



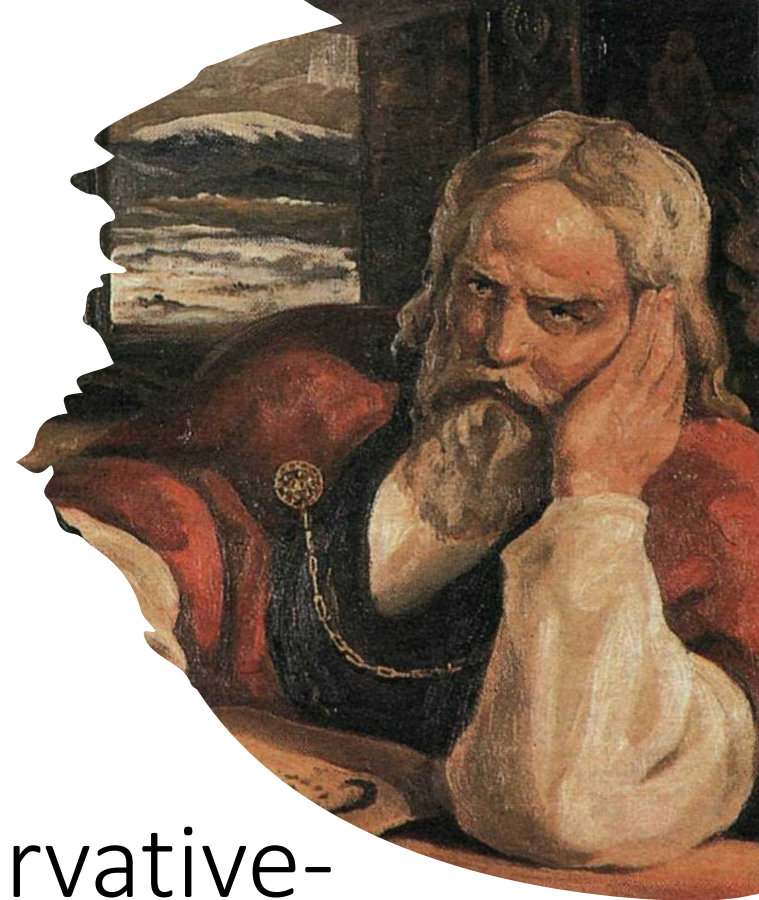
UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND

# What Makes Nordic Conservative Liberalism Different?

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Nostos and New Direction

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## Three Nordic Conservative-Liberal Thinkers

- Snorri Sturluson: Customary law; Government by consent
- Anders Chydenius: Gain from free trade; self-regulation
- N.F.S. Grundtvig: Social cohesion through free associations



# The Ancient Nordic Legal Tradition

- Snorri and Icelandic/Norwegian law
- Jyske lov, Law of Jutland, 1241
- Olaus Petri, Rules for Judges
- King should be guardian of the Law, not a legislator
- Individual and collective liberties, assemblies
- Kings tried to break with this tradition: Rising absolutism



Sweden: Burying Dreams of Military Glory

# Denmark: Turning Defeat into a Victory



# Same Sound Responses: Tegnér and Holst

- Tegnér: 'inom Sveriges gränser erövra Finland åter' — to conquer a new Finland inside our borders
- Holst: Hvad udad tabes, skal indad vindes — What is lost outside, must be regained inside





# Comprehensive Liberal Reforms

- Georg Adlersparre, disciple of Adam Smith, led 1809 revolution in Sweden
- Direct link between 1814 Eidsvoll Constitution in Norway and Adam Smith
- Johan August Gripenstedt, disciple of Bastiat, and Louis De Geer: liberal reforms in Sweden
- Anton Martin Schweigaard and Frederik Stang in Norway: free trade, private property, limited government



