

THE EUROPEAN CONSERVATIVE

Issue 4 | June 2010

“Yellow Ants”, Fundamentalists and Cowboys

In this interview we speak with the French intellectual, Rémi Brague, about his life and work. The question of whether and in what way the West is unique forms a large part of the interview. Whether one can sensibly speak of “three religions of the book”, whether Brague is a Straussian, what the civilizational role of poverty, humility, and cultural inferiority complexes are, and whether Americans really are cultural cowboys, each get discussed in turn.

Interview with Rémi Brague

Could you tell us a little about yourself?

- Well, I was born sixty years ago in a small community on the outskirts of Paris. I studied philosophy at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. I married my current wife at the age of twenty-three. We have four children, who so far have given us two grandchildren.

My first academic interest was Greek philosophy, but I later became more and more interested in Semitic languages. I learned Hebrew to be able to understand the Old Testament. And when I was 38, I started to learn Arabic, because I wanted to read the Jewish philosopher Maimonides' *The Guide for the Perplexed* in its original language. Then I suddenly became professor of Arabic philosophy, and started to concentrate on Jewish and Arab medieval philosophy. Now, I spend the winters teaching in Paris and the summers teaching at the University of Munich. Although I study such a wide range of things without any apparent coherence, the word “work” perhaps isn't justified. I consider it

more a form of scholé in the classical sense: well used leisure.

You are known as a philosopher influenced by Leo Strauss. Is that correct?

- Up to a point only. Leo Strauss taught me that when reading a text, you must be open to the possibility that it contains different layers of meaning. All philosophical books written before the Enlightenment aim at both a wider audience and a small elite, able to understand the deeper meaning of the texts. According to Strauss, this is because philosophy can be a threat to the establishment, by casting doubt on prevailing traditions and making them the subject of discussion. Therefore, philosophers must operate very carefully: both to protect themselves against the establishment, and to protect the established order against their undermining skepticism. So they must write down their thoughts in such a way, that only other philosophers understand the text at that level. The works of Maimonides may indeed be read in this fashion, but I am not convinced that it applies to the Greek philosophers. But Strauss became so convinced of his own way of interpreting texts, that he came to apply it to all sorts of books, even Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Strauss taught me to read very carefully. But I don't consider myself a Straussian, nor do the real Straussians consider me as one of them.

France has a long tradition of philosophers entering public discussions, and frequently they exert considerable influence on public opinion. Do you?

- The French tradition of public intellectuals



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began at the end of the 19th century with the Dreyfus affair, when the word “intellectual” was coined. But I am not a public intellectual in the way that for example Alain Finkielkraut—whom I admire very much—is. He regularly appears on national television and on radio. I do not. I am an academic. A real public intellectual must have something to say about everything, and I know almost nothing about, say, Afghanistan. But I do consider it a duty of academics to correct the frequent errors and untruths that pervade public discussions.

Could you give any examples of frequently occurring errors, which you feel compelled to correct from your particular expertise in medieval Jewish, Christian, and Islamic philosophy?

- Yes. For example: people keep on referring to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as the three monotheistic religions, as the three “religions of

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the book”, and the three religions of Abraham. This is three times nonsense. To speak of the three monotheistic religions is incorrect, because there are more than three. More importantly, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity are monotheistic in very different ways. In the Jewish tradition, God is the God who is loyal in history, and frees his people from slavery in Egypt. In Christianity, God consists of the mutual love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. For Muslims on the other hand, God is a one solid block.

The second misunderstanding is the idea that there are “three religions of the book”. That is misleading, because the meaning of the book is very different in each religion. In Judaism, the Tenakh is a written history of the covenant between God and the people of Israel, almost a kind of contract. In Christianity, the New Testament is the history of one person, Jesus, who is the incarnate Word of God. In Islam, the Koran is „uncreated“ and has descended from the heavens in perfect form. Only in Islam is the book itself what is revealed by God. In Judaism God is revealed in the history of the Jewish people. In Christianity God is revealed as love in the person of Jesus. Judaism and Christianity are not religions of the book, but religions with a book.

The third misconception is to speak of “the three Abrahamic religions”. Christians usually refer to Abraham as a person who binds these three religions together, and who is shared by them. In Judaism, he is the “founding father”. But in the Koran it is written: “Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian.” (III, 67). To Muslims, Abraham was a Muslim, as was the first man, Adam. According to Islam, the first prophets received the same revelation as Mohammed, but the message was subsequently forgotten. Or it was tampered with, with evil intent. So according to Islam, the Torah and the Gospels are fakes.

All in all it must be said, that the religions cannot easily be compared. There are fundamental differences. Yet they are constantly discussed as if they were essentially the same thing.

