

Locating the “Middle Way” in Waldenström’s Discourse

THIS BOOK WILL FOCUS on the career of Paul Peter Waldenström, with the ultimate goal of shedding light on how the popular spiritual movement that he led could have influenced the democratic values of the country as a whole. While he was thrust into the media spotlight for asking spiritual questions regarding the accomplishments of Jesus Christ on the cross, when Waldenström entered politics he turned to very tangible questions regarding the constructive value of pluralism and the nature of the emerging Swedish democracy. In order to explain the connection between these two seemingly different sets of questions, it is important to define pluralism, and offer an introductory perspective on how Waldenström understood pluralism.

One starting point is that pluralism should be differentiated from “plurality,” or the simultaneous existence of multiple points of view. Pluralism, as it is being referred to here, is a deliberately orchestrated strategy for dealing with the conflicts that result from a plurality of opinions and competing interests. In both religious and political questions, plurality presents the opportunity for conflict whenever a single dominant regime is lacking or is challenged and thereby unable to establish uniformity by force. In the case of Sweden in the second half of the 1800s, the national unity that had been inherited from generations of absolutist monarchy, a hierarchical society, and a unified state church gave way under the pressures for democratic governance and a growing diversity of worldviews. This unprecedented level of ideological conflict between opposing groups was so strong after the turn of the century that historian Berndt Schiller has identified the years 1906–1914 as “years of crisis.”¹⁵ Despite such a situation of volatility, it is a remarkable achievement that Swedish politicians were

able to establish a democratic praxis that favored pluralism when some of its neighboring countries were not. To the extent that plurality can be transformed into a strategy of pluralism, in which conflict is mitigated and even funneled into constructive dialogue, then pluralism should be seen as an important historical accomplishment. It is with this in mind that Catholic Church historian George Weigel makes a careful distinction between what can be understood as a passive acceptance of plurality and an active strategy of promoting pluralism:

Plurality is sheer difference: a sociological fact, a staple of the human condition. Pluralism is a civilizational achievement: the achievement of what [John Courtney] Murray called an 'orderly conversation'—a conversation about personal goods and the common good, about the relationship between freedom and moral truth, about the virtues necessary to form the kind of citizens who can live their freedom in such a way as to make the machinery of democracy serve genuinely humanistic ends. [. . .] It must begin, as Jefferson began the American democratic experiment, with the assertion and defense of truths.¹⁶

To the degree that plurality often becomes a social “problem,” then pluralism, as described by Weigel, becomes the response and solution to that problem. The problem occurs whenever there is a conflict of ideologies or interests. These conflicts could be the result of any of the diverse concerns of the human condition; in the case of this study, these disagreements were sparked by conflicts between religious worldviews (prompting the religious awakening), class and economic status (prompting the labor movement), and public health (prompting the temperance movement). The consequences that came from the erosion of uniformity in Swedish society were two-fold. First, the members of these groups were forced to come to terms with the new reality that conflicts of ideologies and interests would no longer be adjudicated solely by elites (by the government or by the church), but instead needed to be debated in public arenas, such as in the media, voluntary societies and congregations, and in the new bicameral *Riksdag*. New ideologies challenged old ones and competed with other new ideologies for dominance. Understanding pluralism is thus first a matter of orientating oneself amid the diverse landscape of competing ideologies and interests that were vying for top position after the parliamentary reforms of the 1860s. Second, they had to develop strategies for dealing with that situation. In crafting these strategies, the members could take different approaches. A natural impulse would be to attempt to establish dominance for one’s own group by trying to prevent pluralism. However, if pluralism could be identified

as being to the advantage of a group, then such groups could be expected to defend and promote a situation of pluralism. For members of minority groups or for groups who saw themselves as threatened, pluralism could be seen as advantageous to the extent that it allowed their own survival. While there is a certain amount of idealism associated with pluralism, it is also important to acknowledge the pragmatic dimensions. Group survival for minorities is often dependent on allowances for pluralism. Pluralism is first necessary for groups trying to carve out a place for themselves. Once this place is relatively secure, pluralism can take on a more idealistic character, as more of a luxury than a necessity.