# 1849 Constitution in Denmark

# Grundtvig: Cohesion Without Commands

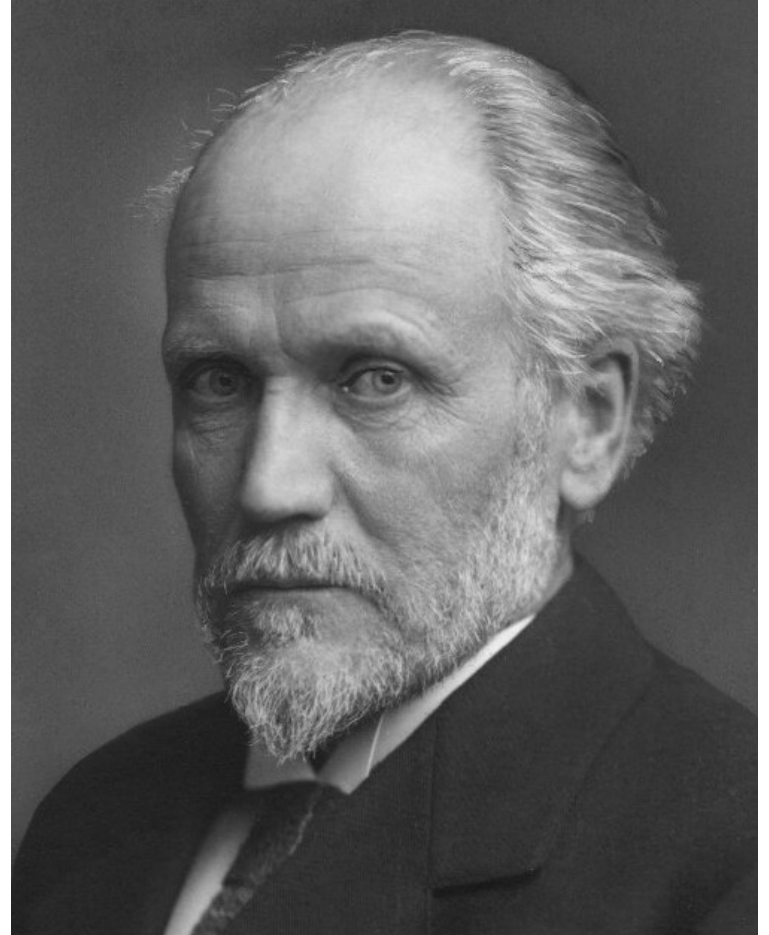
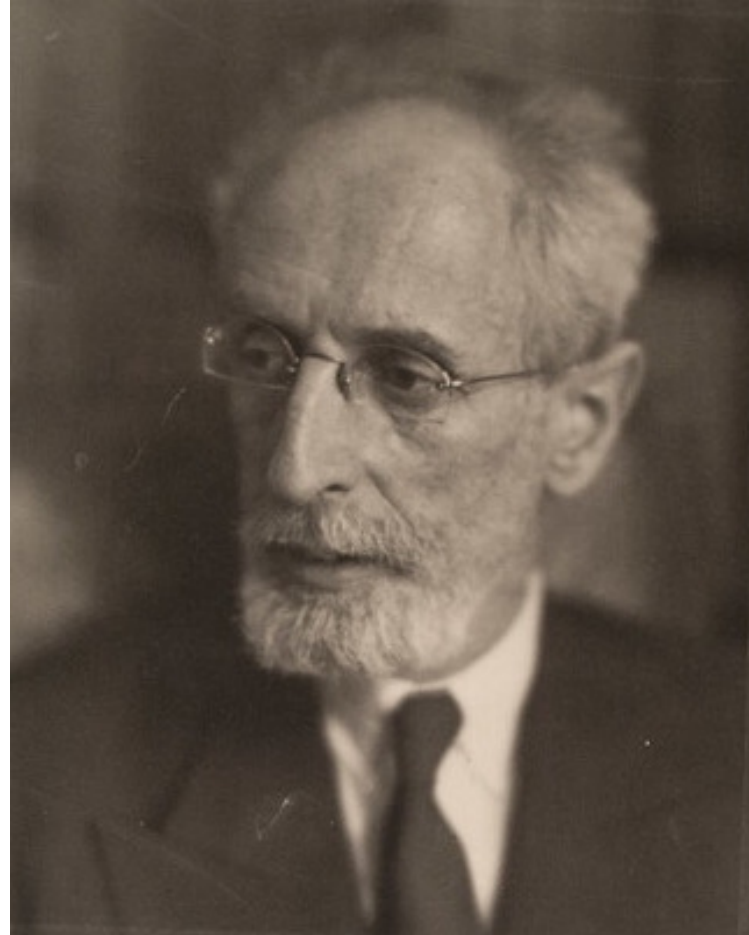
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- Grundtvig articulated the common Nordic cultural heritage, and the special Danish variant, *danskheden*
- Independent farmers, free speech, free trade, private property
- Self-help, congregations, schools, farmers' cooperatives, voluntary associations, even trade unions
- Reinforced a sense of belonging, mutual trust, cohesion, accumulation of cultural capital
- Poems about nationality as matter of individual choice
- Speeches about deciding borders according to choice

# 1943 Rescue of Danish Jews



Two Eminent  
Economists  
and Staunch  
Classical  
Liberals





# Social Democracy: The New Absolutism

- In past centuries, kings, and their supporters, tried to break with the Nordic tradition, claiming to reign by the grace of God, unlimited government
- According to them, e.g. Hans Wandal, the Law should be interpreted as the king's will
- In 19th century, liberal Nordic tradition able to reassert itself, strengthened by the arguments of Adam Smith, David Hume, and Edmund Burke, and abolish absolutism
- In 20th century, social democrats tried to break with the Nordic tradition, claiming to rule by the grace of the People, unlimited government
- Legal theorists, e.g. Axel Hägerström and Alf Ross, taught the Law was the will of the legislator, not constrained by tradition or reason; they rejected both natural law and customary law, extreme rationalists



# Temporary Social Democratic Hegemony

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- Lively debates in all Nordic countries after WW2 on central planning
- Strong arguments against it being compatible with democracy and individual freedom, the road to serfdom
- Tingsten convinced in Sweden, Heckscher as well, Ohlin ambivalent
- Left-wing economists dominant, Ragnar Frisch in Norway, Gunnar Myrdal in Sweden
- Ohlin refused to become member of Mont Pelerin Society
- Classical liberals became outsiders: Trygve Hoff, Christian Gandil, Sven Rydenfelt



Hoff, Gandil, and Rydenfelt at MPS meeting in 1950s

# The Two Retreats of Social Democracy

- Social democrats retreated after WW2, partly because the liberals won the debate on central planning
- Relatively moderate rulers, constrained by the strong Nordic tradition
- Apparent consensus on the Nordic model
- Swedish social democrats radicalised in 1980s
- The Swedish model ceased to work
- Revolt of taxpayers in Denmark and Norway
- Revival of conservative-liberal thought
- End of social democratic hegemony

# The Nordic Model in International Affairs

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**Peaceful Secession:** Norway from Sweden in 1905, Finland from Russia in 1917, Iceland from Denmark in 1918

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**Border Changes by Plebiscites:** Danish-German border in 1920, Northern Schleswig (=Sønderjylland) to Denmark

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**Autonomy of Special Regions:** Åland Islands (Finland), Faroe Islands (Denmark), Sami regions

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**Cooperation without Surrender of Sovereignty:** Nordic Council, common labour market, no passports, support of cultural cooperation; EEA (Norway and Iceland)