Some would say that there are many fundamental differences even within Christianity or Islam. Are you ever rebuked for speaking of Islam as if it were a singular whole, whereas in reality there are many different forms of Islam in the world?

- My response to this reproach is the following

story: once upon a time there was a chemist who wrote a treatise on the element cobalt. Because pure cobalt doesn't exist in nature but only in compounds with silicon, copper, and other elements, the chemist was criticized: Why write a treatise on something that can't be found anywhere, and so doesn't seem to exist? The chemist replied that precisely because he wanted to understand all those different cobalt compounds occurring in the world, he needed to study the properties of pure cobalt. In the same way, I am an “essentialist”. I cannot say very much about individual Muslims, but I know some things about Islam's basic claims, that each and every Muslim shares: the Koran as dictated by God, Mohammed as the “beautiful example”, Mecca as the direction of prayer, etc. I don't know how Europe should integrate its Muslim immigrants, and I'm not saying that theology can provide all the answers. But social sciences and statistics don't either. To understand Islam however, you must be willing to take the Islamic interpretation of Islam seriously. You must study its theology, the way it understands itself.

What are your views on moderate forms of Islam?

- A moderate Islam would be a very good idea. There are moderate Muslims, but Islam has its inner logic, as do other religions.

What about the Islamic societies in Moorish Andalusia in Southern Spain, in the Middle Ages? Much is said about them being quite tolerant.

- Many well-meaning myths circulate about Islamic Spain. The Muslims there were indeed quite tolerant towards each other. But in the oft-romanticized city of Cordoba, the family of the Jewish philosopher Maimonides was banished, Averroes was exiled, and many Christians martyred. If there was indeed some form of Islamic enlightenment in the tenth century under the influence of thinkers such as al-Farabi, it was buried in the eleventh. Philosophy never reached mainstream Islam. An “enlightened” thinker such as Averroës was completely forgotten in the Arabic-speaking world; but his works were widely studied in Hebrew and Latin. And the original texts were republished in Europe from the mid-nineteenth century on.

Incidentally, in one of his books Averroës emphasized that heretics should be killed (see

Incoherence of the Incoherence, XVII, 17).

Why did philosophy play such an important role in Europe but not in the Arab world, when many classical (Western) philosophical texts were only preserved as Arabic translations?

- Philosophy has always been marginal in the Islamic world, but it blossomed in Europe. Why? Well, it was not because of a difference in the sources: both had Aristotle and some Neo-Platonist texts. Although Europe had to put up with only the beginning of Aristotle's logical works and waited till the 12th Century for the rest to be available in Latin. Also, there was no difference in the genius of their philosophers. Thomas Aquinas was no more brilliant than al-Farabi. The big difference was that philosophy was never institutionalized in the Islamic world, as it was in Europe, thanks to the universities. All great Islamic philosophers were amateurs. They practiced law or worked as doctors, because philosophy didn't exist as a profession. Therefore, philosophy remained an army with only generals; whereas in Europe it was taught at universities, where the philosophers also trained lawyers, physicians, and theologians.

By the way, nearly all texts translated from Greek in the Middle East were translated by Christians. There is only one example of an early Islamic thinker who studied a non-Islamic language: al-Biruni. That is another difference: Islamic scholars read the classical works in Arabic translations; whereas in Europe, some people in the Middle Ages—and the whole intellectual elite from the 15th Century on—learned the classical languages. They did this to read the originals.

You frequently emphasize the importance of learning classical languages. Why?

Learning classical languages is essential to European civilization.

- In 1992 I published a short study of the cultural identity of Europe: Europe, la voie romaine, which was translated in English as *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization*. I actually prefer the English title, since it instantly states the central thesis of the book. Europe's luck was its initial poverty. For a very long time, Europe remained far removed from the existing cultural centers in Asia. Europeans were barbarians, inhabiting distant, freezing northern shores. And they knew this about themselves. Studying classical languages, and thereby imbibing a civilization wholly

different from their own, made them conscious of the fact that they were stinking barbarians, who needed to wash themselves with the soap of higher civilizations. The Romans were well aware that they were culturally inferior to the Greeks. But they also had the courage to admit it. And that is precisely what gave them the strength to absorb the Hellenic civilization, and spread it to the lands they conquered. The essential characteristic of European culture is that it is ex-centric. Not in the sense of an Englishman who takes a bath wearing his bowler hat, but in the sense that the two sources of her civilization, Athens and Jerusalem, lie outside the geographical area of Europe itself. European culture is based on the recognition that we are barbarians who civilized ourselves by internalizing 'strange' cultural sources.

And that's unique to Europe?