As it will be referred to here, pluralism will be understood as a strategy for dealing with conflict, and furthermore, that this strategy is made with both idealistic and pragmatic motivations. In its most basic political usage, pluralism implies an agenda that values and defends the presence and participation of more than one interest group in the collective decision-making process. Beyond this basic meaning, however, pluralism can take on quite sophisticated ideological meanings. When pluralism becomes a political strategy, it tends to involve questions regarding the nature of power-sharing between different groups. One political scientist who has focused on the question of power-sharing is Arend Lijphart. Lijphart's interest in exploring this question was motivated by the national and tribal conflicts of African nations in the second half of the twentieth century. In many places on the continent, the end of colonial governments had been followed by experiments with European-style democratic systems. When many of these experiments collapsed into internal conflicts, it became apparent that political ideologies were superseded by other identities, namely “primordial” tribal ones.¹⁷ While some political scientists continued to assert that it was necessary for national identities to trump tribal ones in order to establish unity, Lijphart remained skeptical. His solution to such situations was a form of governance he termed “consociational,” often simply referred to as “power-sharing.” Although the replacement of segmental loyalties by a common national allegiance appears to be a logical answer to the problems posed by a plural society, it is extremely dangerous to attempt it. Because of the tenacity of primordial loyalties, any effort to eradicate them not only is quite unlikely to succeed, especially in the short run, but may well be counterproductive and may stimulate segmental cohesion and intersegmental violence rather than national cohesion. The consociational alternative avoids this danger and offers a more promising method for achieving both democracy and a considerable degree of political unity.¹⁸

The consociational form of government as presented by Lijphart is a form in which all major groups in a region are intentionally represented.

This diversity is made mandatory by policies that stipulate that all significant groups receive a seat at the decision-making table. While this pluralism might be enforced by laws requiring the inclusion of minorities, it is also aimed at generating a culture that values pluralism in the society as a whole. The intention is that if minority groups who are vying for position, as well as majority groups who are trying to defend their dominance, can both understand that pluralism is in their own interests, they will be more likely to tolerate and work with other competing groups. Lijphart's observations reflect the difficulty of achieving unity of purpose in a heterogeneous social environment, as well as touch on the central questions regarding pluralism that have been discussed since the Enlightenment. He also focuses his critique on the weaknesses of democracy by "majority rule," namely its shortcomings in protecting minorities and dissenters. The consociational/power-sharing approach to dealing with ideological conflict thus places value on strategies of pluralism as a way to overcome the weaknesses of democracy by sheer majority rule. When ideological actors intentionally approach conflict with a mind to preserve the rights of dissenters and protesters, these weaknesses are minimized, and then conflicts have the opportunity to become transformed into productive exchanges between opponents.

This productive type of pluralism—where opposing sides of an argument inform one another in a dynamic tension—is a type of pluralism that closely resembles Waldenström's own views on democracy. Though not a political scientist, he was a politician with an experiential understanding of how the Swedish political system worked, as well as how it could fail. Drawing on this experience, he offered an endless stream of anecdotes, warnings and proverbs regarding the political system. An example of this imagery is included as an introductory quote at the beginning of Part I. Simple speech and folksy imagery like this quote in Karlstad in 1908 was typical of his writing and preaching style. Such imagery was both an asset and a liability to Waldenström, and for it he was both admired and ridiculed. With it he was able to captivate audiences of thousands, as well as generate fodder for columnists and tabloid cartoonists. An expert teacher and translator of Latin, Greek and Hebrew, Waldenström understood well that words and images can be interpreted differently and that one text is not always read by two people in the same way. He built a career and a church denomination on the notion that unity could be achieved in the midst of diversity, that pluralism does not destroy truth, but instead enhances the human understanding of it. His famous motto for biblical study, "where is it written?," became a slogan picked up by Swedish Pietists looking to reform an archaic state church monopoly. Picking apart the established religious paradigm word by word, Waldenström became the figurehead of a movement of democratization

within a previously hierarchical and doctrinally-rigid Lutheran church. Simple speech can indeed have profound effects.

