala Philosophy*, (PhD dissertation University of Helsinki), esp. 89-94, as well as Johan Strang (2013) ‘The Rhetoric of Analytic Philosophy: The Making of the Analytic Hegemony in Swedish 20th Century Philosophy’, *Redescriptions* 16, 11-38.

⁷ I borrow the idea of “moves” and “rhetorical re-descriptions” from Quentin Skinner. See e.g. Skinner (2002) *Visions of Politics, vol. 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 151.

aspect of these moves was the political connotations that the younger generation played on. While their philosophical rivals were stigmatised as German or semi-fascist, analytic philosophy was framed as the only politically credible philosophy, practised in the democratic English-speaking world and in the progressive Scandinavian welfare states.

The cultural radicals of the 1880s and the first generation of Nordic positivists

Many historians have pointed to the fact that there was a fundamental change in Nordic intellectual life during the late 19th century. The conservative idealism which had reigned throughout the 19th century was replaced with progressive, modernistic, liberal and secular ideas that in Scandinavia are summed up with the labels “cultural radicalism” or “the ideas of the 1880s.”⁸ This movement is associated with intellectuals from different fields of cultural life, for example the authors Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), August Strindberg (1849-1912), and the critic and public intellectual Georg Brandes (1842-1927). But it also included liberal and socialistic politicians such as Karl Staaff (1860-1915) and Hjalmar Branting (1860-1925), who were active in the student organisation *Verdandi* in the 1880s, a milieu that spawned useful networks for their later political careers. Both of them later became Prime Ministers of Sweden, Staaf for the Liberals (1905-6 and 1911-14) and Branting for the Social Democrats (1920-25).

Høffding and Westermarck were among those philosophers who contributed most significantly to the criticism of philosophical idealism, as well as of religion and conservatism in general. But even if many cultural radicals were positivists, or sympathetic towards positivistic idea(l)s, it would certainly be a mistake to use “positivism” and “cultural radicalism” as synonyms. Cultural radicalism

⁸ See e.g. Nils Runeby (1995) *Dygd och vetande – ur de bildades historia* (Stockholm: Atlantis), 167-256; Martin Wiklund (2006) *I det modernas landskap – historisk orientering och kritiska berättelser om det moderna Sverige mellan 1960 och 1990* (Stockholm: Brutus Östlings bokförlag), 149-57.

was a diverse movement with many sources of inspiration and with many inner conflicts.⁹ “Positivism” and the related belief in the merits of the empirical sciences (mainly empirical psychology) was not the only via regia for the proposed modernisation of the philosophical discipline. To the contrary, some were afraid that this road would seal the fate of philosophy as an autonomous endeavour and thus sought for answers in, for example, the phenomenology of Husserl or in the intuitionism of Bergson.¹⁰

Most of the leading Nordic philosophers of the 1880s generation did, however, sympathise with the empirical-positivistic ideas of their times. This holds true not least of Høffding, who introduced Hermann Lotze and Herbert Spencer to the Nordic countries, and who by virtue of his wide extensive European networks became the unquestioned key figure of the first generation of Nordic positivists. Copenhagen was a semi-centre through which intellectuals and philosophers from Finland, Norway and Sweden had to travel in order to gain access to the the “real” European centres such as Paris or the different universities in Germany.¹¹ Høffding’s consultations were a necessary step on the way to Europe from the more peripheral parts of the Nordic countries. Politically, Høffding was progressive without being provocative, which was arguably one of the main reasons for his respected position both in Denmark and in the other Nordic countries.

⁹ Martin Wiklund has proposed a distinction between a rationalistic enlightenment version and a romanticist esthetic version of cultural radicalism, and positivism would arguably belong to the first category. See Wiklund, *I det modernas landskap*, 151-152.

¹⁰ See e.g. Heidegren, *Det moderna genombrottet*; Carl-Göran Heidegren (2010) ‘Positivism before Logical Positivism in Nordic Philosophy’ in Stadler and Manninen (eds.), *The Vienna Circle in the Nordic Countries*, 91-103; and Stefan Nygård (2011) *Henri Bergson i Finland – reception, rekontextualisering, politisering* (Helsingfors: Svenska Litteratursällskapet). It is also, of course, a rather complicated issue whether one should characterise Nietzsche, one of the main heroes of the Scandinavian cultural radicals, a positivist or not. Many positivists seemed to think that Nietzsche was a well-articulated literary (that is, not “scientific”) spokesman of the modern or positivistic ideas.

¹¹ See Heidegren, *Det moderna genombrottet*, 517-523; Stefan Nygård, *Henri Bergson i Finland*, 28.

In Finland it was undoubtedly Westermarck who was the main figure of the first generation of positivists. In comparison to Høffding, Westermarck was perhaps more a participant in the international debate than a transfer agent or translator of foreign ideas. His anthropological and social investigations of marriage and of moral ideas were published in England, earning him an international reputation.¹² In the domestic political and cultural debates Westermarck and his associates lived up to the progressive positivistic ideals not least through the anticlerical student organisation *Prometheus*.¹³ For example, in 1903 Rolf Lagerborg (1874-1959), one of Westermarck's most outspoken disciples, was the first to manage to legally obtain a civil marriage in Finland.¹⁴ The transition from idealism to positivism was, however, not a straightforward affair, as it had considerable cultural and political connotations. As elsewhere, the Finnish positivists saw themselves as representing secularism, modernism and liberalism, but in the Finnish context this was tied to the national question.¹⁵ Whereas Finnish nationalism to a large extent was associated with philosophical idealism, Westermarck and his compatriots belonged to the Swedish speaking minority, who with varying success tried to compensate for their increasingly marginalised position by associating themselves with progressive, cosmopolitan intellectual trends. However, in a small country with only one chair in philosophy, it was often seen as risky to give such an important position to a cosmopolitan

¹² Edvard Westermarck (1891) *The History of Human Marriage* (London: Macmillan); Westermarck (1906) *The Origin and Development of Moral Ideas* (London: Macmillan).

¹³ See Nygård, *Henri Bergson i Finland*, 109-121; and Marja Jalava (2005) *Minä ja maailmanhenki. Moderni subjekti kristillis-idealisisessa kansallisajattelussa ja Rolf Lagerborgin kulttuuriradikalismissa n. 1800-1914* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura), 372-382.