- Yes, Western civilization is something very strange and unusual. Most civilizations have only one centre. Islam has Mecca. Ancient Egypt had Memphis. Babylon had Babylon. But Western civilization had two sources, Athens and Jerusalem—the Jewish and later Christian tradition and that of pagan antiquity—often described as being in dynamic conflict. This opposition is founded on the opposition of Jew and Greek, borrowed from Saint Paul, which was then systemized in different ways: Hellenism versus Hebraism, the religion of beauty versus the religion of obedience, reason versus faith, aesthetics versus ethics, etc. The curious thing is that one was never swallowed by the other. Europe is neither Jewish nor Greek. In "Rome" in Christianity (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church), Jerusalem and Athens are simultaneously joined and kept apart.

With the coming of Christianity the preceding cultures were not destroyed, but a new civilization was formed. As the Romans recognized that their culture was „secondary“ to that of the Greeks, the Christians recognized that Judaism preceded Christianity. This understanding gave European civilization a unique openness and humility towards the enormous cultural achievements of the past. This humility has been a great strength. It fosters the awareness that you cannot simply inherit a civilizing tradition, but that you must work very hard to obtain it—to control the barbarian inside. This has given European culture the possibility of renaissances: a

renewed appreciation of the sources of our culture, to correct what has gone wrong.

This becomes apparent in the different ways in which Islam and Christianity approached their older Greek and Jewish sources. The difference could be described by the words "digestion" and "inclusion". In Islam, the original Jewish and Christian texts were digested, changed into something completely new, purely authentic to Islam itself. In Europe on the other hand, the original texts were left in their original state. The Christian Old Testament and the Jewish Tenakh are almost exactly the same; and Christians recognize the Jewish origins of the books of the Old Testament. Similarly, the Church Fathers took up classical philosophy, and Thomas Aquinas studied Aristotle and included Aristotelian notions in his theology. Yet scholars have never stopped reading the works of Aristotle himself.

The success of Western Europe is remarkable. Who could have thought in the early Middle Ages that Western Europe would become so powerful, and not the Byzantine or Islamic civilizations? Europe is a continent of parvenus. The Roman and Christian inferiority complexes have worked as spurs on the horse.

So a cultural inferiority complex can be a blessing?

- Of course there are good and bad ways of dealing with an inferiority complex. The right way is to work harder, as Europeans have done. The wrong way would be resentment.

Do you think there is a threat that Europe may lose this unique openness? Is the West becoming 'normal'?

- With the decline of Christianity and classical education, the West is indeed becoming less and less interested in the classical sources of our civilization. Knowing less about our own civilization also seems to make us lose the ability to listen carefully to what we could learn from others. The Chinese show us that to survive you must work. And what do we do? We call them "yellow ants". Muslims show us that to survive, you must procreate. We call them "fundamentalists". Americans could teach us that you must not blind yourself to the fact that you have enemies. And what do we do? We call them "cowboys".

Why are we allowing this to happen?

- Perhaps we have become victims of our own



Professor Rémi Brague

*is part of a small group of European thinkers, knowledgeable of the founding traditions of the Christian West as well as medieval Jewish and Islamic philosophy and theology. This nature of this knowledge—being both broad and deep—is evident in his publications in French and German. The few of his books that English speakers have been lucky enough to receive in translation are: *The Legend of the Middle Ages: Philosophical Explorations of Medieval Christianity, Judaism, and Islam* (forthcoming, April 2009); *The Law of God: The Philosophical History of an Idea*; *The Wisdom of the World: The Human Experience of the Universe in Western Thought*; *Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization*.*

success. It seems Europeans have eaten the carrot of civilization that used to spur them onwards. To survive, we must learn to remain humble, in spite of our successes. ■

Interview and translation

by Diederik Boomsma & Yoram Stein

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Institut de Formation Politique

www.ifpfrance.org

After personally experiencing the political “openness” and “fairness” of the contemporary university toward conservatives, three young men—Alexandre Pesey, Jean Martinez, and Thomas Millon—joined together to create a solution for conservative French students who are punished by professors and students alike for their beliefs.

Alexandre Pesey

Each of these young men brought with them specific areas of expertise, Jean in law, Thomas in politics, and Alexandre in civil society, and with that breadth of knowledge, created the Institut de Formation Politique (IFP) in 2004. Modeled on various American conservative organizations—in particular, Morton Blackwell’s Leadership Institute—IFP recruits, trains, and places France’s most promising young conservatives.

The Principles

The Institute is financially and politically independent. With no public funds and no member of the Board holding any political position, IFP is free to follow its convictions and convey them without apology or equivocation to French youth, a rarity in France.

