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The Strong Programme and the Weak Philosophers; a Finnish Conflict and the Levels of Interest

Introduction

In this article, I shall discuss a conflict between two philosophical research traditions in Finland in the 1860's from the viewpoint of relativistic social studies of science. Originally, the conflict was about filling the professorship of philosophy in the University of Helsinki. However, as I shall argue in this paper, the real battle was not about the competence of the candidates, but the future course philosophy would take, and it was fought between two philosophical traditions.

I do not intend to prove the universal validity of the strong programme in this paper. Also the exponents of the weak version of the social studies of science — Merton, Laudan, etc. — would obviously apply social explanations in this case, where Thiodolf Rein was elected to the chair despite the fact that his rival Wilhelm Bolin had written more, and also in the contemporary opinion, on a higher level than Rein had done. Bolin had a dissertation of 168 pages for the professorship, and Rein one of 118 pages. If the earlier theses and other scientific publications are included, Bolin's works amounted to 726 pages, and Rein's works to 251 pages (Manninen, 1987: 161).

However, I will discuss the case in terms of the strong programme. My intention is not to make the trivial point that social and political factors can sometimes play crucial parts in the elections of professors. I intend to show how both candidates' philosophical and psychological views were connected to interest groups on various levels: politically, socially, religiously, etc. I shall also describe how the scholars created interests themselves, and how they made tactical moves against the other groups in the scientific community. Both the rivals' ideas, and the dispute about their competence were parts of this process.

I shall first cast a brief glance at the strong programme, and at the case. After that I shall discuss the interests in the event in more detail.

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The symmetry thesis and the notion of interest

In the middle of the 1970's David Bloor (1976: 4—5) wrote the third thesis of his strong programme: "It would be symmetrical in style of explanation. The same types of cause would explain, say, true and false beliefs." This thesis contains the basic idea of several traditions of recent social studies of science: social factors are present and crucial in all phases of the development of science; that is, social factors are needed to explain both: progress and standstill, correct and incorrect theories. I call this view the strong programme in the wide sense, as an opposite to the weak programme, which claims: "the sociology of knowledge may step in to explain beliefs if and only if those beliefs cannot be explained in terms of their rational merits" (Laudan, 1977: 202).

One of the most central explanatory concepts of the strong programme is the one of interest. These interests may be social and political interests outside the scientific community, professionally vested interests of the groups of scientists, or personal interests of individual scientists.

For instance, Steven Shapin (1975; 1979a; 1979b) has described the conflict between phrenology, and the Scottish common-sense psychology and academical anatomy in Edinburgh in the early nineteenth century from the viewpoint of the Edinburghian strong programme. According to Shapin, neither Edinburgh phrenology nor the common-sense psychology were "purely scientific" theories. Phrenology was the psychology of the rising bourgeois, and petty-bourgeois groups, and the common-sense philosophers were serving the interests of established social elites. Shapin translates the psychological ideas of both groups into the conflicting ideas on social order of that very time.

In recent developments of the strong programme (e.g. Latour, 1987; 1988), it has been stressed that scientists also actively create interests and interest groups inside the scientific community, and also outside it. They make tactical moves, such as to create an image of being indispensable, to gain allies, to make it more difficult for enemies to operate, etc. On the personal level one of the main motives is to gain credibility.

Thiodolf Rein becomes professor

In 1863, Johan Wilhelm Snellman, professor of philosophy, was elected to the Senate of Finland, and he retired from the chair. The university board had to choose a new professor, which was a crucial task: the chair was the only one in philosophy in the only university the country had. Thus, the direction of the whole discipline was at stake. Klinge (1989: 562—569), and Manninen (1987: 157—178) have described the election in general, and the documents of the process have also been published (Handlingar, 1868).

At the moment, when Snellman retired and the professorship was declared open, there was no competent philosopher in the country. Licentiate (a Finnish degree between M.A. and Ph.D.) Wilhelm Bolin (1835—1924) was the most competent, and in 1864, he presented a dissertation for his Ph.D, and the professorship, discussing Leibnitz as a predecessor of Kant.