The simple language that Waldenström used in his speeches is also problematic for the study of his political philosophy precisely in that it is folksy and often prefers parable-like explanations instead of a standardized political vocabulary. It is also masked in theological imagery, which has the potential to make it unattractive to secular ears. Despite these challenges, the pluralism that Waldenström advocated in his speeches and sermons bears similarities to the explanations of the concepts articulated by Weigel and Lijphart. The introductory quote was selected as a starting point in explaining Waldenström’s particular understanding of pluralism. This image of the cart on the road appeared in one of the political speeches that he gave after his career in the Swedish parliament formally ended, in this case in Karlstad in 1908, in which he passionately urged his listeners to vote against the Social Democratic party (*Socialdemokratiska arbetarepartiet*) in the upcoming elections. It had been the result of the work of members of this same party which had helped to end Waldenström’s political career in the election of 1905 through an ambitious and successful media campaign directed at unseating him.

As a result, the simple reading of this speech and the rest of Waldenström’s political commentary has been to explain him as a defeated, conservative reactionary, bitterly attacking the ascendant political ideology that had beaten him and which would come to dominate Swedish politics throughout the following century. This was the interpretation given by the newspapers in Gävle during the elections of 1902 and 1905, as well as the enduring interpretation demonstrated by the debate over Waldenström’s legacy among the historians Grundström, Tomson, and Bredberg. Even Tomson, who most advocated the interpretation of Waldenström as a radical, conceded that he had become reactionary in his later years. However, there are several limitations to a perspective that divides the political arena into “conservatives” versus “radicals.” The first is that this dichotomy does little to explain the interaction between opposing political ideologies, particularly how they influenced one another, and instead initiates a cyclical process of weighing the radical qualities of a person against his or her conservative qualities. Oftentimes, whenever one political party or ideology has emerged as the victor following a debate, those groups who had protested the now dominant group find themselves in the situation of having to defend their contribution. This often results in attempts to either justify their conservatism or herald the radical aspects of their program. This kind of process of justification is evident in Tomson’s analysis, as his work is framed as a defense of Waldenström “the radical.” While there is value in being able

to identify someone as being a conservative or radical, this presents a bias, where radicalism is favored, irrespective of whether or not this radicalism promoted progress. It also creates the risk of overstating the contributions of radicals or incorrectly identifying people as radical for the sake of validating their careers. It can suffice to say that Waldenström had his moments of both radicalism and conservatism.

The second limitation of this perspective is that once these labels of conservative and radical are affixed to a group or ideology it can obscure their contribution to the debate. This seems to have been the case with the groups involved in the religious awakening in Sweden. These groups are often named as being part of the overall emergence of democracy, but only indirectly credited with this development. That is, the democratic ideologies of these communities, which gave greater freedom to the individual participant and democratized the hierarchy of religious life, are credited as serving as a catalyst to create a general culture of democracy and a precursor to more radical reforms. But there has been a paradox in Swedish historiography in that at the same time as this general assessment has been made, there has also been a tendency to assert that when religious personalities were directly engaged in politics through official channels, they were seen as defending conservative values and being resistant to democratic reforms. This assumption perpetuates a traditional bias that has been present since the Enlightenment, in which religion is viewed as the opponent to reason and progress. Operating within this assumption, social scientists have sometimes treated the positive outcomes of religious ideology as unanticipated byproducts of fanaticism, as though the religious participants were acting irrationally and not aware of what they were doing.¹⁹ This assumption can even be seen among sympathetic observers. For instance, at a centennial event for the Swedish Mission Covenant in 1978, former prime minister and Social Democrat Tage Erlander (1901–1985) made the observation that Waldenström's life's work had been decisive in the overall breakthrough of democracy in Sweden.