Attached to the principles of subsidiarity, IFP promotes individual freedom, personal responsibility, free markets, a common cultural heritage, and the role of natural intermediary bodies in society (i.e., the family).

The Training

To ensure the quality of its seminars, each prospective student participant is carefully selected by the board based on a survey they

much complete, which includes questions such as What should be the virtues of a politician? or Who is the person that inspires you the most? Once the students are selected, they will spend an intense weekend together participating in lectures from our faculty.

IFP is fortunate to have a dynamic and knowledgeable roster of university professors, political entrepreneurs, journalists, businessmen, and communication experts who donate their time, energy, and wisdom to our students. This faculty actively seeks to promote an environment of mentorship: speakers will often remain with students to discuss issues informally over coffee or stay for lunch. This dimension of the IFP program is very important for our students, because mentorship is a rarity in France.

As students mature in their political understanding they are offered places in two more advanced seminars. The level II seminar requires work before the session and offers deeper engagement both intellectually and technologically. The level III seminar is more practically focused, with sessions like Learn to communicate or Finance and develop your organization.

The Network

After graduating from the IFP’s course, students join our alumni network of more than three hundred French conservative youth. Through this valuable network, graduates are able to continue to develop their expertise and their grasp of current issues. Les Lundis de L’IFP (IFP Mondays) are working dinner meetings where experts brief participants on various topics. Most recently we have discussed “The Economic Role of the Family” with Professor



Jean-Didier Lecaillon and “Understanding the Green Ideology” with author Christian Gerondeau.

Graduates receive a monthly e-letter that broadcasts information about alumni events, what other graduates are doing, internship and job opportunities, and also grassroots activities. Every year, IFP also hold its Annual Soirée where graduates come to network and receive the updated Book of Alumni which provides contact information for all IFP alumni, thus placing likeminded allies ready to hand.

The Templeton Freedom Award

For its achievements in recruiting, training, and placing students in public policy positions, the solidity of its business model, and its promotion of freedom, IFP received the Templeton Freedom Award from the Atlas Economic Research Foundation. IFP is the first French organisation ever to receive this recognition.

The Future

While the Institute is still young, we are encouraged by the quality of the network and teaching we have been able to assemble. Always looking for new ways to promote our ideas and advance our graduates, we look forward to sharing your experiences and hearing any ideas from you.

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New graduated from IFP seminars

Alexandre Pesey

is a Founder and the executive director of the Institut de Formation Politique, a conservative training Institute in Paris. Pesey (1975) received a law and political science degree from Paris II Panthéon-Assas University, where he taught constitutional law and international relations theories for four years. Also a graduate from EM Lyon Business School, he is currently teaching Economics in a private school. Alexandre is married, and the father of two children, Emma 2, and Rémi 7 months.

Intellectual Conservatism in Sweden

Historically, Sweden has been quite isolated from the rest of Europe, although Christianized in the eleventh century and becoming one of the first protestant countries in the sixteenth century. That isolation began to change during the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, and then, in the twentieth century Sweden was re-made as a socialist (social democratic) country. But we also have a history as one of Europe's empires between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries, with Finland as the eastern part of the empire and provinces all around the Baltic Sea, as well as a colony in North America, one in the Caribbean, and one in Africa.

Jakob E:son Söderbaum

Swedish conservatism is essentially related to the nationalism of the nineteenth century which followed the deterioration of Sweden's empire. Swedish conservatism has also been inseparable from royalism—even though this may seem strange to many Europeans who see conservatism as more related to the nobility's strivings for power in competition with the crown. This is due to the fact that in Swedish history, the peasants have been a class of freeholders with their own representation in parliament alongside the nobility, priests, and burghers. Sweden is unique in this respect: we have had no slavery or serfdom since 1335. The king has always been seen as a "people's king." The rise of the Social Democratic party and its ascendancy over politics (their first prime minister was elected in 1921) and the academic world—together with the fact that conservatism was popular before the Second World War whereas modernism has been popular ever since the 1930s—are the main reasons why conservatism largely lost its place in Swedish political life during the second half of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, Sweden has a history of conservatism that goes back to the eighteenth century, and it was never extinguished the way it usually was in communist countries. The student organization Föreningen Heimdal in Uppsala, although quite small, has been crucial in keeping conservatism alive during the twentieth century, when the Party of the Right/The Moderate Union Party (officially dubbed as Sweden's "Conservative Party," though this is not an accurate representation today) has not been able or even interested enough in

maintaining the legitimacy of conservatism in political and social debate.