Taking the standards of the nineteenth century into account, Bolin's dissertation should have been good enough for the professorship. However, Bolin's opponent Zachrias Cleve subjected the thesis to severe criticism, and Bolin announced that he was not going to apply for the professorship any longer, but only wanted to be appointed as a docent (lecturer). After the case, the university board waited several years before declaring the professorship open again. In the meanwhile Bolin held the chair as acting professor. The professorship was declared open for a second time only after docent Thiodolf Rein (1838—1919) had finished his thesis on the possibility of knowledge in 1867, and got his licentiate degree.

In 1868 both applicants presented dissertations for the professorship. This time, Bolin dealt with the problem of the freedom of

will, and especially Kant's ideas concerning it, and Rein discussed the methods of philosophy. The time had come for the decision. Rein was appointed by the majority of the Consistory (16—10 in his favour), despite the fact that the lower level of the University board (Department) had recommended Bolin as more competent.

Thus, something odd was obviously going on; some "unscientifical" factors were playing a part. In the rest of this paper, I shall focus on the last phase of the process, where two opposing candidates were applying for the chair. But as I already mentioned, my intention is to go beyond the election; i.e. to discuss the connections between scientific beliefs, and political interest groups and how those connections and interests were made.

The birth of fennomen and swekomen

We can present the case as a conflict between two political interest groups.

The Russian emperor Alexander I conquered Finland from Sweden in the beginning of the 19th century. In order to prove his loyalty to the new part of the empire, he gave Finland an autonomous position, which later turned out to mean the country's having its own parliament, currency, postal service, etc.

In this new situation some members of the educated Swedish speaking upper class saw a possibility to create a Finnish nation, which perhaps later could become an independent country. These nationalists, "fennomen" (= Finnish-minded), started to strive towards this goal by actively educating the people; raising its intellectual and moral level, and by improving the status of Finnish, which was still spoken only by the uneducated majority of the people in the middle of the century.

On the other hand, some other members of the upper class felt their privileged position threatened. These "swekomen" (= Swedish-minded) tried to maintain the status of Swedish as the official language used in administration, University, etc. At least some of them also saw Finland's reunifying with Sweden as the political ideal. When the parliament of Finland started actually to work in the 1870's, fennomen and swekomen emerged as the main political parties. The third group, the liberals, soon dissolved into the language parties.

During the 1860's, the swekomen had not created any true identity as a political and cultural group. This happened during the following decade. In this paper, I shall use "swekomen" as a term referring to the fairly heterogenous, Swedish-minded group, which was critical to the ideas of the fennomen.

Fennomen tended to idealize in a philosophical and psychological way. Materialism, determinism and scientific psychology were usually represented by liberals or swekomen in the latter part of 19th century. The professorship competition mirrors this connection between scientific beliefs and political interest groups, both in respect to the rivals and to the members of the Consistory.

Fennoman vs. liberal — idealist vs. materialist

Gabriel Rein, Thiodolf Rein's father was a Finnish-minded professor in history, and also Thiodolf himself was a fennoman throughout his life. Wilhelm Bolin, however, was a son of a German-Jewish jeweller from Petersburg, and did not even speak proper Swedish — and certainly not Finnish. He was a materialist, and atheist, even if he hid it, during the professorship competition he was a liberal, later he became a swekoman (Manninen, 1987: 157—178; 1988; see also Klinge, 1989).

Rein presented the Hegelian conceptions of imputability and soul already in his first dissertation. This soul was in Hegelian terms a part of the progress of the World Spirit, but as a prerequisite of moral and legal responsibility it was, or had to be metaphysically free (Rein, 1863: 5—16 et passim). And this freedom meant for Rein (1863: 45—47) being above the law of causality. Later, Rein rejected Hegelian idealism, and adopted the one of Hermann Lotze, but, this moral free-

dom was to remain as a fundamental notion of Rein's psychological thought until the end of his active career as a professor. This can be seen in his voluminous works on psychology (Rein, 1876—1891), and also in his smaller textbook on the same subject (Rein, 1884).