Waldenström's teaching on the atonement took on a decisive significance for the breakthrough of democracy in Sweden. He tossed out a difficult dogmatic question of doctrine to the people and let anyone and everyone take a position for themselves on how one should understand the atonement. Now it no longer mattered what was stated by the parish priest and the confessional documents. Read about it in the Bible, and see for yourself! [. . .] If people could now decide for themselves on heavenly things, they were naturally competent to make decisions regarding communal

*affairs about the schools and church building and even regarding national political questions.*²⁰

At the same time that Erlander credits Waldenström as starting a process of democratization, his language also preserves the assumption that these religious developments were still disconnected from the political arena. It is as if Waldenström as a religious actor instigated something that he later did not participate in; his activity in the spiritual world simply allowed people to make the application to politics themselves, without him making the connection directly.

Other historians have sometimes made the claim that these religious movements served as “lessons” in democracy for lower- and middle class Swedes who were in the process of abandoning their agricultural and patriarchal society.²¹ The official website for the Swedish parliament identifies the emergence of Swedish democracy as having been due to the influence of the folk movements:

*It is often said that the temperance movement together with the free-church and trade union movements in the late 1800s had a positive bearing on the development of democracy in Sweden. They helped people to learn the procedures for meetings, to write minutes, to argue in favour of their cause and to handle contacts with public authorities. The political parties as we know them today also began to emerge just over 100 years ago, and together with the various popular movements they helped to bring about universal franchise.*²²

These religious movements appear not only to have set the stage for the development of democracy, but also as having had a long-term impact on the direction that society took. This exploration of Waldenström’s view of pluralism and his participation in Swedish politics aims to identify some of the missing links between the religious awakening and the emergence of democracy in Sweden. Specifically, this involves an assertion that Waldenström directly applied the democratic aspects of his theology to his political philosophy.

The simple imagery in Waldenström’s analogy of the coachman steering a wagon on a road speaks volumes about his philosophy and introduces his positive view of ideological tension. In this image, the tension between conservative and radical forces in politics is identified as bearing the potential for productive dialogue if it can be brought into balance. And conversely, if this debate is not balanced, societal breakdown is immanent. Balance is achieved by allowing open debate between opposing groups. This debate is necessary for the steady development of society as a safeguard against

extremism and the totalitarian elimination of minority groups. Innovation is being encouraged here, but at the same time there is the caution that innovation does not automatically lead to progress. In this analogy, Waldenström reflects an understanding of the history of ideas that resembles the philosophy of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), most notably the dialectical progression between thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Determining the degree of influence of Hegel on Waldenström is elusive, but it is unlikely that he could have remained ignorant of Hegel's works during his studies in philosophy and theology at Uppsala University. Among Waldenström's influences at Uppsala were the idealist philosopher Christopher Jacob Boström (1797–1866) and one of his disciples, Sigurd Ribbing (1816–1899).²³ Although Waldenström cannot exactly be cast as a disciple of Boström's, William Bredberg suggests a significant level of Boström's influence, particularly in the rationalized vocabulary that Waldenström himself employed as well as his own Christian idealism, which reflected that of Boström.²⁴ Hegel's Christian idealism and worldview is certainly amenable to the rational characteristics in Waldenström's own spirituality. At any rate, Waldenström's political philosophy demonstrates an application of various strains of rational idealism to the theological and cultural context of Pietism. Waldenström's articulation of his political view was minimalistic at best, and is primarily visible in his explanations of specific items of debate in the *Riksdag*. In and of itself, his understanding of pluralism in the political arena was not highly theoretical, and was left largely undeveloped. However, the novelty of Waldenström's political philosophy is that it represents a fusion of this Hegelian-style dialectic, a rational idealism, and the missional focus and democratic commitments of Swedish Pietism as expressed by the "new evangelicals." Here is a tangible point of convergence between Enlightenment philosophy and Pietist spirituality, which Waldenström not only inherited, but also developed and promoted. At its best, this fusion of diverse ideologies bore with it the potential for harmony, something which seems to have been a goal of Waldenström's political activism.