Late eighteenth and early nineteenth century

Sweden made important philosophical contributions to the proto-conservative philosophical debate of late eighteenth-century Europe. In 1759, Peter Forsskål (1732–1763) published the pamphlet, "De Libertate Civile." In that period, Sweden maintained good contacts with the German university of Göttingen, which was internationally recognized as a center for new ideas critical of the radical French Enlightenment. It does seem that the conservative thought later derived from Edmund Burke has a stronger resonance with ideas arising within the German cultural sphere than elsewhere. There may even have been a direct influence of German thought on Burke himself, since Göttingen was then part of the Kingdom of Hannover, which was in alliance with Great Britain at the time.

Forsskål's "De Libertate Civile" had a powerful impact on the Göttingen debate, and he was appointed a corresponding member of the Royal Society of Science. The pamphlet has all the elements of a conservative text, including patriotism, defence of civil society, insistence on morality, ordered liberty, the importance of liberal education and refinement, a separation of state ownership and private ownership, advocacy of harmony in a stratified society, the principle of human imperfection, and a critique of individual reason. Forsskål was not a utopian. He opposed revolution, he opposed imperialism, and he criticized the earlier warrior-king Karl XII (1682–1718) for the fact that his campaigns had left Sweden impoverished of population, food, and financial resources. This critique of imperialism and absolute royal power also resembles themes in the writings of Burke. Forsskål was also clearly influenced by David Hume and his position was close to that of the contemporary Scottish common-sense philosophers. It has also been argued that Forsskål influenced Immanuel Kant.

In 1772, King Gustav III (1746–1792) carried out a coup d'état, reinstating absolutism. As a ruler, Gustav III made Swedish culture bloom more than any other king. He also happened to be an admirer of Burke. Gustav III himself read "Reflections on the Revolution in France" and it is documented that the king personally



King Gustav III (1746-1792), a mecenat of Edmund Burke's

shared Burke's view on pre-Enlightenment Europe. Gustav III even gave Burke a small Swedish state pension.

Burke's influence on practical Swedish politics is otherwise mostly connected with the constitution of 1809, after the fall of absolutism—especially through the work of Hans Järta (1774–1847), who is considered one of the very first ideological conservatives in Sweden. The framing of the constitution of 1809 was also the occasion when the first conservative ideas could be observed in Swedish intellectual debates. This constitution was held in great popular respect until it was finally replaced by the Social Democrats in 1974 with a new constitution which today is considered a bad piece of work from the beginning.

In 1809, Sweden also entered the last war that we have fought—with Denmark and Russia. That war ended with Sweden losing the eastern part of the empire to Russia (which became Finland) and gaining Norway (which had been in union with Denmark since the fourteenth century). The union with Norway remained until 1905. These historical facts meant a great deal in the shaping of Swedish national identity and Swedish conservatism until the Second World War, when everything was turned upside down.



The Uppsala University main building, with the statue of Erik Gustaf Geijer (1783-1847), an important contributor to both conservative and liberal thinking in Sweden.

The leaders of the center-right parties have traditionally published articles in the magazine during years of parliamentary elections. Many members of Heimdal have become leading conservative intellectuals and politicians, including two leaders of the Party of the Right.

The great conservative debate by the turn of the century

Around the turn of the century, 1899–1900, a vast intellectual conservative debate took place in Sweden. Several different conservative camps were formed, with two main branches: one centered around Harald Hjärne (1848–1922) and another around Pontus Fahlbeck (1850–1923) and Rudolf Kjellén (1864–1922). All three were professors, and both Hjärne and Kjellén were very prominent in their time.

Harald Hjärne was a professor at Uppsala University, and an honorary member of Föreningen Heimdal. Beginning as a liberal, Hjärne became a conservative by the time he entered parliament in 1902. In his political philosophy, he joined the ideas of Edmund Burke, Benjamin Disraeli, and Otto von Bismarck. He had an historicist view of man and society, where individuals stood at the centre of social development. The central theses in his writings concerned justice and culture, state and Christianity. According to Hjärne, the Swedish nation had a cultural and civilizational heritage to defend, and the interests of the nation were superior to parties, social groups, and individuals. At this time, Sweden considered itself to have an historical mission as the last Western outpost against an imperialistic Russia. Despite its much smaller population, Sweden had stood as a bulwark against the Russians for more than 500 years—and Sweden was the only country ever to successfully conquer Moscow (in 1610). Hjärne also held that the national interest, in turn, should be understood in light of higher ideals common for all people. Thus, he did not advocate any kind of “clash of nations,” that has come to signify the ideological creed of nationalism. Hjärne was also an Anglophile in a Sweden where German influence since the industrial revolution of the 1870s was strong. Today, Hjärne would be considered as leaning toward social conservatism. He also advocated economic and social reforms to achieve greater social justice. He did not write many weighty volumes; instead he published a huge quantity of shorter booklets.