In Bolin's opinion, determinism had made scientific study on the human mind possible by stating that the same natural laws exist in it just as in the rest of nature. For Bolin (1868: chap. I) "will" is only consciousness of one's own action, and "freedom" is just the existence of various causes or motives, and the fact that there are various motives does not imply that we could have acted any differently than we had done. Thus "human will" is just a term referring to causes of action.

Thus, the contrast between the rivals on the political level (fennoman vs. liberal/swekoman) had a parallel contrast on the level of psychological theories (idealist vs. deterministand materialist).

Fennomen vote for Rein; swekomen and liberals for Bolin

The decision, who was to get the professorship, was formally about the competence of the candidates and the validity of their ideas. However, this decision was made between two political and social interest groups. Fennomen usually voted for Rein, swekomen and liberals basically gave their votes for Bolin. (Handlingar, 1868; about the political ideas of the board members see Klinge, 1989: passim).

We have already seen that Bolin had better scientific merits, but it seems quite unlikely that the personal qualities would have been decisive for the board members' votes. The fennomen actually admitted that Bolin had a wide knowledge, and excellent qualities as a lecturer — even the theologian, A.F. Granfelt, who presented the boldest criticism against Bolin during the process had to admit that Bolin had certain qualities (Handlingar, 1868: 47—52; Manninen, 1987: 171—172). It seems clear to me that the political interests were the most crucial factors. The retired professor Snellman thought that his successor's philosophical ideas should be such that they could form a basis for educating state officials in a patriotical way (Klinge, 1989: 562). This too, indicates the importance of the political factors.

Thus idealistic philosophy and psychology was the science of the nationalists in Finland in the 19th century. Materialism, determinism, and scientific psychology were traditions of the swekomen and the liberals. As Klinge (1989: 556 et passim) has pointed out, there was a more general separation in Finland in the 19th century: humanism and idealism vs. scientific tradition, materialism, and determinism — fennomen vs. swekomen and liberals. In the conflict between Hegelianism and Feuerbachian materialism, we see this separation in the psychological issue for the first time.

Two decades later we are able to find another example of this separation on the level of psychological beliefs. In the late 1880's two Finnish philosophers were working on their dissertations in Leipzig. Weber's and Fechner's psychophysical laws were the subjects of both of their theses. Arvi Grotenfelt (1888) presented a philosophical and theoretical thesis, while Hjalmar Neiglick (1887b) did his own experimental study in Wundt's laboratory. We can roughly say that Grotenfelt was more sceptical about the psychophysical laws, which only reached the physiological bases of the soul, in his opinion. On the other hand, Neiglick proved by means of experiments the validity of Fechner's formula as a true psychophysical law — even if he did not discuss it from a metaphysical point of view, and did admit the restrictions of psychophysics, too. Besides the theses, the authors presented some ideas on experimental psychology to the Finnish audience in two articles (Grotenfelt, 1886—87; Neiglick, 1887a).

Grotenfelt is known to have been a fennoman, and besides that he was a relative of Thiodolf Rein — another fennoman. Neiglick was a cosmopolitan. He was a

French orientated philosopher — a stranger in Finland, surrounded by petty language controversies, and peripheral cultural debates. However, he participated in the cultural discussions, and he did it from an extremely radical point of view (on Neiglick, see Mustelin, 1966).

The case of Rolf Lagerborg is also an example of the parallel between political and psychological levels. He published a large number of books and articles on several topics from the late 1890's onwards: on moral philosophy, history, and psychology, but also on current social, political, and cultural issues. He was a materialist and determinist in psychology, just like Bolin had been (see e.g. Lagerborg, 1905). However, these views were presented in this case in the context of physiological psychology: namely, the Münsterbergian "action theory", the "psychosecretionism" of a Swedish physiologist Bror Gadelius, and the early behavioristical tradition. Lagerborg was also one of the first Finns to publish anything on psychoanalysis (on Lagerborg, see Aho, 1988).

Besides his scientific merits, Lagerborg is known as the most outstanding example of the Swedish-minded radicals in the early 20'th century Finland. In the two volumes of his massive memoirs (1942; 1945), we see how he acted in public against the church, religious conservatism, moral idealism, and the puritan values of society during several decades. In the issue of fennomany vs. swekomany he was not a patriot at all. For instance, he thought it better for Finland to be reunified with Sweden than to be independent as it was (Lagerborg, 1945: 11, 18), and that "the most dangerous enemy of peace is patriotism." (1945: p. 408).