¹⁴ He succeeded in this by ingeniously exploiting the Finnish legislation which at the time criminalised premarital affairs. Admitting that he had indeed indulged in a premarital affair, Lagerborg succeeded in getting convicted into marriage by an official court.

¹⁵ Olli Lagerspetz and Kirsi Suolinna (2014) *Edward Westermarck: Intellectual Networks, Philosophy and Social Anthropology* (Helsinki: The Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters), 38-43.

and potentially disloyal Swedish-speaking positivist. Yet in the end Westermarck's reputation was such that a separate chair in "practical philosophy" was opened up for him in 1906.

In Norway, the Hegelian-idealistic dominance was stronger and more persistent than in the other Nordic countries. The definite break occurred only in the beginning of the 20th century with the appointments of Arne Løchen (1850-1917) in 1900 and Anathon Aall in 1908 as professors of philosophy in at the University of Oslo. Even if neither of them was a scholar of Høffding's or Westermarck's international stature, they had travelled extensively in Europe, by virtue of which they were able to make names for themselves as the pioneers of positivism and experimental psychology in Norway.¹⁶ Especially Aall, who also was an historian of philosophy, was of great importance for the modernisation of the philosophical discipline in Norway. His book *Filosofien i Norden* (Philosophy in the Nordic countries, 1919) portrayed the advance of the scientific philosophy in the Nordic countries, that is, the gradual progress from idealism towards the positivism, empiricism and experimental psychology of the modern age. Aall was relentless in his critique of idealism, and his book was undoubtedly intended as a contribution to the process it described.¹⁷ However, the cultural and political role of Aall and Løchen was arguably not comparable to that of Høffding in Denmark or Westermarck in Finland. Instead the modern breakthrough was very much associated with authors and especially Henrik Ibsen.

The second generation of Nordic positivists – the logical empiricists

¹⁶ See Erik Lundestad (1998) *Norsk filosofi fra Ludvig Holberg til Anathon Aall* (Tromsø: Ravnetrykk), 265-279 and 315-330.

¹⁷ Anathon Aall (1919) *Filosofien i Norden – til oplysning om den nyere tænknings og videnskaps historie i Sverige, oh Finland, Danmark og Norge* (Kristiania: Jacob Dybwad). For a critical account of Aall's book and its importance for the "dehydration" of Norwegian philosophy, see Rune Slagstad (2001) *De nasjonale strateger* (Oslo: Pax), 25.

The relation between the first and the second generation of positivists in the Nordic countries was by no means a straightforward one. Jørgensen, the front figure of Danish logical empiricism, was a student but no uncritical disciple of Høffding. In conscious opposition to the empiricist positivism of his teacher, the young Jørgensen was a devoted Neo-Kantian.¹⁸ But there was no attempt of intellectual patricide; instead, the relationship between Høffding and Jørgensen remained amicable and respectful. Høffding did not seem to mind Jørgensen's Neo-Kantian interests, nor did he complain when Jørgensen, in the 1920s, became increasingly interested in the new British empiricism (Russell) and in formal logic. To the contrary, it was on Høffding's request and with Jørgensen in mind that the Royal Danish Scientific Society (*Det Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab*) in 1924 arranged an academic writing competition in which they asked for studies of the recent developments in formal logic. Jørgensen's 1034-paged submission was later published in three volumes as *A Treatise in Formal Logic* (1931), which gave him a distinguished position internationally and connected him with the Vienna Circle.¹⁹

Jørgensen did not have the same central mediating role for Nordic intellectual life as Høffding. By now, Copenhagen had lost some of its status as a semi-centre. Even if Jørgensen did arrange the Second International Congress for the Unity of Science in Copenhagen in 1936, the development of Nordic philosophy, logical empiricism and Nordic intellectual life in general was now more strongly associated with national front figures with direct contacts to the abroad. Moreover, from a political and cultural perspective, Jørgensen's profile was considerably more radical than Høffding's. During the 1930s Jørgensen gradually embraced socialistic ideas and eventually, provoked by the rise of Nazism and the Second World War, he became a committed communist and spent part of the German occupation (1941-44) in jail. In the post-war debate on the question of democracy and socialism,

¹⁸ Carl Henrik Koch (2004) *Dansk filosofi i positivismens tidsalder 1880-1950* (København: Gyldendal), 187-193.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 194-209.

Jørgensen was a spokesperson for a “broad notion of democracy” according to which “the narrow political democracy” should be complemented with “social” and “economic democracy”, and he also celebrated the Soviet Union as a champion and model example of the latter.²⁰ In comparison to Høffding, Jørgensen’s role in the domestic debates was more the one of an oppositional provocateur than that of a leading progressive intellectual.²¹ He did, however, spearhead the introduction of Anglo-American analytic philosophy to Denmark, which remained a dominant perspective at the philosophical departments in Denmark at least until the student movements of 1968.

More important in a political and cultural respect is the legal theoretician Alf Ross (1899-1979), a student of Hans Kelsen, who after the Second World War used ideas of logical empiricism and analytic philosophy to develop a particular version of legal positivism, later called Scandinavian Legal Realism.²² Ross was also central to the Danish democracy debate where he criticised Jørgensen and other communists for trying to claim the concept of democracy for their own purposes. For Ross, democracy was form and procedure (majority rule) rather than content.²³ Politically he sympathised with the Social Democrats and his legal philosophy has been interpreted as facilitating piecemeal social reforms.²⁴

²⁰ Jørgen Jørgensen (1946) *Det Demokratiske Samfund* (København: Tiden). See also Johan Strang (2010) ‘Why Nordic Democracy? – The Scandinavian Value Nihilists and the Crisis of Democracy’, in Jussi Kurunmäki and Johan Strang (eds.) *Rhetorics of Nordic Democracy* (Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society), 83-113.

²¹ Koch, *Dansk filosofi i positivismens tidsalder*, 241.

²² Alf Ross (1953) *Om Ret og Retfærdighed – en indførelse i den analytiske retsfilosofi* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk forlag, Arnold Busck). (Translated as (1959) *On Law and Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

²³ Alf Ross (1946) *Hvorfor Demokrati?* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard).

²⁴ See Sverre Blandhol (1999) *Juridisk ideologi – Alf Ross kritikk av naturretten* (Copenhagen: Jurist- og Økonomforbundets forlag); Johan Strang (2009) ‘Two Generations of Scandinavian Legal Realists’, *Retfærd* 12, 1, 61-82.