Popular conservatism in the nineteenth century

Swedish intellectual conservatism came of age during the nineteenth century, and there were three main political philosophers who professed ideas congenial to conservatism: Nils Fredrik Biberg (1776–1827), Samuel Grubbe (1786–1853), and Christopher Jacob Boström (1797–1866). These three were in turn influenced by conservative intellectual currents in the rest of Europe: Immanuel Kant, Johan Gottlieb Fichte, and Friedrich von Schelling, as well as Adam Müller, Carl Ludwig von Haller, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi.

Nils Fredrik Biberg was a professor of philosophy at Uppsala University. He wrote primarily on the theory of the state, and he represented a more liberal form of conservatism. For him, the social contract was a central idea, and he focused on the freedom of the individual in relation to the state.

Samuel Grubbe was a disciple of Biberg, and like him he was a professor of philosophy at Uppsala University. Between 1840–1844 he was head of the ecclesiastical ministry of the Swedish government. Unlike most conservatives in Sweden, Grubbe was a republican, and he advocated a new Swedish constitution inspired by the constitution of the United States of America.

Christopher Jacob Boström succeeded Grubbe as professor of philosophy at Uppsala University. He was much admired, and is considered as perhaps Sweden’s greatest philosopher of all time. Boström formed a synthesis of the philosophies of Plato and Friedrich Hegel, based on orthodox theism. According to Boström, society is organic, and its parts each have their own place and goals to strive for within the whole. He considered justice to be the main goal of the state, and he argued that the people have a duty to apply God’s will in their own deeds. Because of Boström, Sweden never had any actual Hegelianism: Swedes have tended to debate the Hegel-influenced ideas of Boström instead. Of considerable importance for the

development of Swedish conservatism was the historian and poet Erik Gustaf Geijer (1783–1847), not least through his novel-writing and his poetry. As a conservative, Geijer was influenced by the German critic of revolution Adam Müller, as well as by the Historical School. Like the latter, Geijer saw the state as an organism and defended established institutions. Under the influence of Burke, he also understood society’s ethical, juridical, and aesthetic values as historically grounded. As a philosopher of history, he focused on tradition, on the one hand, and free will, on the other. As a poet he was patriotic. In 1811 he co-founded the Gothic Society (Götiska Förbundet), an organization which tried to strengthen Swedish historical identity and national spirit after Sweden had lost Finland. Geijer is most famous today, however, for his turning away from conservatism, and powerfully developing a Swedish form of liberalism.

With his novel writing and poetry, Geijer was part of the so-called Romantic school (sw: Den romantiska skolan) which played an important role in making conservative and nationalist values popular in nineteenth-century Sweden. Two other important conservative authors of the Romantic School were Esaia Tegnér (1782–1846) and Erik Johan Stagnelius (1793–1823). During the second half of the nineteenth century, conservative ideas flourished in Swedish social life, together with nationalist and royalist ideas. King Oskar II (1872–1907), the last crowned king of Sweden, is still today a famous symbol for Swedish popular late 19th century conservatism.

It was also during this period, in 1891, that the conservative student organization Föreningen Heimdal was founded, originally as an association for political discussion amongst right-leaning students in Uppsala. After a period as an organization oriented to “enlightening the populace,” from 1910 onwards Heimdal developed into a self-proclaiming “pro-reform conservative” political student organization. Since 1962, Heimdal has also been publishing the magazine *Tidskriften Heimdal*, with conservative and liberal thinking and debate.

As an historian, Hjärne was something of a genius. He developed new methods, and he fostered a generation of Swedish historians. Among his disciples are the famous national economist Eli Heckscher (1879–1952, father of Gunnar Heckscher, see below), the legal scholar and politician Karl Gustav Westman (1876–1944), the historian and politician Samuel Clason (1867–1925), and the historian Nils Ahnlund (1889–1957).

Rudolf Kjellén and Pontus Fahlbeck formed the second main branch, alongside the Hjärne-branch, in the intellectual conservatism of the early twentieth century. While Hjärne is nearly forgotten today, Kjellén's name is internationally well regarded—though in Sweden he is somewhat controversial.

Pontus Fahlbeck has been mainly recognized as a professor of statistics. Politically, he was a protectionist, and he was the first in Sweden to develop a general critique of socialism. Rudolf Kjellén is highly regarded as the inventor of geopolitics as an academic doctrine, and as such he is one of the very few internationally known Swedish political philosophers. He should also be recognized as the creator of the “people's home” (sw: folkhem), the model for Swedish social life which the Social Democrats made their own and carried through in their social politics—but few remember Kjellén for this. As a thinker and member of parliament for the Party of the Right, Kjellén was a patriot with authoritarian views, not opposing the social democratic movement, and supporting Germany during the First World War.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the development of conservative ideas in Sweden stood at its intellectual zenith. To put it simply, there was a debate with few boundaries. While Hjärne inspired a generation of academics, Kjellén won the naturally more radical hearts of the young organized Right. In this way, Kjellén initiated what would become a political development towards right-wing extremism among the young organized Right. This fact led to the eclipse of his reputation here in Sweden.