In addition to the Hegelian and Boströmian impulses in Waldenström's worldview, there are also a few connections to the cultural phenomenon known as Romanticism. In terms of his future vision for a democratic Sweden, there are points of resonance with the ideas of poet and historian Erik Gustaf Geijer (1783–1847) in particular. Historian Henrik Berggren has explained that Geijer had a conservative vision for a Sweden that would remain composed of small, independent farmers (known as "Little Sweden"), which would be able to withstand the threats of industrialization and urbanization, and which could avoid the extremes of chauvinistic nationalism ("Greater Sweden") on the one hand, as well as the version of

socialism that advocated an international, industrial utopia on the other.²⁵ For the proponents of Little Sweden, democracy was heralded as an age-old national characteristic, which dated back to the free farmers of the Middle Ages, and which was threatened by modernity and needed to be recovered and defended. Waldenström himself made comments to this effect, in which he championed the Romantic ideal of the free farmer and saw democracy as a Swedish value, which was in stark contrast to the alleged totalitarian characteristics of socialism. For example, it may have been out of a preference for an idyllic, pastoral vision of Sweden that Waldenström came to support the “own-your-own-home” movement (*egnahemrörelsen*), which was a more palatable alternative to socialism that was more in line with traditional Lutheran social welfare strategies. The options for poor relief that Waldenström preferred reflected his desire to answer the critiques of socialist agitators, without forfeiting a classical liberal basis for the Swedish economy and political system. His socialist opponents would consider this kind of solution to social inequality as an example of the “old charity” model, however. Waldenström was the leader of a folk movement that depended upon local, grassroots associations, and which presupposed that its members were voluntarily engaged in idealistic charitable, missionary enterprises. His version of the new “Little Sweden” (though he did not call it that) would have been to complement the parish council / municipal council (*sockenstämma / kommunalstämma*) with free-standing mission societies, whether in rural or urban settings, which would be engaged in rebuilding society from the bottom-up with popular involvement.

Historian Bo Stråth has made a generalization about the folk movements, which could rightfully also be applied to Waldenström: “They wanted to reform society, not make revolution. They did not seek to do away with the targets of their criticism, but to transform them and take them over.”²⁶ As a reformer Waldenström drew from an eclectic mix of ideologies of the time, among them the Romantic tradition. He was not a Romantic in the full artistic and cultural sense of that term, but did think in terms of a renewal of the nation-state that fits with larger currents within Romanticism, sometimes progressive and sometimes conservative. On the eve of World War I, he did express support for the “Farmers’ March,” which called for an increase of the national defense force, and he did support the monarch’s constitutional privileges when these were attacked. However, these two concerns were pragmatic, rather than Romantic; in regard to the former, for the ability of Little Sweden to defend itself, and in regard to the latter, to maintain consistency in constitutional interpretation (these two topics will be treated in Part III). Despite making his share of patriotic statements,

Waldenström ultimately made a poor nationalist, as his citizenship in the Swedish kingdom (whether “Little” or “Great”) would always be trumped by his citizenship in Christ’s kingdom. On a foundational level, conflating these two kingdoms would have amounted to blasphemy for him, even if he found himself tempted by it at various points. Better to leave Sweden in the hands of small, voluntary societies, which could grapple with the challenges of modernity in a pluralistic, democratic public discourse. Patriotism may have been part of a healthy expression of civic duty, but national citizenship was no more than a coincidence of birth. By contrast, Christ’s kingdom was of a transnational variety. Its international character was inescapable to the participant of the mission societies and free churches, which had a clear, two-fold division of their enterprises: “inner mission” (work in Sweden) and “outer mission” (in foreign locations such as Congo, China, and Alaska).

This preference for Little Sweden is also evidenced in Waldenström’s statements in his account of America, in which he compared the United States and Sweden.