In Finland the disparity between the generations of positivists was arguably much greater than in Denmark. When logical empiricism was introduced to Finland by Kaila in the early 1930s it was to a very little degree associated with Westermarck and his school. There were no attempts from Kaila to anchor logical positivism in the ideas of Westermarck, but neither did Kaila try to profile himself against the ideas of his older colleagues. There was no battle between the generations; rather, it was a case of mutual respect between two schools that were regarded as completely different.²⁵ There were many reasons for this lack of relation between the generations of positivists in Finland. First of all, there was no actual master-disciple relationship between them. Kaila's interest in logical positivism stemmed from his interest in the questions regarding the foundations of the natural sciences, and his disciples became leading scholars in philosophy of science and logic. The Westermarckians on the other hand often moved towards anthropology or sociology.

But it is surely also significant that Kaila's cultural and political profile differed from that of the previous generation. While the Westermarckians can be characterised as aristocratic intellectuals from the Swedish speaking minority who looked abroad in order to compensate for what they often conceived of as a stifling cultural environment in Finland, Kaila was a moderate conservative who belonged to the Finnish speaking majority. Thus he was much more suitable for the role as the leading philosopher in the country. That said, when Kaila was appointed as professor in Helsinki in 1930, he was forced to reply to accusations of being associated with the "socialist" Vienna Circle, and thus it became important for him to downplay the political message of positivism and present logical

²⁵ Kaila spoke highly of his older colleague and the Westermarckians did apparently not have anything against Kaila and his disciples. For example, Westermarck's disciple, Professor of Practical Philosophy, Rafael Karsten, was among those who supported Kaila in the race for the chair in Theoretical Philosophy in Helsinki in 1930. See e.g. Ilkka Niiniluoto (2006) 'Eino Kaila och Wienkretsen', in Stefan Nygård and Johan Strang (eds.) *Mellan idealism och analytisk filosofi – den moderna filosofin i Finland och Sverige 1880-1950* (Helsingfors/Stockholm: Svenska Litteratursällskapet/Atlantis), 169-196, here 173.

empiricism as a neutral and unpolitical philosophy. Kaila took his role as the leading national philosopher seriously, taking part in the cultural and university-political debates, and publishing books aimed at a broader non-academic audience. More controversially, during Finland's involvement in the Second World War on the German side in 1941-44, Kaila wrote propaganda articles for Finland in German journals associated with the National Socialists, while friends and colleagues at Vienna were trying to escape European fascism.²⁶ After the war, Kaila withdrew from academic and public life, but his philosophical legacy lived on, and with scholars as Georg Henrik von Wright (1916- 2003) and Jaakko Hintikka (1929-2015), Finland established itself as a leading country in analytic philosophy.

Like Kaila, the Norwegian logical empiricist Næss did not conceive of his ideas as part of any particular tradition. In fact, for him, the whole philosophical discipline in Norway was in a state of disarray, and it was only by means of radical reform and modernisation that it could be re-established.²⁷ His intellectual profile was that of a young and radical intellectual, who was introducing a radically empiricist version of the ideas of the Vienna Circle to his native country, and he did not think highly of his predecessors. The sentiments were mutual. When Næss applied for the chair in philosophy in Oslo, his predecessor, the old positivist Aall supported a rival candidate as he thought Næss was too young, inexperienced and one-sided to take over the nation's leading (and only) chair

²⁶ There are, however, good reasons to interpret these publications as wartime propaganda efforts (commissioned or not), rather than as spontaneous utterances of sympathy with the Nazi-regime. See Malte Gasche and Johan Strang (2009) 'Der Kriegseinsatz des finnischen Philosophen Eino Kaila', in Bernd Wegner, Oliver von Wrochem and Daniel Schümmer (eds.) *Finnland und Deutschland – Studien zur Geschichte im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Hamburg: Verlag Dr. Kovač), 81-95; Juha Manninen and Johan Strang (2010) 'Eino Kaila's Political Views – A comment to Sven Ove Hansson's 'A History of *Theoria*'', in *Theoria* 76, 108-111.

²⁷ See e.g. Fredrik Thue (2005) *In Quest of a Democratic Social Order – the Americanization of Norwegian Social Scholarship 1928-1970* (PhD dissertation University of Oslo), 127-130.

in philosophy, and it was only thanks to the positive judgements of the more established Nordic logical empiricists Jørgensen and Kaila, who called Næss' views and methods "ultra-modern," that Næss obtained the chair.²⁸ Politically Næss was far more suited for the post-war climate than both the communist Jørgensen and the conservative German-oriented Kaila. Næss had been active in the underground opposition during the German occupation and emerged from the war on the "correct" side. His political and intellectual orientation during the immediate post-war years was Anglophone and he was pivotal in establishing an American-inspired social scientific research institution in Oslo, which was inspirational not only for generations of Norwegian social scientists, but also for policy makers, and thus important for the creation of the Norwegian welfare state.²⁹ Also in Norway, analytic philosophy became a dominant perspective for decades after the Second World War.

Swedish positivism? The Uppsala school

From a Nordic comparative perspective it is striking that there was no prominent Swedish philosopher of the first nor the second (logical empiricist) generation of positivists.³⁰ In a cultural and political (and even religious) sense, classical positivism was introduced to Sweden by the physician Anton Nyström who translated many of Comte's works, founded a positivistic congregation in 1879, and

²⁸ See the statements of Kaila and Jørgensen in UiO (1940) *Universitetet i Oslo. Årsberetning 1939* (Oslo: University of Oslo), 68 and 90.

²⁹ See Thue, *In Quest of a Democratic Social Order*, 130-162.