The Swedish-minded, and later the Swedish-speaking radicals were, and still are to some extent, a long living feature of the Finnish culture. During the last century and early in this century the psychological level was ruled by materialistical and deterministical ideas in the Swedish-minded culture.

However, we should not be put on the wrong track by believing that the scientific communities responded to ready-made social and political interests outside the scientific community. These connections between the political level and the level of scientific beliefs were created by the scientists themselves, and they were an outcome of the internal processes of the scientific community.

Nationalists conquer the soul

The fennomen's intellectual leader, J.V. Snellman, fought on several frontiers: in philosophy and psychology, as a newspaperman, and in politics. He created the fennoman programme in a large measure, and presented it in terms of the Hegelian philosophy and psychology. In his textbook of psychology, and in his dissertation, first published in the early 1840's, Snellman (1932; 1982) wrote that the Spirit of the people had to be raised from the level of subjective Spirit to the level of objective Spirit, and thus Finnish society had to be raised from civil society to the State. Psychology describes this process on the level of soul.

One does not have to be an idealist in psychology to become a nationalist or a patriot, or be a nationalist to become an idealist. However, Snellman created this connection, and thus Hegelian psychology became a part of a political and social ideology, and nationalism a part of psychology in Finland. Nationalism conquered the metaphysically free soul as a subject of psychology. It became a property of the fennomen, and was to be dealt with in political terms.

On the other hand, the political and social ideas of swekomen and liberals do not themselves conclude in scientific psychology, determinism, and materialism. This historical connection was a result of the fact that fennomen had adopted the idealistical philosophy and psychology. One could argue that this displays the ancient dialectical conception of the development of science, and not the one of the modern social studies of science. However, the point is that swekomen and liberals generally were more favourable to certain scientific beliefs than oth-

er beliefs, and not for purely scientific reasons. Thus, arational, i.e. social reasons brought about their beliefs, as well as those of fennomen. This is in congruence with the ideas of the strong programme.

As a result of this we have two tribes, which have differing opinions on politics, as well as on the methods of science and the yardsticks by which scientific theories were measured. These two cultures clashed in the meetings of the Consistory on the professorship issue.

The fennomen argued for Hegelian idealism, and in Bolin's works they "found" frivolous eclecticism, immoral determinism, and outdated materialism. Science's most modern view was presented by Rein's theses, in their opinion. On the other hand, swekomen and liberals applied the criteria of natural sciences. They thought that Rein's ideas were outdated, and Bolin had the most scientific approach (Handlingar, 1868). In principle, the controversy between the two groups was as open-ended as the perennial problem of idealism versus materialism, and the closure mechanisms had to be essentially social. Therefore, the case can also be presented in terms of Harry Collins' (1985: see esp. 25—26) "special relativism".

Closure mechanisms on the group level

In general, perhaps the most crucial factor was that the Hegelian fennomen got an ally, the importance of which was enormous in the coherent Lutheran society and culture: the church. Despite the differences in details between Hegelianism and Lutheran theology, the four theologians of the Consistory saw Rein's ideas as more Christian than those of Bolin. They all voted in favour of Rein (Handlingar, 1868). Swekomen and liberals did not have any comparable ally: thus they were doomed to lose.

Furthermore, the Hegelians made a tactical move by using the authority of the retired professor J.V. Snellman. It seems that they were not willing to take the responsibility of choosing the weaker candidate — in terms of amount and thoroughness of publications. Thus, they referred to the differing opinions, and wanted to ask the opinion of "an authority, whose objectivity was beyond any doubt", professor Snellman (Handlingar, 1868: 27). This was done, and the result was already clear beforehand: the old Hegelian was going to recommend his good Hegelian student (Handlingar, 1868: 31—43).

Tactics on the personal level

The rivals made tactical moves in order to win the professorship, which was undoubtedly the highest indicator of credibility for a Finnish philosopher of that time — and besides that, it would assure one of financial security for the rest of one's life. And also in this case success had a greater relevance than "truth".