America seems to me to be like a young, rich, nervous lady with plumes, rings, brooches, dressed in silk and velvet, bustle and high heeled shoes, which make her taller than she really is. Old Sweden resembles more a shy and unpretentious mother with kerchief and cotton apron. There is more gold adorning the exterior of the young woman, but the old woman has more gold dwelling in her heart.²⁷

Elsewhere in his accounts, he presents America as an innovative, fascinating place with high ambitions, but also demonstrating a culture that has perfected the art of exaggeration and fraud in advertising itself. Whereas old Sweden might be this poor little woman in cotton rags, her superiority rests in being confident in her authentic identity and drawing her wisdom from time-honored traditions. These Swedish traditions he imagined were liberal, democratic ones, derived from a general romanticized view of the free farmers (*bönder*), whose common sense was more to be trusted than the nobility or the captains of industry. It is telling also that in his novel, *Squire Adamsson*, the hero is not the *brukspatron* (factory owner) but rather a *torpare* (cotter or crofter), from the lowest rung of the social hierarchy. It is “Mother Simple,” who lacks formal education and all pretensions, and is engaged in sewing circles and community revival, who ends up saving the Squire and implicitly advocating societal transformation from the bottom up. The paradox of Waldenström’s exaltation of agrarian values was that in the early twentieth century, this way of life was quickly disappearing. Nevertheless, there remains to this day a widespread Scandinavian mentality which hearkens back to the values of this bygone society, in which

moderation and mediocrity were seen as positive traits, even if satirized. One of these is the “Law of Jante,” a comical list of “ten commandments” adhered to by the village of Jante depicted in a work of fiction from the 1930s.²⁸ These laws effectively prevent anyone from being exceptional, and frown on attempts at innovation and self-promotion. It is best for the individual to “fit in” and join the consensus of the community. The Swedish word “*lagom*,” almost always used positively, similarly refers to a cultural preference for doing things “just right,” not too much, not too little.²⁹ With humorous self-criticism, Scandinavians often deride themselves for being conformists to this oppressive cult of mediocrity. But it is also used as a way to distinguish “how things are done in Sweden” from “how things are done out in the rest of Europe and abroad,” in which political haste, excess, fervor, and self-promotion can lead to bankruptcy, revolution, entanglement in war, and social and economic inequalities. *Jante* and *lagom* represent “the golden mean.” These terms have been popularized after Waldenström’s lifetime, but he in many ways demonstrated this kind of mentality of moderation as he formulated his political philosophy.³⁰ This is particularly evident in how he imagined international socialism as being a foreign, extremist threat to homegrown, common-sense traditions of democratic pluralism. For Waldenström, the more organic variety of liberalism represented by the humble farmers had cultivated a domestic democratic praxis. One qualification of this is that while he may have advocated moderation, he himself was a man of high ambitions. Mediocrity was not compatible with his role as the leader of hundreds of thousands of free-church participants, the editor of an internationally read journal, a prolific author, and a politician. The revival was a growth industry, in which he expected to see results in concrete terms: numbers of saved souls, increased memberships of societies, changed laws, and a transformed society. There is a tension here with what Waldenström says about “little mother Sweden.” On the one hand, she should be prudent, frugal, moderate and wise, but on the other hand . . . she should get busy and reform the world.

Central to Waldenström’s understanding of democratic praxis, was the safeguarding of a pluralistic public sphere, in which dissent was possible and opposing political groups were able to critique one another and shape each others’ ideological development. Waldenström made several assumptions in crafting this political worldview. One assumption was that societal progress is best achieved through steady evolution. Abrupt revolution and rejection of foundational principles would spell disaster. Another assumption was that these classical liberal values just mentioned (values of free speech, democracy, and equality) permeated the essence of what Swedish society was in the late 1800s, despite many blatant contradictions and inequalities.

Achieving the social and economic equality desired by large portions of the lower classes would be best served by reforming society in such a way that took its liberal heritage into account, rather than abandoning the liberal perspective for a wholesale endorsement of socialism. His third assumption was that socialism left unchecked would all too naturally devolve into revolution, revolution into anarchy, and anarchy into tyranny. The liberal traditions of democracy and pluralism, as they had slowly emerged through the reforms of the 1800s could easily be lost. With these assumptions in mind, it is easy to understand the urgency with which Waldenström warned against this in his political speeches. For him, the potential dominance of the Social Democratic party likely meant the end of free speech and parliamentary process. In short, the budding pluralistic discourse that Sweden was experiencing in the late 1800s could easily be replaced with a unipolar political landscape, governed by a rigid Marxist ideology.