³⁰ As exceptions one can mention Paul Cavallin (1868-1901), who was interested in both British empiricist philosophy and in formal logic during the late 19th century, and Åke Petzäll (1901-1957), who wrote two treatises on logical positivism in the 1930s and who, as the editor-in-chief of the philosophical journal *Theoria*, invited logical positivists to participate in the discussions. But both Cavallin and Petzäll remained outsiders in Sweden. See Heidegren, 'Positivism before logical positivism', 100-101; and Johan Strang (2010) '*Theoria* and logical empiricism – on the tensions between the national and the international in philosophy', in Manninen and Stadler (eds.), *The Vienna Circle in the Nordic Countries*, 69-89.

published a positivistic hymn book in 1875.³¹ Nyström was an active participant in the cultural and political debate, and founded a workers' institute in Stockholm (*Stockholms arbetarinstitut*) in 1880, devoted not only to popular education but also to reducing the perceived threat of socialism.³² Within academia, however, and not least within the philosophical discipline, positivism did not really establish itself in Sweden in the same way as it did in the neighbouring countries. The idealistic dominance in its peculiar Swedish form of Christopher Jacob Boström (1797-1866) was strong, and those who revolted against it generally chose rather different paths than the empiricist-positivist one.³³

It was only with the Uppsala philosophy of Axel Hägerström (1869-1939) that the idealistic hegemony was overcome in Sweden. Hägerström was not a positivist in any philosophical sense of the term; he was hostile towards both empiricism and formal logic, and very much concerned with the autonomy of the philosophical discipline. But he combined elements from phenomenology, Neo-Kantianism and Austrian *Werttheorie* in an ingenious way, and in offering a radical alternative to idealism he gained a position and reputation as the main moderniser of Swedish philosophy. Hägerström was (and is) chiefly associated with his so called *value nihilistic theory* according to which value judgements cannot be true or false, but have to be interpreted as emotive outbursts of the

³¹ Anton Nyström (1875) *Positivistisk andaktsbok – hymner och språk, samlade och öfversedda af Anton Nyström* [Positivistic devotional book – hymns and sayings, gathered and seen over by Anton Nyström] (Stockholm: Ebelings).

³² See Tore Frängsmyr (1963-64) 'Den unge Anton Nyström och positivismen', *Lychnos*, 72-116; Jan Olov Nilsson (1994) *Alva Myrdal – en virvel i den moderna strömmen* (Stockholm: Brutus Östlings förlag Symposium), 111-115.

³³ In fact, the strongest opposition against Boström came from Jacob Borelius (1823-1909) in Lund, who was a Hegelian. Later, philosophers such as Vitalis Norström (1856-1916) in Göteborg and Hans Larsson in Lund (1862-1944) revolted against the Boströmian idealism in different ways, but generally remaining true to the transcendental-philosophical premises. See Heidegren, *Det moderna genombrottet*, 293-484. There were also individual philosophers such as John Landquist (1881-1974), who was interested in Bergson, but who remained outsiders in academic philosophy. See e.g. Battail, Jean-François (1979) *Le mouvement des idées en Suède à l'âge du bergsonisme* (Paris: Lettres Modernes); Nygård, *Henri Bergson i Finland*.

speaker, which he launched in his inaugural lecture as the professor of Practical Philosophy at the University of Uppsala in 1910. Historians of philosophy often claim that Hägerström was the first to articulate the so called non-cognitive or emotive theory in meta-ethics, which later became popular among logical positivists and analytic philosophers.³⁴ From a broader cultural and intellectual perspective, however, Hägerström's work must certainly be understood in connection with, or as a continuation of, the Scandinavian cultural radical tradition. The controversial value theory echoed the progressive and modernistic ethos of cultural radicalism, and Hägerström was sometimes called "the last of the 1880iers."³⁵

Hägerström was never politically active, but he lectured on socialism and was known as one of Sweden's foremost (critical) experts on Marx.³⁶ Hägerström's great significance in the cultural and political debates of the 1920s and 30s was mostly due to the fact that he introduced and represented the political and moral ideas of cultural radicalism at the prestigious and conservative department of philosophy at the University of Uppsala, where he claimed Boström's old chair in practical philosophy. Hägerström lent a certain official credibility to the secularist and oppositional ideas he embraced.

The 1920s and 1930s was a period of rapid modernisation of Swedish society. Sweden developed from a poor rural country at the margins of Europe, into something of a beacon of progress and

³⁴ See e.g. Patricia Mindus (2009) *A Real Mind – the Life and Work of Axel Hägerström* (Dordrecht: Springer); Sven Eliaesson, Patricia Mindus and Stephen P. Turner (eds.) (2014) *Axel Hägerström and Modern Social Thought* (Oxford: Bardwell Press).

³⁵ E.g. in the Swedish daily *Dagens Nyheter* 23.4.1934.

³⁶ According to Lennart Olausson (1980) 'Marxism och socialdemokrati', in Bo Lindberg, Ronny Ambjörnsson and Sven-Eric Liedman (eds.) *17 uppsatser i svensk idé- och lärdoms historia* (Uppsala: Carmina), 315-336, here 325. Hägerström's lectures on socialism were posthumously published as Hägerström (1946) *De socialistiska idéernas historia* [The history of the socialistic ideas] (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur). See also Hägerström (1909) *Social teleologi i marxismen* [Social teleology in Marxism] (Uppsala: akademiska boktryckeriet).

modernisation. The main symbolic event in this transformation was the Stockholm exhibition of 1930 which not only introduced modernism and functionalistic architecture to Sweden, but which also succeeded in making modernism itself something of a Swedish national characteristic.³⁷ In these processes Hägerström and Uppsala philosophy enjoyed a central position, not unlike that of the Vienna Circle in the Austrian and German realms, only with more success.³⁸ Celebrated as a prophet of modernism and progressivism, Hägerström was invoked by social scientists, as well as by leading figures in culture and politics. In 1932 in the modernist journal *Spektrum*, the Danish designer Paul Henningsen alluded to Hägerström by claiming that modern architecture tried to get by without the concept of beauty, precisely as modern philosophy of life wanted to abandon the concept of good and modern theory of knowledge the concept of truth.³⁹

It was, however, probably in the field of jurisprudence that the influence of the Hägerströmian ideas was the strongest. Hägerström is held to be the father of Scandinavian Legal Realism, a legal philosophical school that followed legal positivism in claiming that is only by studying law as a positive fact that the metaphysics of natural law philosophy can be avoided. The Scandinavian Legal Realists stood out among the varieties of legal positivism in that they emphasized one specific dimension, namely that law is a social fact, and that the legal rules therefore are revisable and subjects

³⁷ See Eva Rudberg (1999) *The Stockholm Exhibition 1930. Modernism's Breakthrough in Sweden* (Stockholm: Stockholmia förlag); Carl Marklund and Peter Stadius (2010) 'Acceptance and Conformity – Merging Modernity with Nationalism at the Stockholm Exhibition in 1930', *Culture Unbound* 2, 609-634.

³⁸ The positivist philosophers Rudolf Carnap and Otto Neurath both lectured for the Bauhaus architects during the late 1920s and early 1930s. See Peter Galison (1990) 'Aufbau/Bauhaus – logical positivism and architectural modernism', *Critical Inquiry* 16, 709–52.