The decades following the Second World War

The development of Swedish conservative ideas after World War II has been mainly connected to the Party of the Right, which became increasingly liberal and in 1969 changed its name to the Moderate Union Party (sw: Moderata Samlingspartiet). Erik Anners

(1916–1997) was the most important party ideologist during the period. For many years he led the work on the party's political programs, manoeuvring them in a liberal-conservative direction. The party's politics during the period were, however, more pragmatic and non-ideological. Harald Hjärne and his followers disappeared as points of references into the mists of history, even though this branch of conservative ideas had a noticeable influence on the politics of the Party of the Right until 1965 when Gunnar Heckscher (1900–1987) departed as chairman of the party.

In post-WWII Sweden, Gunnar Unger (1915–1976) must be mentioned as the most important conservative publicist, albeit not a developer of ideas and in many ways a reactionary. He was a witty critic of the downsides of the social state, the problems of cultural radicalism, and the student revolt of 1968. He wanted to preserve society but also see the government (then Social Democratic) ousted from power. He was a defender of the beauty and value of historical houses during a period when the Social Democrats demolished so much of old Swedish architecture. In his biographical essays, opportunists and power-seekers were denounced, while virtuous, dutiful, and creative people were praised. He wrote in the conservative idea-magazine *Obs!* as well as in the Party of the Right's journal of ideas *Svensk Tidskrift*, and for twenty years in the major conservative newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet*.

The only conservative philosopher (more or less) after the 1960s who is not directly connected to the Moderate Union Party is Tage Lindbom (1909–2001). He began his public life as a Social Democrat: from 1938–1965 he was the head of the Workers' Movement Archive and Library (sw: Arbetarrörelsens Arkiv och Bibliotek), and his doctoral thesis in 1938 concerned the rise and early history of workers unions. During his later years, however, he became more and more interested in religion and theology, which first made him a conservative and later led him to convert to Islam. In 1962 he officially turned against socialism with his book *Windmills of Sancho Panza* (sw: “Sancho Panzas väderkvarnar”). Thereafter, he published about ten books on conservative, traditionalist, and antimodernist themes, alongside theological and also antidemocratic themes. His book “*Demokratin är en myt*” (1991) has been translated into English and published under the title, “*The*

Myth of Democracy.” By the end of his life, Lindbom focused on his personal studies of Islam.

Conservative organizations after the 1970s

From the mid-1970s until the present, the history of intellectual conservatism in Sweden consists of various attempts to re-legitimize conservatism. Against all odds, these attempts have succeeded and conservatism is today much debated in the Swedish media. But it has been a long and hard journey.

In 1971, the conservative think tank *Konservativt Idéforum* (KIF) was formed. Its inspiration was on the one hand the debate book “*Fighting Conservatism*” (sw: “*Kämpande konservatism*”, 1971), which introduced the concept of “value-conservatism” (sw: *värdekonservatism*), to distinguish the position from popular misconceptions of the word “conservatism.” “Value-conservatism” means to safeguard politically the cultural values that have proven to be meaningful for a people through history. On the other hand, *Konservativt Idéforum's* inspiration was the new conservative movement in the United States, which was introduced in Swedish intellectual life also in 1971 by the book *The “New Conservatism in the USA”* (sw: “*Nykonservatism i USA*”) by Claes G. Ryn and Bertil Häggman, both active members of KIF.

The original KIF had approximately 200 members, mainly from university cities. Its chairman was a member of the parliament for the Moderate Union Party, Birger Hagård.



The book „Kämpande konservatism“ (1971) started the modern conservatism debate.

Until 1979, KIF published a series of pamphlets and books. The initiative was renewed in 1980 by members of the Moderate Union Party's youth organization, and then transformed into an association separate from the party. At the constituting meeting, Tage Lindbom and Claes G. Ryn lectured. After a controversy with the Moderate Union Party's more and more liberal youth organization in 1981, KIF began to deteriorate. But for a few more years, until 1983, it continued arranging seminars and publishing pamphlets.