The wealthy factory owner, Squire Adamsson, receives the common sense wisdom of the old cottier woman, Mother Simple. *Brukspatron Adamsson, Eller Hvar Bor Du?*, 181. Illustration by the celebrated National Romantic artist, Jenny Nyström. Used by permission. © 2015 Jenny Nyström / Kalmar Läns museum / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

His opponents in the Social Democratic and Communist fold disagreed strongly with him. Waldenström was in their eyes a reactionary, and in being reactionary defended the status quo, the monarchy, the bourgeoisie. However, in surveying the records of the internal quarrels that occurred within the Social Democratic party, it seems that some of the party leadership had

many of the same concerns that Waldenström did, particularly during the pivotal years of 1908 and 1917.³¹ The specifics of these confrontations will be explored in more depth in Part III, but what can be said briefly here is that these internal conflicts demonstrate that as members of the party worked to dismantle Waldenström’s political career and dismiss his concerns, there were many who also seemed to take his criticisms seriously, namely Hjalmar Branting (1860–1925) and Kata Dahlström (1858–1923). The party, as it emerged in the 1920s, was not the same party that it had been in the 1880s. The more radical and anarchistic elements had been marginalized or even banned in some cases, and the party members in the *Riksdag* had more often than not opted for cooperation with the Liberal party, rather than open confrontation. The hindsight of a century gives the modern observer the ability to see that by the 1920s, important precedents had been set by the party which allowed the survival of pluralistic political discussion and the maintenance of democratic practices. The party would go on to dominate Swedish politics for the majority of the twentieth century. However, at the time that Waldenström died in 1917, Europe was horribly shaken by the Great War, revolution was in the air, and the anti-establishment rhetoric of Socialist agitators continued to pick away at the older Liberal political paradigm. Waldenström could not confidently assert that Sweden was yet out of the woods, nor could he admit that the Social Democratic party was in many ways a different party than the one which had almost driven him out of office in the 1902 election and then finally succeeded in 1905. Right up until his death in 1917, his media presence continued in the newspapers, and so did his warnings to the Swedish people about the dangers that radical socialism posed to free speech, to parliamentary process, to Swedish constitutional law, and to the overall health of pluralistic social discourse.

The goals of individual liberty and social security have been persistent dreams throughout human history, but the attainment of one has often come at the expense of the other. The ideological battles that were fought during the twentieth century between American-style capitalisms and Soviet-style socialisms created a unique opportunity for Swedish society to be identified as a “middle way” between these two extremes. To mid-century political analysts, such as journalist Marquis Childs, Sweden appeared to have fused socialism’s concerns for social justice with the freedoms and democratic structures of classical liberalism in a unique balance.³² Although these assertions would later be critiqued and modified, the “middle way” still remains current in the popular imagination as a convenient way to locate Sweden on an ideological spectrum. The assumptions that are generally made from right and left, respectively, are that liberalism “tamed” socialism or that socialism “humanized” liberalism. Alternately, recent analysis by

political scientist Sheri Berman has demonstrated that it was neither liberalism nor socialism that triumphed in the struggles of the twentieth century; instead it was Social Democracy, which was a new product produced by the confluence of both.³³

Regardless of how much one ideology is credited over and against the other for having contributed the most to this exchange, one assertion that can be made is that the successful development of this new Social Democracy was dependent on the maintenance of a pluralistic public sphere. That is, unlike the dramatic ideological revolutions that took place in some European governments, such as Germany, in which one party eliminated its opposition, the practice of parliamentary democracy was maintained and managed to flourish in Sweden. Pluralistic discourse and exchange can be seen as having been essential to fostering this environment, and as such constitutes the basis of any kind of political middle way that might have developed. If Swedish society can indeed be seen as a middle way, it would be to the degree that political actors were able to maintain this atmosphere of pluralism in a public sphere where diametrically opposed ideologies were able to coexist and continue to influence one another in an ongoing political dialogue.