³⁹ Paul Henningsen (1932) 'Estetiken och samhället', *Spektrum* 2, 7-8, 45-51, here 45.

of political decision making. This was a useful ideology for progressive intellectuals, particularly in the labour movement, who were arguing for social and political reforms.⁴⁰

The most energetic political voice of Scandinavian Legal Realism was Vilhelm Lundstedt (1882-1955), professor in legal science in Uppsala and Social Democratic Member of Parliament (1929-48). One of his favourite examples was “the right to property.” Lundstedt argued that it makes no sense to claim that expropriation of land constituted a violation of ‘the right to property,’ as this ‘right’ was created and guaranteed by the state in the first place. According to Lundstedt, it would be more correct to say that the possibility of expropriation is part of ‘the right to property’; i.e. that the rules regarding private property are construed in such a way that nothing prevents the government from taking control over the land if necessary.⁴¹ The issue of ‘property’ was particularly topical in the debates before the 1928 elections when the Social Democratic proposal for a substantial reform of the law of inheritance was criticised by the conservatives as a violation of the ‘right to property.’ Lundstedt countered these allegations with Hägerströmian arguments, claiming in a public speech that “There are no rights what so ever. The claim that a new law of inheritance would violate the right to ownership is as meaningless as the chatter of a parrot.”⁴² Even if the philosophical arguments might

⁴⁰ See Sverre Blandhol (1999) *Juridisk ideologi*; Toni Malminen (2007) ‘So You Thought Transplanting Law is Easy? Fear of Scandinavian Legal Realism in Finland, 1918-1965’, in Jaakko Husa, Kimmo Nuotio and Heikki Pihlajamäki (eds.) *Nordic Law – Between Tradition and Dynamism* (Antwerp: Intersentia), 75-87; Heikki Pihlajamäki (2004) ‘Against Metaphysics in Law; The Historical Background of American and Scandinavian Legal Realism Compared’, *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 52, 2, 469-487; Johan Strang, ‘Two Generations of Scandinavian Legal Realists’.

⁴¹ Vilhelm Lundstedt (1925) *Superstition or rationality in action for peace? Arguments against founding a world peace on the common sense of justice – a criticism of jurisprudence* (London: Longmans, Green and Co.), 89.

⁴² Quoted from Staffan Källström (1991) *En filosof i politiken – Vilhelm Lundstedt och äganderätten*, (Stockholm: Stockholms universitet), 15. My translation from the original: “Ty det finns ingen äganderätt och har i alla tider aldrig funnits någon äganderätt. Hela begreppet är blott en fantasiprodukt, logiskt otänkbar i verkligheten. Det finns

have escaped the audience at this particular occasion, the legal theory of Hägerström and Lundstedt was clearly well suited for a critical political rhetoric.

Lundstedt remained a somewhat controversial and peripheral figure both within Swedish politics in general and within the Social Democratic Party to which he belonged. But even if Lundstedt was among the more radical Hägerströmians, he was far from alone in using Hägerström in a political way. Among the Social Democrats, the social scientist and Nobel laureate economist Gunnar Myrdal (1898-1987) used Hägerströmian ideas to reveal hidden political (value) premises in liberal economic theory.⁴³ And the political scientist, and later editor-in-chief of the liberal newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, Herbert Tingsten (1896-1973) used Hägerström as part of his famous criticism of political – mainly totalitarian, but also conservative and Social Democratic – ideologies.⁴⁴ Hägerström was a philosophical icon for a whole generation of progressive intellectuals in Sweden; he was a leading intellectual authority to which “those who wanted to change things”⁴⁵ wanted to adhere, and to whose camp it was important to belong.

Hägerström under fire

överhuvudtaget inga rättigheter. Talet om att en ny arvslag skulle kränka äganderätten är lika meningslöst som papegojans pladder.”

⁴³ See Gunnar Myrdal (1955) *The Political Element in the Development of Economic Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press) (translation of Myrdal (1930) *Vetenskap och politik i nationalekonomien* (Stockholm: Norstedts). See also Johan Strang (2007) ‘Overcoming the Rift Between ‘is’ and ‘ought’ – Gunnar Myrdal and the Philosophy of Social Engineering’, *Ideas in History* 2, 2, 143-177.

⁴⁴ See e.g. Herbert Tingsten (1941) *Idékritik* [Criticism of ideas] (Stockholm: Bonniers), 12. See also Johan Strang (2009) ‘The Scandinavian Value Nihilists and the Crisis of Democracy’, in *Nordeuropaforum* 19, 1, 37-63, here 47-54.

⁴⁵ Gunnar Myrdal’s characterisation quoted by Staffan Källström (1997) ‘Filosofi och politik – Axel Hägerström och samhällsdebatten’, in Göran Bexell and Henrik Stenius (eds.) *Värdetraditioner i nordiskt perspektiv* (Lund: Lund University Press), 143-158, here 151.

The ideas of Hägerström were by no means univocally celebrated. Hägerström was a controversial figure and often the subject of criticism by not only his philosophical opponents, but also by the more conservatively inclined in the cultural and political debates. One of his most ardent critics was the philosopher and regular publicist of the tabloid *Aftonbladet*, John Landquist, who claimed that “Hägerström’s philosophy is an anti-metaphysical positivism, more narrow and stingy than the previous ones, for example that of Comte.” Landquist focussed especially on a criticism of Hägerström’s value theory which he claimed was not “culturally normal.”⁴⁶ Hägerström was very much a focal point in the cultural discussions during the 1930s. His position is illustrated not least by the writing contest that the publishing house *Natur och Kultur* arranged in the mid-1930s, in which the participants were asked to answer the question: “In our time, is it possible to formulate an objective moral theory, and on what would it be based?”⁴⁷ It was rather obvious, and also explicitly noted by the press, that it was Hägerström’s theory that the participants were asked to refute.

Hägerström rarely took part in these discussions himself. However, in an article from 1934 he did explicitly address the allegations that his rejection of the objective reality of duty would lead to the obliteration of society and morality itself.⁴⁸ According to Hägerström, it was absurd to suggest that his theory implied that everything is allowed, as “do what you want” was a moral judgement precisely on par with any other, and as such also an empty collection of words. Moreover, he also emphasised

⁴⁶ John Landquist (1931) ‘Angrepp på Hägerström’, *Aftonbladet* May 23, 3-4.