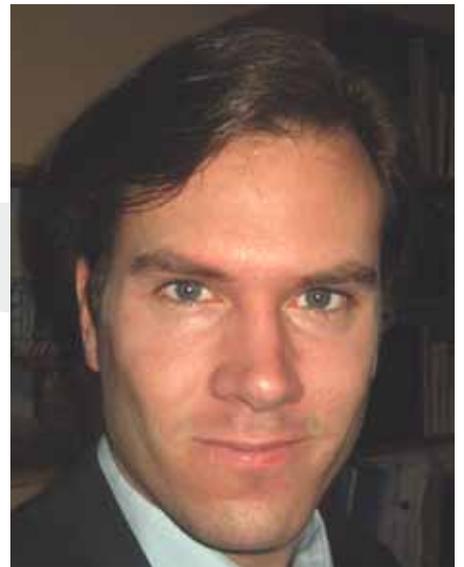
Konservativa Sällskapet (KS) was founded in Uppsala in 1992 by members of Föreningen Heimdal and with four journalists on the board. KS aimed to stimulate conservative intellectual debate, and they arranged seminars, conferences, and dinners, and also published a few books. Having received a little financial support, KS published the magazine *Contextus* between 1997-1999, with contemporary conservative debate and philosophy. KS united for the first time moderates and Christian Democrats around conservative values, even though only in a very small form. This was an important step in showing that conservatism can speak to many strands of thought and opinion, and not just to the "traditional right" which even the Moderate Union Party itself tried its best not to be associated with.

In 2000, one of the founders of KS, Fredrik Haage, published the book „the book “Keys to a Modern Conservatism” (sw: “Nycklar till modern konservatism”). This was important, because it is one of the very few books on conservatism in Sweden written by a conservative, and because it was published by the largest political (free market) think tank in Sweden: Timbro. Mr Haage also took part in the anthology “Then what? The New Debate of Ideas for the Center-Right movement” (sw: “Och sedan? Den nya borgerliga idédebatten”), published in 2003, together with a handful of other writers connected to KS and with Per Dahl as editor. This book can be said to suggest a widening of the center-right debate in Sweden in the direction of conservatism, without, however, highlighting the word

“conservatism.”

Konservativt Forum (KF) was founded in 2002 by three students (I being one of them), then members of the Moderate Union Party's youth organization and Föreningen Heimdal. KF has become something of an heir to KIF and KS, maintaining contacts with leading members from both organizations. Beginning as a network for liberal conservatives, social conservatives and 'value conservatives', with a closed Internet-community, KF has arranged yearly conferences and seminars since 2005 with many prominent lecturers [read more about KF in *The European Conservative* No. 1]. Most of the members are also members of Föreningen Heimdal, the Moderate Union Party's youth organization, and the Christian Democratic Party's youth organization. In 2007, KF-members Carl Johan Ljungberg, Christian Swedberg and I published the book “Power Set in Concrete” (sw: “Betongväldet”), which criticized Swedish social democracy and the overwhelming influence it has had on all parts of Swedish society. I mention the book not because of its intrinsic importance for Swedish conservatism, but to illustrate what KF has managed to accomplish despite the forum's meagre resources. Ljungberg, an early member of KIF, has acquired a position today as Sweden's foremost expert on Edmund Burke. His Ph.D. thesis was about Burke; in 1990 he published “Common Sense & Insight, Burke Between Enlightenment and Romanticism” (sw: “Förnuft & inlevelse, Burke mellan upplysning och romantik”) together with Per Dahl; and in 2009 he published “Edmund Burke” with one of Sweden's major publishing houses, SNS förlag.

Members of KF also run the conservative e-zine *Tradition & Fason* (www.traditionochfason.se), a blog with conservative philosophy and opinion exclusively produced by a small group of committed writers, with carefully selected guest writers. In April 2010, *Tradition & Fason*, published an anthology which I edited on “Conservatism & Capitalism.” In this anthology, liberal conservative and social conservative writers advance different



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perspectives on conservatism's relation to capitalism and the market economy. One of the essays was on the thought of Wilhelm Röpke, and was written by Carl Johan Ljungberg, who in addition to his work on Burke has for many years now also studied Röpke. KF also maintains the information portal www.konservatism.se in order to spread information in Swedish on conservative thought, philosophers, and politicians, all of which is written by conservatives. ■

Footnote: I would like to thank Bertil Häggman especially for important contributions to this article.

Published by the Center for European Renewal | P.O. Box 85633 | 2508CH The Hague | The Netherlands

Editor-in-Chief: Jorge Soley (Fundacion Burke | Spain)

Managing Editor: Jakob E:son Söderbaum (Konservativt Forum | Sweden)

Layout: Bernhard Adamec (Europa Institute | Austria)

Donations to: ABN/AMRO account nr. 0601773993. IBAN: NL71ABNA0601773993. BIC/SWIFT: ABNANL2A.

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