Furthermore, the understanding of pluralism that is being advanced here is one that contends pluralism to be a positive and even a deliberately orchestrated situation. This would be opposed to an understanding in which pluralism is seen as a *modus vivendi*, or undesirable situation, along the lines of a cold war or passive-aggressive conflict. In this positively defined pluralism, the actions of those who hold power and of those who seek power become delicate balancing acts. Affirming the agency of dominant groups as well as underdogs not only makes for more nuanced history, but also frees historical inquiry from the assumptions that only those in power determine outcomes. A positively defined pluralism also depends on generous provisions for free speech that allow dominant political paradigms to be criticized and challenged. In moments when power changes hands, freedom of speech allows ascendant political regimes to be criticized. This type of transfer of power between groups creates a situation in which the ascendant regime is confronted with criticism, and in addressing this criticism, can shift its developmental trajectory. Such can be seen to have been the case in the ascendancy of the Social Democratic party from the 1880s through the 1920s. As will be argued in Part III, Waldenström took on this role as a critic of socialism during this period, and interacted with key figures within the party who were in turn forced to respond to his criticisms.

The perspective that political exchange is a balancing act can be seen as a simple-minded generalization of a complex situation. However, it can also be seen as an intentional rhetorical strategy, employed in order to maintain

a pluralistic public sphere. Common in Waldenström’s sermons as well as his political speeches was the presentation of societal progress as a journey along a road, as already seen in the Karlstad speech. Hazards existed to the right and to the left, he claimed, and the proper course was that navigated somewhere in the middle. The subsequent direction society would take was determined by a struggle between opposing viewpoints. Each pulled the wagon to one side or the other. The net result of this struggle was, in Waldenström’s view, a positive outcome. This was reinforced in part by the fact that he remained an independent in the *Riksdag*, never formally aligning with any political party. His political philosophy was to throw his weight to whichever point of view he saw as being underrepresented and at risk. That said, he most often took up the cause of the Liberal party and later with the Moderates (conservatives), after the Social Democratic press cranked up its media campaign in 1902. However, he tended to play the devil’s advocate and found himself at times defending causes normally advocated by Socialists. Such political ambiguity often makes classifying Waldenström on a political spectrum difficult. However, when read from his own perspective—that the maintenance of pluralism was of the utmost importance in facilitating any reform at all—one is able to better understand the way in which Waldenström hoped his political strategy would serve to promote pluralism. Waldenström’s dire predictions of a tyrannical new world order ruled by Marxist ideology have never been actualized in Sweden. Swedish Social Democracy evolved in a hybrid form, having co-opted existing structures rather than supplanting them. As is being argued here, the Social Democratic party seems to have responded to criticism from opposing parties and modified their priorities, charting a course of dialogue and reform, rather than open confrontation and revolution.

If Swedish society managed to develop in a pluralistic direction, despite the ominous warnings of opponents a century ago, then why is the study of Waldenström’s political philosophy and activism of interest today? For one, if the outcome of Swedish politics is to be seen as the product of a pluralistic dialogue rather than a one-party triumph, then any insights into the discussions that took place during this seminal period in Swedish political development are valuable. The common narrative in Swedish history during this period, however, has frequently opted for the one-party-triumph motif. Due to the dominance of the Social Democratic party through most of the last century, there has been a tendency for the predominant historical narrative to be written from that party’s perspective.³⁴ This narrative developed naturally due to the fact that during the twentieth century, the party enjoyed long periods of political dominance—in fact, the longest unbroken rule of any political party in a European democracy was that held by the Social

Democratic party from 1932–1976.³⁵ This perspective is rather teleological in the sense that the historical conflicts that the party had with oppositional groups were seen as triumphs of the Social Democratic agenda, rather than as moments of contingency, in which ideas were exchanged across party lines and the ultimate outcomes were altered by the presence of a plurality of voices.

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