⁴⁷ My translation from the original: “Kan i vår tid uppställas en objektiv moral och varpå kan denna i så fall grundas”. As noted by Staffan Källström the question was somewhat self-defeating from a Hägerströmian perspective: If a moral theory is objective it should arguably not be dependent on the time in which it is formulated. See Staffan Källström (1984) *Värdenihilism och vetenskap – Uppsala filosofin i forskning och samhällsdebatt under 1920- och 30-talen* (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis), 95.

⁴⁸ Axel Hägerström (1939) ‘Om pliktmedvetandet’, in Axel Hägerström (ed.) *Socialfilosofiska uppsatser* (Stockholm: Bonniers), 67-92, here 69.

that he did not deny that moral judgements have a function in society, that they expressed social norms and sanctions that made a peaceful coexistence possible; he merely denied that these denoted something objectively existing.⁴⁹ And contrary to his critics, Hägerström argued that there were reasons to believe that the effects of his theory on public moral would be positive. By pointing out the fact that morality is based on social conventions, it was given a less absolute character. If punishment was believed to constitute a righteous retribution of a violation to a natural or divine law or right, there is no limit to the extent of the retribution. Similarly, if both sides in a moral or political dispute (say, a class conflict) believe that their cause is the objectively righteous one, the conflict easily escalates into religious proportions. Concluding his essay, and affiliating himself to the secular, progressive and modernistic ideals of cultural radicalism, Hägerström expressed a hope that his theory would at least “achieve something in the direction of removing the most difficult obstacles for a promotion of humanity and a forgiving temperament.”⁵⁰

When Hägerström in the summer of 1939 unexpectedly passed away, one of his closest disciples Martin Fries immediately gathered a collection of Hägerström’s moral philosophical essays and had them published by a major publishing house (Bonniers) as *Socialfilosofiska uppsatser* (Social-philosophical essays, 1939).⁵¹ The timing of the publication was, however, unfortunate. In the autumn of 1939 the European political the political situation in Europe was on the verge of culminating in the Second World War, and as Germany invaded Poland and the Soviet Union attacked Sweden’s neighbour Finland, the criticism of Hägerström became louder than ever. In newspaper articles and

⁴⁹ Ibid., 85 and 72.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 92.

⁵¹ The book included his (in-)famous inaugural lecture “Om moraliska föreställningars sanning” from 1910, as well as some articles on moral-philosophical problems that had been published in various popular journals (*Presens*, the modernistic journal *Spektrum*, and the Social Democratic journal *Tiden*), as well as two articles from the leading Swedish juridical periodical *Svensk juristtidning*.

reviews, characteristically entitled “Professor Hägerström and the world crisis” or even “Hägerström and Hitler,” the critics claimed that there was a connection between Hägerström’s value-nihilistic theory and the rise of totalitarianism, that value nihilism was, if not the ultimate reason for the cataclysm, then at least a symptom of the moral and cultural decline that had given leverage to totalitarian ideologies.⁵²

It certainly did not help that one of Hägerström’s and Lundstedt’s most distinguished disciples in legal theory, Karl Olivecrona (1897-1980), developed Lundstedt’s criticism of the concept of legal rights into a call for monopolisation of the use of force in Europe. According to the final paragraphs of the Swedish and German translations of *Law as fact* (1939) there was only one way to stop the recurring wars on the European continent: The small nations would have to subsume themselves to an organisation controlled by the strongest power in Europe.⁵³ Later in 1940 Olivecrona publically announced his German sympathies with the pamphlet *England eller Tyskland?* (England or Germany?, 1940).⁵⁴

The introduction of analytic philosophy to Sweden

It is hardly surprising that Hägerström, and particularly his value nihilistic theory, came to serve as something of an intellectual scapegoat in this period of cultural and political crisis. But contrary to how things developed on the European continent, where the experience of Nazism and the Second World War provoked a renaissance of natural law philosophy, the intellectual discussions in Sweden

⁵² Harald Källström (1940) ‘Prof. Hägerström och världskrisen’, *Göteborgs Morgonpost* January 29; Conrad Lönnqvist (1940) ‘Hitler och Hägerström’, *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, July 3. See also Strang, ‘The Scandinavian value nihilists and the crisis of democracy’.

⁵³ Karl Olivecrona (1940) *Gesetz und Staat* (Kopenhagen: Munksgaard), 226; Karl Olivecrona (1940) *Om lagen och staten* (Lund: Gleerup), 195-198.

⁵⁴ Karl Olivecrona, (1940) *England eller Tyskland?* (Lund: Gleerup).

(and to some extent also in the neighbouring Nordic countries) continued largely on the positivistic-realistic path.⁵⁵ Certainly, to some extent, the comparatively fortunate situation of Scandinavia, and particularly Sweden, might serve as an explanation for this fact. But one should not underestimate the challenge that the political situation raised for the democratically minded followers of Hägerström. While they continued to sympathise with the general progressive political and cultural ethos of Hägerström and Uppsala philosophy, they could not ignore the political criticism of the value nihilistic theory. However, with the grand old man Hägerström gone, there was plenty of room for innovative interpretation and re-description of his legacy, and this was effectively exploited by a young generation of positivists.

Of particular importance in this connection was a book called *Om rätt och moral* (On right and morals, 1941), published by the young Uppsala philosopher Ingemar Hedenius (1908-82).⁵⁶ The book was a well-written critical defence of Hägerström's value theory, by virtue of which Hedenius emerged publically as the main apostle of the theory in Sweden. But while the theory for Hägerström had been anchored in Austrian act-psychology (Brentano, Ehrenfeldts, Meinong) and concerned the psychological, epistemological or ontological status of value judgements, Hedenius transformed the theory into a semantic theory regarding the proper analysis of certain linguistic expressions, very much like the formulations of the logical positivists Alfred Ayer and Rudolf Carnap.⁵⁷

Hedenius was by no means uncritical of Hägerström. To the contrary, he devoted a large part of his book to a critical discussion of, e.g., Hägerström's (and Lundstedt's) naïve trust in the beneficial

⁵⁵ See e.g. Joakim Nergelius, *Konstitutionellt rättighetsskydd – svensk rätt i ett komparativt perspektiv* (Stockholm: Fritzes), 94-99; Joakim Östling (2008) *Nazismens sensmoral – svenska erfarenheter i andra världskrigets efterdyning* (Stockholm: Atlantis), 181-198.

⁵⁶ Ingemar Hedenius (1963 [1941]) *Om rätt och moral* (Stockholm: Wahlström and Widstrand).