Rein reached out for the chair standing on the black box construed by Snellman: the combination of Hegelian idealism, patriotical ideas and a Christian world view. He presented three dissertations (Rein, 1863; 1867; 1868) during the decade, in which he wanted to create an image of being a trustworthy Hegelian, who would follow in the footsteps of his teacher — Snellman. However, Rein had completely rejected that tradition a couple of years later. He started to criticize Hegelianism in the first volume of his textbook on psychology published in 1876. According to Rein (1876: 277—290) it is methodologically lost, and its soul-conception is completely invalid.

In his dissertations Rein was discussing the theoretical problems of philosophy in moral and patriotical terms, but in the Hegelian framework this was quite natural, and did not have to be primarily tactical — even if the examples that he used did look rather "fennomanical". For instance, Rein (1868: 91—92) gave a morally free, that is patriotical, action as an example of idea's purpose.

In any case, Rein (1868: 4—7) also defined the task of philosophy as a scientific manifestation of the idealistic world view, and pointed out that only idealism could reach this goal. In other words, empiricism was the self-refutation of philosophy. Here Rein is actually implicitly claiming that Bolin was not a philosopher at all, and that his rival was unpatriotical and immoral.

In Bolin's case the tactics are even more obvious — and without doubt conscious. For many years, he had contacts with Ludwig Feuerbach, and their correspondence still exists in archives. In Bolin's letters to Feuerbach in 30. 12. 1864, 12. 9. 1865, and 17. 12. 1866, we can read that he had adopted most of Feuerbach's basic ideas, for instance concerning the freedom of will, and the metaphysical problem of obtaining knowledge (on the correspondences see also Manninen, 1988). Hence, Bolin developed his own ideas by discussing matters with Feuerbach. This conclusion is confirmed by the striking similarity of their ideas, for instance on determinism (Bolin, 1868; Feuerbach, 1960; chaps. 1—6.). In Bolin's letter to Feuerbach 18.5.1866 we also can read that Bolin had also studied this very same work of Feuerbach.

However, Bolin (1868) did not bring up the subject of his personal connections with Feuerbach in his dissertation on the freedom of will. Actually, he did not even mention Feuerbach in the thesis. Bolin wants to give the reader the impression that the ideas in the study were due to his own independent research based upon a study on Kant, Spinoza, etc, but this is only partly true. Hence, there is an essential discrepancy between the image he was officially giving about the way he had received his results, and the real way to construe the thesis. Bolin was hiding an important source of knowledge on purpose, this being Feuerbach, taking into account that Feuerbach had built up a reputation of being an immoral and unchristian philosopher.

However, there were obvious tactical reasons for some of his deeds, which Bolin did mention in his theses. As Manninen (1987: 159) has already pointed out, the only essential point in which Bolin differed from Feuerbach, was in the end of his thesis on the freedom of will. There Bolin (1868: chap. 5) discussed determinism in moral and social terms, too. In the whole context of Bolin's dissertation, it does not seem especially relevant to point out that the deterministic nature of the human soul makes moral education possible, or that man is free as he follows rationality, and that this rationality is created in society, and fulfilled in solidarity. Bolin added these "extras" obviously for undermining probable accusations of being immoral, and thus increasing his chances in getting the professorship.

So in the end, both the winner, and the loser were adding, and leaving out things in order to gain credibility. The only difference was that the one was more successful than the other.

Conclusion

This Finnish dispute is an example of the fact that scientific competence is not the only, and perhaps not even the most important factor in professorship elections. This is a trivial result, as I pointed out in the beginning already. However, the case does display something else, as well.

First of all, the same kind of social processes were present on the winning, and on the losing side. This is in congruence with the symmetry thesis.

The conflict also reflects the versatile nature of the notion of interest, and it is parallel with the phrenology-case of Shapin. Also we can translate the conflicting ideas about the soul in the political interest groups of society.

Finally we see that these connections between political and scientifical levels were not ready-made, but were construed in, and by the scientists' actions, and the processes inside the scientific community. And in the end, the dispute was closed for a while by the tactics employed on the group level, and on the personal level as well.

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