⁵⁷ Alfred Ayer (1958 [1936]) *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Victor Gollancz); Rudolf Carnap (1935) *Philosophy and Logical Syntax* (London: Kegan Paul).

consequences of value nihilism. In believing that the value nihilistic theory would pave the way for a more humane moral attitude, Hedenius argued that the Hägerströmians were no better than their critics who claimed that it was leading to moral decline. There is no empirical evidence of the psychological moral consequences of supporting this rather intricate philosophical theory, Hedenius claimed.⁵⁸ So while value nihilism for Hägerström and his more orthodox followers had been a source for great social, political and moral expectations, it was by Hedenius, in the Swedish intellectual historian Svante Nordin's words, "transformed into a logical-semantic theory that concerned no-one but professional philosophers."⁵⁹

Another central feature in Hedenius criticism of the previous generation concerned their repeated claims of the metaphysical nature and non-existence of "legal rights." Certainly Hedenius agreed that natural law philosophy was wrong in claiming that a legal right was based upon something natural or divine, but this does not, according to Hedenius, mean that everyone who uses the concept "legal right" is referring to something natural or divine, let alone that the concept of a "legal right" itself "means" something natural or divine. The meaning of a statement is not something in the head of the speaker but rather the fact that makes it true, Hedenius argued echoing (but without referring to) Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (1922) and Carnap's *Scheinprobleme in der Philosophie* (1928). The meaning of the statement "It is raining" is the fact that raindrops are falling from the sky, regardless of the metaphysical theories that people have had regarding the phenomenon, for example, that it was Zeus that was making water trickle from his lofty throne in the heavens. Similarly, the meaning of a "legal right" is the verifiable social and legal circumstances (the law, the actual sanctions, etc) connected to this legal right, regardless of the silly theories that people have regarding the meaning

⁵⁸ Hedenius, *Om rätt och moral*, 146. Hedenius continued by arguing that "being personally acquainted with a large number of those concerned" he had not found anything that suggested that these philosophers would have been more moral if they had supported some kind of a objectivistic theory.

⁵⁹ Svante Nordin (2004) *Ingemar Hedenius – en filosof och hans tid* (Stockholm: Natur und Kultur), 107.

of the concept.⁶⁰ Instead of doggedly repeating that “there are no rights” as the previous generation, the Uppsala philosophers should, according to Hedenius, focus on analysing and describing the facts to which the concept actually refers.

The Nordic legal theoretical community deployed Hedenius’s thoughts and in the period between 1945 and 1953 there was a long and intricate debate on the meaning of a “legal right” in Scandinavian legal and philosophical journals, in which the Danish legal philosopher Alf Ross was one of the main figures.⁶¹ Even if this debate was carried out on a very abstract and analytical level, it must be seen as an attempt to rehabilitate the concept of “legal rights” within the Scandinavian legal discussion, and to overcome the radicalism of the Hägerströmian legacy. From this perspective, the Nordic legal discussion did not remain unaffected by the rise of totalitarianism and the Second World War. It remained on the realistic-positivistic track, but the Hägerströmian ideas were re-described in the light of the new challenges. For Hägerström, Lundstedt and Olivecrona, legal realism and value nihilism had been rhetorical weapons that paved way for substantial social and legal reforms. But where they had been occupied with overcoming the conservative and liberal dominance in Swedish politics, the generation of Hedenius and Ross were already working within a milieu largely dominated by the social democratic ideas of state intervention and economic planning. For them, it was rather the rise and fall of totalitarianism that constituted the main political challenge and thus they sought to deradicalise the ideas of the first generation in order to guarantee the stability of the legal and political system.⁶²

⁶⁰ Hedenius, *Om rätt och moral*, 62-68.

⁶¹ Jan Olof Ekelöf (1945) ‘Juridisk slutledning och terminologi’, *Tidsskrift for rettsvitenskap* 58, 211-272; Ivar Strahl (1946) ‘Till frågan om rättighetsbegreppet’, *Tidsskrift for rettsvitenskap* 59, 204-210; Alf Ross (1951) ”Tû-tû”, in Oscar A. Borum and Knud Illum (eds.) *Festskrift til Henry Ussing* (København: Nyt Nordisk Forlag). (English translation: (1957) *Harvard Law Review* 70, 5, 812-825).

⁶² Strang, ‘Two Generations’.

Establishing the analytic hegemony

The breakthrough of logical empiricism or analytic philosophy occurred in a very different way in Sweden than it did in neighbouring countries. While Kaila, Jørgensen and Næss had been directly involved with the Vienna Circle, Hedenius claimed the Uppsala philosophical legacy and redescribed it as a domestic pre-history of analytic philosophy. During the post-war years, Hedenius and his companions Konrad Marc-Wogau (1902-1991) and Anders Wedberg (1913-1978) repeatedly stated that Uppsala philosophy was a “parallel movement” to the Vienna Circle, and that “analytic philosophy” had three birthplaces, Cambridge, Vienna and Uppsala.⁶³ What Hedenius and his companions did was that they introduced logical positivism and analytic philosophy to Sweden by anchoring it in the Uppsala tradition after Hägerström.⁶⁴ Hedenius emerged as an updated version of Hägerström, both at the university and in the domestic debates. In 1947 he was appointed to Hägerström’s old chair in Practical (i.e. moral and political) Philosophy at Uppsala University, and through his infamous criticism of the Church and religion in *Tro och vetande* (Faith/belief and knowledge, 1949) he also succeeded in claiming Hägerström’s role as a leading public intellectual.⁶⁵

Despite the fact that Hedenius and his generation, at least to some extent, de-radicalised the political programme of Uppsala philosophy, it would certainly not be correct to say that the second generation of Uppsala philosophers, the analytic philosophers, were entirely apolitical. But in

⁶³ See Hedenius, *Om rätt och moral*, 10; Konrad Marc-Wogau and Hjalmar Wennerberg (1957) *Revolutionen i filosofin* [translation of Ryle’s *The Revolution in philosophy* extended with a chapter on Hägerström] (Stockholm: Natur und Kultur), 7; Konrad Marc-Wogau (1984) *Filosofisk uppslagsbok* [Philosophical dictionary] (Lund: Doxa), 23; Anders Wedberg (1966) *Filosofins historia III – Från Bolzano till Wittgenstein* [The history of philosophy III – From Bolzano to Wittgenstein] (Stockholm: Bonniers), 366.

⁶⁴ Strang, *History, transfer, politics*; Strang, ‘*Theoria* and logical empiricism’, 87-89.

⁶⁵ Ingemar Hedenius (1949) *Tro och vetande* (Stockholm: Bonniers).

Sweden, where it was the Uppsala School of Hägerström that occupied the position as the rational, scientific, modernistic, positivistic enlightenment philosophy, logical empiricism could not be imported as a culturally radical philosophy. Instead, logical empiricism was used by Hedenius as an argument *against* the radicalism of the Uppsala School. In intellectual transfers, the context to which ideas are transferred is often far more important than the context from which the ideas are borrowed.

At the same time, the de-radicalisation of Uppsala philosophy certainly also fell very well in line with the disarmament of the political aspects of logical empiricism in connection with its emigration to the United States in an emerging Cold War context.⁶⁶ Simultaneously as the Viennese logical empiricists abandoned their socialistic ambitions in the United States during the McCarthy era, analytic philosophy was explicitly profiled by Hedenius and his companions as the most objective, scientific and autonomous philosophy. The competing philosophies on the other hand, were stigmatised with suspicious political or cultural connotations. In his inaugural lecture as the Professor of Practical Philosophy in Uppsala 1948, Hedenius claimed that Marxism and neo-Thomism were popular only due to their support from the Soviet communist party and the Catholic Church respectively. Existentialism in turn was understandable only as a confused reaction to the terrors of the World Wars. If philosophy everywhere was given full freedom, Hedenius argued, the one that appears as most “scientific” would certainly prevail.⁶⁷

But the depoliticisation of analytic philosophy was not without its own political connotations and implications. As “the other philosophers” were stigmatised as fascist or communist, analytic

⁶⁶ See Don Howard (2003) ‘Two left turns make a right – on the curious political career of North American philosophy of science at midcentury’, in Gary L. Hardcastle and Alan W. Richardson (eds.) *Logical Empiricism in North America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 25-93; George A. Reisch (2005) *How the Cold War Transformed Philosophy of Science – To the Icy Slopes of Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

⁶⁷ Ingemar Hedenius (1972) ‘Om praktisk filosofi’, in Ingemar Hedenius (ed.) *Om människans moraliska villkor* (Göteborg: Författarförlaget), 17-33, here 17-19.

philosophy emerged not merely as objective and scientific, but also as the “democratic” alternative.⁶⁸ Similarly, when the other philosophies were presented as German, Catholic or Soviet-Russian, analytic philosophy was both “Western” as analytic philosophy was by now emerging as a primarily British and American movement, and “Swedish” by virtue of its Hägerströmian roots. Analytic philosophy was well in line with the general political air of the neutral, democratic, progressive, welfare state that Sweden was becoming during the post-war era.

Conclusions: Positivism in the Periphery

The history of Nordic positivism is very much a history of different ways in which foreign ideas have been introduced to these Northern outskirts of the European intellectual republic. But this does not mean that the Nordic philosophers have been passive recipients of ideas from the European continent. To the contrary, the Nordic philosophers have actively selected ideas they wished to import and sought to sensibly adapt them to domestic contexts. In a small peripheral country it is often a good idea to profile yourself as a local or national representative of a foreign intellectual or philosophical school, but the example of Sweden shows that it sometimes can be a better strategy to anchor the foreign ideas in, or even conceal them as, a local or national tradition. The making of the analytic hegemony in Sweden was accomplished by monopolising the figure of Hägerström and by re-describing his philosophy as “pre-analytic.”

But perhaps Sweden is not to be considered a “small peripheral country” like its neighbours. Hedenius move resembles the way in which Alfred Ayer in his epochal *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936) introduced logical empiricism to the English-speaking world as “the logical outcome of

⁶⁸ “The other philosophers” (*dom andra filosoferna*) was Hedenius’ way of denoting “...not only structuralisms, but also other existentialisms and Neo-Marxisms and drivel-theologies” [...inte bara strukturalismer, utan också andra existentialismer och nymarxismer och svammelteologier]. Ingemar Hedenius (1977) *Filosofien i ett föränderligt samhälle* (Stockholm: Bonniers), 33.

Berkeley and Hume.”⁶⁹ From this perspective Sweden can be seen as a more self-sufficient culture in which the importance of local and national traditions is stronger. The Uppsala legacy was so central that it could not, like the legacy of Høffding, Westermarck or Aall, be side-stepped by the introduction of celebrated foreign ideas like logical empiricism or analytic philosophy. Instead logical empiricism and analytic philosophy had to be domesticated, nationalised and presented as a natural continuation of the Uppsala tradition before it could reach its Swedish breakthrough.

Interestingly, the political connotations of positivism, which were present to some degree in all Nordic countries during the first generation, seem to have been more persistent in Sweden than in the neighbouring countries. The analytic philosophy of Hedenius, which in a political sense represented the domestic “positivistic” legacy of cultural radicalism and Uppsala philosophy, dominated the debates in post-war Sweden and remained virtually unchallenged at least until the generation of 1968. At the same time, it needs to be emphasised that the connection between “positivism” and the democratic Swedish welfare state is by no means a necessary one. Olivecrona’s book *Law as a fact* (1939) provides an example of an alternative form in which the Hägerströmian ideas were given political significance. Whether Hägerström could have served as the anchor for a Swedish philosophy in a Nazi-dominated Europe is, of course, a matter of speculation, but it is in any case not *a priori* impossible that he could have done so.

The domestic background and the strong political connotations is, however, surely one of the reasons why the analytic dominance was both more persistent and more aggressive in Sweden than it was in the neighbouring countries. The *Positivismusstreit* of the 1960s and 70s did not challenge the analytic hegemony at the philosophical departments in Sweden, instead non-analytic philosophers were forced to find a refuge at departments of sociology, literature or history of ideas. From this perspective, the intellectual freedom and the lack of dogmatism attributed to the peripheries by

⁶⁹ Alfred Ayer (1936) *Language, Truth and Logic* (London: Victor Gollancz), 1.

Jørgensen at the start of this chapter, seems to have been much more pertinent in the other Nordic countries where the Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss and the Finnish philosopher Georg Henrik von Wright both became internationally recognised as bridge-builders between analytic and continental philosophy.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Arne Næss (1968) *Four modern philosophers, Carnap, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Sartre* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), (Norwegian original from 1965); Georg Henrik von Wright (1971) *Explanation and Understanding* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul).